# SERMON SERIES: SEE THE LIGHT

**“There’s None So Blind…”**

## *John 9:24-34*

 Today we continue our sermon series “See The Light,” in which we’re walking through the ninth chapter of the gospel of John. The whole chapter is about sight and blindness, about seeing the obvious and the not-so-obvious.

The story so far has Jesus and his disciples encountering a man who was blind from birth. Jesus healed the man but great confusion followed. The man’s friends were suddenly not so sure of his identity. The Pharisees were divided because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, but at the same time they knew sinners didn’t perform miracles. And the man’s parents, fearful of being tossed out of the synagogue, did a duck-and-cover, only acknowledging the man was their son but claiming ignorance of his healing. Let’s pick up the story in our Scripture reading, John 9:24-34.

 ***Have you ever known someone who absolutely refused to see the truth right in front of them? No matter what facts were presented--no matter how much evidence there was--the person simply ignored it all? I once knew a man in a church who was firmly convinced that I never went to seminary. He told others in the church that I had lied about my seminary degree. It didn’t matter that I had my degree hanging on the wall of my office. It didn’t matter that I could produce a transcript of my coursework—not to mention my student loan bills! This man didn’t care for my leadership so he looked for reasons to support his dislike.*** That’s where we find the Pharisees at the next juncture of our story.

*24So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, “God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner.”*

*25“I don’t know whether he is a sinner,” the man replied. “But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!”*

*26“But what did he do?” they asked. “How did he heal you?”*

*27“Look!” the man exclaimed. “I told you once. Didn’t you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?”*

*28Then they cursed him and said, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! 29We know God spoke to Moses, but we don’t even know where this man comes from.”*

*30“Why, that’s very strange!” the man replied. “He healed my eyes, and yet you don’t know where he comes from? 31We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. 32Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he couldn’t have done it.”*

*34“You were born a total sinner!” they answered. “Are you trying to teach us?” And they threw him out of the synagogue.*

 ***Like detectives investigating a crime—which for the Pharisees this healing certainly was—they had the formerly blind man brought back in for more questioning.*** *“God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner,”* they said. Some translations say *“Give glory to God!”* Regardless of how it was phrased, it was a command for the man to confess his sins. The Pharisees believed he’d been lying about his blindness and subsequent healing. Like a “good cop, bad cop” routine, if the man wouldn’t tell them the truth then they wanted him bound by an oath to tell the truth before God.

 They were also parsing their words and ideas to benefit their position. They wanted the man to give glory to *God*. Not Jesus. While the Pharisees may’ve been willing to admit that Jesus had made mud—and put it on the man’s eyes—and told him to wash in the pool—it wasn’t *this man* who healed him. It was God.

But instead of buckling under the third degree, the man revealed a growing confidence in himself—and in Jesus. *25“I don’t know whether he is a sinner,” the man replied. “But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!”* It wasn’t for the man to know or judge the content of Jesus’ heart. He wasn’t a priest to dispense forgiveness. However, he did know one thing with certainty: “*I was blind, and now I can see!”* The law of Moses, the threats of the Pharisees, nor anything else could shake that reality.

So the Pharisees tried a different tactic: *26“But what did he do?” they asked. “How did he heal you?”* If they couldn’t shake his assertion of being blind and being healed, then maybe they could poke holes in his story. By asking him to retell it they were hoping to catch him in some contradiction; then they could discredit his evidence.

 But once again the man didn’t budge in his claims. In fact, here’s where we see his growing boldness and belief. *27“Look!” the man exclaimed. “I told you once. Didn’t you listen?”* Now maybe he was getting irritated with all the theological hair-splitting. Maybe he just wanted to go home and celebrate his newfound sight. Or maybe he knew the Pharisees were over a theological barrel. “*Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?”*

Ouch! That was a gut-punch from nowhere to the religious leaders. I’m sure we can imagine their faces turning beet-red and smoke curling from their ears! It’s obvious this man could’ve cared less what the Pharisees thought or even what they might do to him. Jesus had not only restored the man’s physical sight; he had given him spiritual sight as well.

 Of course, we don’t have to imagine how the Pharisees responded. John makes it abundantly clear: *28Then they cursed him and said, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! 29We know God spoke to Moses, but we don’t even know where this man comes from.”* These eminent men were flustered, angry and pinned to the wall by their own theology. But instead of weighing the facts, praying or exploring all perspectives, they pounced on the man. This is always what happens when the truth rubs up against an untenable belief. Unless we are willing to change our views or entertain a different perspective, we react with name-calling, cursing or belittling others. ***It sounds suspiciously like this year’s presidential race, doesn’t it?***

 ***It also happened with the man I mentioned earlier who thought I didn’t go to seminary. When I confronted him about his comments, and offered to show him my degree, he puffed and blustered and then stormed off. He didn’t want to know the facts because they conflicted with what he wanted to believe.*** Just like the Pharisees. The truth of what happened to the blind man didn’t mesh with their preconceived ideas. So they pompously affirmed their loyalty to Moses--which only served to dig their hole even deeper because the man showed no signs of letting up. He knew they had painted themselves in the corner.

