

# John 9.8-14: The Dilemma of Structural Blindness

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- ❖ Act 2: The “missionary” tells his story
  - ▶ Main characters:
    - ▶ The missionary: the healed man
    - ▶ The confused community
  - ▶ Theme: Structural blindness and witness

▶ Everyone who encounters Jesus has a story—a testimony of what He did for them, and by reason of that experience, becomes a witness.

▶ The Gadarene man who had been possessed by a legion of demons—

*“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.*

*Mark 5.19-20*

▶ The five-time married Samaritan woman—

*Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him. . . . Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” . . . And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”*

*John 4.28-30, 39, 41-42*

- ▶ Some, however, have an extraordinary and life-changing encounter with Jesus, but because their heart remains unchanged, they are a failed witness.
- ▶ The man who had been an invalid for 38 years—

*When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. . . . The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.*

*John 5.6-9, 13-15*

## The Missionary and the missionary

*“Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.*

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- ❖ *Siloam* is the Greek translation for the Hebrew Old Testament *Shiloh*. Shiloh was an early center for Hebrew worship. More importantly, it was a Messianic identification. At his death, Jacob prophesied that, *“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people”* (Genesis 49.10 NKJ).
- ❖ As a place of worship, Shiloh was a spiritual fountainhead. The Lord spoke to Isaiah of impending judgment because *“this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloh”* (Isaiah 8.6). When John the Baptizer came, the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected any need of being baptized, and thus *“rejected God’s purpose for themselves”* (Luke 7.30). Jesus stood in the temple and offered an outflowing of spiritual life to anyone who would come to him, the true spiritual fountainhead (John 7.37-38). This “one who was sent” washed in the water of the true Shiloh<sup>1</sup>—the waters of the true “Sent One”—and returned, a witness to the life-giving work of the Messiah.

<sup>1</sup> see Titus 3.4-7

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,  
He saved us,  
not because of righteous things we had done,  
but because of His mercy.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,  
whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
so that, having been justified by His grace,  
we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

*—Titus 3.4-7*

## A Confused Community

*His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”*

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- ❖ **How is it that neighbors who knew this man all his life and people who saw him daily and heard his pleas for help, are now confused about his identity?**
- ❖ Prevailing first-century belief, as reflected in the question of the disciples (verse 2), regarded blindness as divine punishment from God, without any consideration for other causes such as disease or congenital.
- ❖ Although Jewish law required its adherents to care for those who were handicapped, the social order ostracized such people and condemned them as the lowest caste in society. At the Jewish age of manhood, 13, this man would have been put out on his own to beg for a living.

*My son, lead not a beggar’s life; for it is better to die than to beg.*

*Ecclesiasticus 40.28 (180 BC)*

## ❖ Understanding structural blindness

- ▶ *caste: a system of rigid social stratification characterized by hereditary status, endogamy, and social barriers sanctioned by custom, law, or religion*

“Nepal’s long centuries of caste-based autocratic rule created structures and institutions that favored some and disfavored others. These structures are embedded in our daily lives. Therefore, they look natural.”

—Subhash Nepali

- ▶ Caste-like environments exist in every society and in every person’s perspective. Many times people, their issues, and their concerns are invisible to us. We are often insulated, unaware, unaffected, and unseeing of the brokenness around us. Or, I may see a discrepancy—spiritual, social, or otherwise—but it doesn’t provoke concern or empathy within me. Often, an issue becomes important to me only when it directly affects me.
- ▶ **structural blindness: a lack of perception that renders me unaware and therefore unconcerned about another’s experiences or plight**

❖ Not only is it perplexing that they were confused about this man's identity, it is also astounding that this man's neighbors didn't celebrate his healing! The reality was, the community knew the blind man was *there*, but they never really *saw* him; they never interacted with him as a person—they simply felt nothing in their hearts toward him. It was as though he didn't even exist.

❖ **Missions truth: If we don't see the need, we don't truly see the person as Jesus sees them.**

▶ *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

*Matthew 9.36*

▶ *So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds . . .*

*Luke 10.32-34*

▶ *Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*

*Hebrews 13.3*

## An Emphatic Witness

*But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”*

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- ❖ Was the man just defending his identity or is something more taking place? John, who is very particular with his vocabulary and choice of words, attributes to the man the same phrase that Jesus used to speak of his identity: “I am” (*ego eimi*).
- ❖ Could it be that this man had already experienced, with the gift of eyesight, a transformation of understanding and identity that he saw himself as a testimony to the man called Jesus—a missionary of the Missionary?

*Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?”*

## The “sent one’s” Story

*“How then were your eyes opened?” they demanded. He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”*

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- ❖ The invalid man-healed (fourth sign) and the blind man-healed (sixth sign)—
  - ▶ The invalid man-healed didn’t know the name of his healer
  - ▶ The blind man-healed knew the identity of Jesus
  - ▶ The invalid man-healed did not relate a substantive story of his healing
  - ▶ Though brief, the blind man-healed related every detail of his encounter with Jesus
  - ▶ The invalid man-healed demonstrated no faith or change of heart
  - ▶ The blind man-healed will continue to demonstrate ever-increasing spiritual understanding
- ❖ *“So I went and washed, and then I could see.”* One’s testimony need not be extensive, eloquent, or convincing—but simply a heartfelt recounting of what Jesus did for you.

## There Has to be a Different Explanation

*“Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath.*

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- ❖ Our mission is not to convince, and many will be skeptical and not accept our testimony. We must simply be faithful to bear witness to Christ.

*When [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

*John 16.8-11*

- ❖ Once again Jesus chooses to “work” on the Sabbath. As before, this will be a big problem; but, again, that is not a concern for Jesus; his mission is to do, while it is still day, the works of the “One Who Sent” him—and so it is with us. May we see those Jesus would see and do what he would do—while we have the opportunity.