# SERMON SERIES: SEE THE LIGHT

**“Can’t See A Hole In A Ladder”**

## *John 9:13-23*

This month we’re working our way through the ninth chapter of John’s gospel in a sermon series called “See The Light.” We began last Sunday with Jesus and his disciples encountering a man who’d been blind from birth. The disciples, following the common belief of their time, asked Jesus whether the blind man had sinned—resulting in his handicap—or whether his parents had sinned and caused his blindness? However, Jesus offered an alternative perspective. He said the man had been born blind so that God’s power could be displayed in his life.

Jesus, calling himself “the light of the world,” made some mud, smeared it on the blind man’s eyes, and sent him to the Pool of Siloam to wash the mud off. The Pool of Siloam was some distance away from where this happened, and Jesus used that as a test of faith and obedience—to see if the man would trust in him, and if the man would take responsibility for doing his part.

Well, the man returned and was no longer blind. But then a comical scene ensued. His friends and neighbors had difficulty identifying him! They argued back and forth, puzzled over the blind man’s restored vision. When asked who had healed him, the man said it was Jesus. Let’s pick up the story by turning in our Bibles to John 9:13-23.

***It’s happened to all of us as parents or grandparents, as babysitters or Sunday school teachers. Anyone who has been around children long enough experiences the “I-can’t-find-it” problem. It’s a simple situation: we ask a child to go get their shoes or backpack from their room. The child leaves only to return seconds later. “I can’t find it,” they say.***

***“Go look again,” we reply, and the child disappears once more—only to return empty-handed yet again. “I can’t find it.” But when we walk into the bedroom there are the shoes in the middle of the floor, or the backpack is sitting on the bed. “They’re* right here*!” we say, perhaps now a bit exasperated. And the child gives us an “Oh, yeah,” expression.***

***The child didn’t look carefully. They ran into the room, looked back and forth, and ran back to us. What they were after was in plain view but they weren’t looking. As the old saying goes, they couldn’t see a hole in a ladder!*** And neither could the Pharisees. They couldn’t see a hole in a ladder if their arm was sticking through it--because they didn’t want to see.

*13Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, 14because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him. 15The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, “He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!”*

*16Some of the Pharisees said, “This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath.” Others said, “But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?” So there was a deep division of opinion among them.*

*17Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, “What’s your opinion about this man who healed you?” The man replied, “I think he must be a prophet.”*

*18The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. 19They asked them, “Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?”*

*20His parents replied, “We know this is our son and that he was born blind, 21but we don’t know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself.” 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. 23That’s why they said, “He is old enough. Ask him.”*

We may assume that the man’s friends took him to the Pharisees the next day because it would’ve been against the law to do so on the Sabbath. After all, that’s what was about to get Jesus in hot water. In fact, according to the Pharisees, Jesus was guilty of a double crime.

**ASK: Who knows what two laws Jesus broke?** [he made mud, which was considered kneading, and he healed him] Verse fourteen tips us off: …*14because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him.*

According to Jewish oral traditions healing was forbidden on the Sabbath unless it was a matter of life or death. If a person’s life was at stake, the Pharisees made an exception. However, we know this blind man’s life was not at stake.

In addition, the act of kneading was considered to be work. A woman did not knead dough on the Sabbath. It was considered a law-breaking activity. Doing something like making mud out of saliva was viewed by the authorities as kneading. *15The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, “He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!”*

*16Some of the Pharisees said, “This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath.” Others said, “But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?” So there was a deep division of opinion among them.*

The person and name of Jesus always brings division. ***We only have to look at our own culture today to see this. More and more frequently, the name of Jesus is being excised from the public square. Students, civic leaders, teachers, and even pastors are being told to drop the name of Jesus from their prayers and comments. The presence and the image of Jesus is systematically being removed from holidays and public displays.*** Jesus causes division. Because one way or another, we must each decide what we will do with Jesus.

The actions of Jesus had divided the Pharisees. Some stated there was no way Jesus could be from God because he broke the Sabbath law. Of course, what they were really saying was that Jesus couldn’t be from God because he broke the Pharisee’s *interpretation* of the Sabbath law. Others, however, said “Wait a minute. If this guy was a sinner then how could be do something like giving sight to the blind?”