*30“Why, that’s very strange!” the man replied. “He healed my eyes, and yet you don’t know where he comes from? 31We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. 32Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he couldn’t have done it.”* You can almost taste the sarcasm in this passage!

To restore sight to someone who had lost it was miraculous enough, but to give it to someone who’d never had it was unheard of. Such power could only come from God, and for the man he was convinced that God was with Jesus. In addition, he used the Pharisees’ own teachings against them: God doesn’t listen to sinners. He only listens to those who love him and do his will. Therefore, if Jesus healed by the power of God then God must listen to Jesus—which meant Jesus could not be a sinner--at least according to the Pharisee’s logic.

 That was the final straw for the religious leaders! They’d been humiliated and insulted, by a common beggar no less! Again, we can almost see them stammering for the right comeback--a zinger that would put them back on top of the argument. Spitting and blustering, all they came out with was *34“You were born a total sinner!”…“Are you trying to teach us?” And they threw him out of the synagogue.”*

 Even in their final words they undermined their own position and authority. If you recall from the first week of this series, there was a belief that a fetus in the womb could sin. Birth defects and handicaps such as this man’s blindness were, to the religious leaders, proof of sin within the womb. They told the man *34“You were born a total sinner!”* By making this declaration they acknowledged that the man *was* born blind. And he *had* been healed. So with their logic crumbling around them, they once again acted in a predictable manner. They threw the man out of the synagogue. It was the last act of authority by desperate men.

The former blind beggar, now with full sight restored, stood in the street outside the synagogue. He had no job. His friends had distanced themselves from him after his healing. He was excommunicated from the religious life of Israel. What was going to happen to him? We’ll find out next week when we conclude this series…

We all form ideas and beliefs based on different information. Some of our knowledge and data is commonly shared: gravity, stopping at a red light, the need for oxygen. And we all have perspectives that differ from one another. You may believe that one presidential candidate is better than the other. I may believe in Bigfoot. The problem arises when the beliefs we hold that are different from one another are elevated to unquestionable.

***If we all started to believe that gravity did not exist, and we started living our lives as if gravity did not exist, we do not change gravity. It’s still there. People who did believe in gravity would think we’re silly at best and quite possibly insane at worst, because the facts tell us that gravity exists.***

***If we refused to change our beliefs to fit the facts of gravity, we’d be like the Pharisees. We’d assume that come hell or high water, our way was right.*** The Pharisees preferred the darkness of their intractable beliefs to the possibility of new light. In this story so far the Pharisees are truly an example of the phrase “there’s none so blind as those who will not see.”

***There’s a cute Peanuts cartoon that shows Charlie Brown talking to Snoopy, who’s sitting on his doghouse with his typewriter in front of him. Charlie Brown says “I hear you’re writing a book on theology. I hope you have a good title.” Snoopy replies “I have the perfect title: Has It Ever Occurred to You That You Might Be Wrong?”***

Some things about our theology and beliefs stand firm, regardless of our denomination or worship style or church size. We believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We believe in the Scriptures as God’s inspired Word. We believe in the humanity and divinity of Jesus. And so on.

And there are aspects of our theology that differ from denomination to denomination, and from believer to believer. ***For example, some people believe that when we die our souls immediately go to heaven, while other people believe our souls wait until called by Christ. Some believe our souls are called to heaven by Christ at some undetermined time in the future, and others believe our souls do not rise until Christ returns.***

***Now none of those beliefs affect our salvation. No one is going to Hell because they believe one way or the other about the soul’s departure. But if we did—if we claimed that our belief was the only right and true one—that could not be questioned or challenged—then we’d be like the Pharisees.***

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to hold our core beliefs sincerely and firmly, and not compromise on them. But we are never to use those beliefs—as the Pharisees did—to put ourselves above anyone else. Our beliefs are not tools or weapons for proving ourselves right and everyone else wrong. In fact, when we use our beliefs to exclude, abuse, reject or hate others we’re not acting like Jesus—no matter how sincerely we hold those beliefs***. As the old saying goes, “Your beliefs don’t make you a better person. Your actions do.”***

Let’s allow the Holy Spirit to work within us this week to ensure our actions reveal our beliefs about the love of Jesus Christ. Let’s be the light that someone else needs in their own private darkness. Let’s open our eyes to new possibilities, new relationships, new risks, and yes—perhaps to the possibility that in some things we might even be wrong. And if so, God grant us the grace and wisdom to adjust our beliefs—not to compromise with the world—but to better serve the world in humility and compassion. Amen.