

John 9:1-41

Taking the Spiritual Eye Exam

Are we blind also? – v. 40

Healing men of their blindness was a miracle that our Lord performed often. Having your physical sight is a blessing that you come to take so much for granted that you scarcely know how to appreciate it unless you come to lose it. J.C. Ryle makes an interesting observation here:

“A more serious affliction can hardly be conceived. Of all the bodily crosses that can be laid on man, without taking away life, none perhaps is greater than the loss of sight. It cuts us off from some of the greatest enjoyments of life. It shuts us up within a narrow world of our own. It makes us painfully helpless and dependent on others. In fact, until men lose their eyesight, they never fully realize its value.”

Evidently when Christ walked this earth He found blindness to be a common malady. When John the Baptist languished in prison and sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire whether or not Jesus was truly the Messiah, we read in Lk. 7:21 *And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight.* Christ’s instructions to John’s disciples were that they return to John and report to him that *The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them* (Mt. 11:5).

And so we find a number of accounts given to us in the gospels of Christ restoring sight to the blind. No where do we find, however, so detailed an account of such a healing as what we find in this 9th chapter of John’s gospel. In this chapter the reader is actually able to zoom in on such a miracle and see up close the impact it had not only on the man born blind but on his neighbors, and parents, and on the Pharisees as well as on the blind man himself.

In fact the actual miracle doesn’t take up a lot of space in John 9 – just 2 verses, vv. 6,7: *When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, 7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.*

What you find in the rest of the chapter is the response to this miracle – especially the response of the Pharisees who desperately sought out a way to deny the miracle. It’s interesting to note how they went to the blind man’s parents and demanded an explanation from them. *Is this your son, who ye say was born blind?* they say in v. 19 – *how then doth he now see?* It’s as if the Pharisees are saying to the parents – *are you sure your son was born blind? Are you sure that he hasn’t really just been faking blindness? Perhaps you and your son have just been playing out a concocted scheme in order to collect welfare from your son’s begging.*

Had that been the case, one who wonder why they would cease playing out the scheme at that point in time. The Pharisees showed that they were willing to believe just about anything that would allow them to explain away the miracle of the man being healed of his blindness.

Now when you get to the end of chp. 9, Jesus makes it very plain that this healing miracle had a much more far reaching aim than to simply convey the blessing of physical sight to a man born blind. That certainly was a tremendous blessing and like I said a moment ago, you and I can hardly appreciate this miracle enough since we've had the blessing of physical sight all our lives. We can scarcely take in what it would have meant especially to a man that was *born* blind.

But when you read John 9 and especially if you read it a couple of times it becomes pretty easy to see that the chapter clearly leads to a conclusion that pertains not to physical sight but to spiritual sight and understanding. Look at what it says in v. 39: *And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.*

He's not now speaking so much about physical sight as He is spiritual sight. And the Pharisees understood His saying perfectly and so we find them asking a spiritual question in the next verse – v. 40 *And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?* And by the answer Christ gives them it becomes all the more clear that Christ is speaking of spiritual sight. Look at His response to them in v. 41 *Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.* Can you see the spiritual import of Christ's answer to them?

What I want to do this morning is raise the question that the Pharisees themselves raise in v. 40 – *Are we blind also?* It's a good question to ask, especially since the Pharisees thought they could see. Can you imagine that – a phenomenon in which people who are blind think they can see? It's a phenomenon that's found not only among Christ-rejecters, but it's a malady that can also be found in those that profess to be followers of Christ.

I've often been struck by the words of Christ to the church at Laodicea found in Rev. 3. I find it incredible, and convicting and it ought to challenge us to search our hearts when we see what that church thinks of itself and what Christ thinks of it. Listen to Christ's words to the church at Laodicea found in Rev. 3:17,18 *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.*

Wow! – Who would think that a church could be so far off base in the matter of analyzing its own spiritual condition? This is why I say that we can look at the question that the Pharisees ask Christ and view it as a good question to ask even though it's asked

by Christ-rejecters that were so strongly bent against Christ. It's a good question for you and me to ask ourselves this morning – *Are we blind also?* Let's take the spiritual eye-exam this morning by asking the question and then seeing what the narration provides to us that will enable us to answer the question.

Are We Blind Also?

Let's think first of all on the truth that:

I. People that are Blind have a Defective View of Sin

Some folks you know that are declared to be legally blind are not totally blind. You could say that there's a sense then in which Christ's own disciples were not totally blind when it came to the matter of sin but they were certainly partially blind. This is evident by their initial inquiry about the man born blind. Notice what it says in the first two verses of chp. 9 - *And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*

The disciples could partially see the truth about sin in that they recognized that in a general sense blindness is due to sin. When God created man, He didn't create Him blind. Before there was sin there was no blindness. It's only after Adam and Eve plunged the human race into sin that blindness became a phenomenon of this world. So Christ's disciples certainly understood sin to that degree. Their view of the man born blind reminds me of Job's friends. They too thought that Job's sufferings were the result of Job's sin. They were right to make a connection between suffering and sin. Before sin there was no suffering and had sin never entered this world there never would have been suffering.