Unable to reach a consensus, *the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, “What’s your opinion about this man who healed you?” The man replied, “I think he must be a prophet.”* His understanding of Jesus was slowly growing. Last week, in John 9:11, the blind man knew him only as *“the man they call Jesus.”* With some time to reflect on events, the formerly blind man now acknowledged that Jesus must be a prophet. It was the same confession made by the woman at the well in John 4:19: *“Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet.*

*18The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. 19They asked them, “Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?”* Seeing as how they weren’t getting anywhere among themselves—nor had the healed man been of much help—the Pharisees had the man’s parents brought in for questioning.

***The way they go about this is another comical scene. In the original Greek, the questions posed to the parents are combined into a single question. It’s more like a Mafia shakedown than a theological discussion! Throw’em into a dark room. Tie them to a chair. Turn a bright light in their eyes. Bombard them with questions: “Isthisyourson—washebornblind--ifsohowcanheseenow?”*** No doubt the Pharisees wanted to trip up the parents—to catch them in some misstatement or confusion—in order to better minimize the miracle.

*20His parents replied, “We know this is our son and that he was born blind, 21but we don’t know how he can see or who healed him.”* You’d think that parents would be ecstatic over their child being healed. But as John tells us in verse twenty-two: *His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue.* Therefore, we may ascertain that the parents did, in fact, know who Jesus was and believed in his power. If they didn’t—or if they viewed him as some raggedy miracle-monger—why would they’ve been afraid of the religious leaders? If they didn’t see Jesus as anyone special, why fear being cast out of the synagogue? So it’s pretty safe to assume that the man and his parents had some deep conversations about Jesus since the healing took place.

But because the parents were scared of being ostracized by the religious leaders, and fearful of being excommunicated from the synagogue, they essentially threw their son under the bus: “*Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself.”* The age of accountability was thirteen so we know the man was older than that. His parents didn’t want to be drawn too deep into the theological quagmire and they left their son to fend off the Pharisees by himself.

We started off talking about children going to “look” for something only to return seconds later claiming they couldn’t find it. They looked but they didn’t really see. In this passage the same thing happened repeatedly.

We already know the man’s friends were totally confused about his identity. They’d seen him often enough, blind and begging. And yet they couldn’t see a hole in a ladder. They couldn’t see the miracle of sight that had been granted to their friend. They looked but they didn’t really see.

The Pharisees couldn’t see a hole in a ladder. A real, live miracle stood before them. But all the religious leaders wanted to see were the broken laws and theological debates surrounding the event. They could not deny that the man had been healed. But they did not want to attribute that healing to Jesus. They looked but they didn’t really see.

Even the man’s parents couldn’t see a hole in a ladder. They were so frightened by the power and influence of the Pharisees that they refused to state the obvious. They opted for the “head-in-the-sand” approach. They looked but they really didn’t see.

We’re all guilty of doing this. We look at something but we don’t really notice the details. ***We’ve all driven by a building hundreds of times and then one day we ask our passenger “When did they paint the front door?” Our friend says “That door’s been like that for months.”***

***Or we’re rummaging through the drawers in the kitchen looking for the spaghetti tongs. “Where’s the tongs!?” we yell at our spouse. They point to the stovetop where the tongs have been laying the whole time. And we sometimes reply “If it’d been a snake it would’ve bitten me.”***

We look but sometimes we really don’t see.

I wonder if we were to look around us right now—really look, with the purposeful intent of seeing—what we would fine? What would Jesus want to open our eyes to this morning?

The widow who desperately needs a hug of warmth and love?

The youth who needs a word of encouragement and blessing?

The person in pain who needs a soft hand and a healing word?

A musician who needs to hear just how much their talents mean to us?

A committee chair who needs to be encouraged and thanked for the responsibilities they bear?

The parents of small children who need to know how much we love and appreciate tiny voices and laughter in worship?

Those struggling financially who need our prayers?

The one who is alone who needs a reminder that they are truly not alone?

It’s easy to not see a hole in a ladder. All it takes is to become so wrapped up in our own little worlds that we look but don’t see who and what God has placed all around us.

Your assignment as you leave today is this: look and see who around you needs a word, a touch, a hug, a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, someone to rejoice with. Think about it as we sing our closing hymn, and let the Holy Spirit guide your heart. Following our benediction, go to the person and hug them, pray for them, encourage them, let them know what they mean to you.

Let us pray:

*Holy Spirit, we acknowledge we can have both our eyes fully open and still not see what’s right in front of us. We can be like the friends, or the Pharisees, or the parents in our Scripture reading. It can be so obvious and bold that we somehow blindly miss it. Open our eyes this morning, Spirit of Comfort, to see the need of another. And before we leave this place, send us to them to speak, to listen, to heal, to praise. In the name of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.*