But the disciples, like Job's friends, were limited in their view of sin. They could only partially see sin. They could not conceive what Christ went on to say to them which was that in this particular instance sin was not the reason for this blind man's infirmity, at least not directly. And so we go on to read in v. 3 *Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*

God's purpose, you see, was for the glory of Christ to be revealed. That's something you should keep in mind when you wonder about your own infirmities or your own appearance or your own circumstances. How often young people wonder about why God made them the way He made them. Why do you look the way you do? Or why have circumstances fallen out to you the way they have? And the answer can be found not simply by saying that God saw fit to punish you for sin. When you find yourself tempted to think that way you should aim higher. Christ made you the way He made you for His glory. And Christ has subjected you to the circumstances you find yourself in for His glory.

Those who possess spiritual sight are able to see and affirm what Paul writes to the Romans that *all things do work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose* (Rom. 8:28). Those who fail to see themselves and

their circumstances in this light you would have to argue are at least partially blind. We've seen in our shorter catechism studies that God controls everything. His decree takes everything into account. And while God is not the author of sin, He certainly is able to direct sin for His own purposes. And He's able to direct the consequences of sin for His own purposes. So while this man was born blind, he was not born that way in order for God to punish him or punish his parents. He was born that way that the works of God might be manifested in him and that he might bring great glory to Christ.

In a similar vein, you could say that:

II. Those that are blind have a defective view of God's Law.

We're told in v. 14 that Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath day. Two verses later in v. 16 we read: *Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day.* You may recall from our earlier studies back in chp. 5 that when Christ healed a man who for 38 years was bedridden, that the reaction of the Jews was the same. They were incensed that this man, in obedience to Christ, had taken up his bed and walked.

We'll have occasion to get into this a little deeper when we reach the 10 commandment portion of our Shorter Catechism studies. For now let me tell you of two potential dangers that pertain to the Sabbath day. The first danger is the danger of neglecting it altogether. The second danger is that of attaching so many stipulations to it that you defeat its purpose.

You can find, especially in Reformed circles, various articles on what a Christian should and should not do on the Sabbath. I'll tell you this morning one thing that you can and should beyond all doubt do and that is to worship Christ. You may have different ideas about what you should and shouldn't do beyond that, but this much is certain – this is the Lord's Day, and the Lord's Day calls for the people of God to gather with other believers to worship Christ. The failure to see at least that much obligation on the Lord's Day is a pretty clear symptom of spiritual blindness.

Now in the case of the Pharisees in our text I think it's easy to see that they thought man was for the Sabbath instead of the Sabbath being for man. Only people that are spiritually blind can fail to see that compassion and mercy underlie everything. The essence of the law is to love God and love your fellow man. Christ's manifestation of grace and mercy to a man born blind shows His love and compassion for a soul in need. Those who are blind have a defective view of God in that respect. They see God as a kind of tyrant who needed people to keep these rules that He had in mind, so He created man in order to foist upon him all the strict stipulations of the Sabbath.

But let me now move on under this heading to point out that:

III. People that are blind stubbornly refuse to see Christ.

This is what dominates this 9th chapter of John's gospel. The Pharisees did not want to acknowledge Christ. Can you sense the intensity of hatred toward Christ as they ask again and again – *what did He do to you?*

First his neighbors in v. 10 - *How were thine eyes opened?* Verse 15: *Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight.* Verse 17: *They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?* Then they go to his parents in v. 19: *And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?* Verse 26: *Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?*

Can you detect their growing desperation to find some other way to explain this miracle? It's a very strong symptom of their blindness. People that are blind, you see, will not acknowledge Christ. They don't want to see Him. Their blindness is willful. Listen to these words from J.C. Ryle:

“These verses show us... the desperate lengths to which prejudice will sometimes carry wicked men. We read that the "Jews agreed that if any man did confess that Jesus was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." They were determined not to believe. They were resolved that no evidence should change their minds, and no proofs influence their will. They were like men who shut their eyes and tie a bandage over them, and refuse to have it untied. Just as in after times they stopped their ears when Stephen preached, and refused to listen when Paul made his defense, so they behaved at this period of our Lord's ministry.”

Are we blind also? – they wanted to know. I remember hearing a preacher at a Bible conference meeting make a statement about a particular point of prophecy. And if you didn't agree with his view on that particular statement he remarked that *you were as blind as a bat in King Tut's tomb.* That's how blind the Pharisees were in our text. I wonder this morning – are you taking this spiritual eye exam? How are you doing? Do you see the truth of sin both generally and particularly? Do you see the truth of God's law, how it's undergirded by love and grace and mercy? And most importantly, do you see the truth of Christ? Or do you desperately search in vain for alternative explanations to who He is and what He's done.

Up to this point we've focused on the defective nature of spiritual sight that can be classified as blindness and how it brings a impacts a man's spiritual vision negatively. Let's think next on what people with proper spiritual sight – 20/20 vision, if you will actually do see.

IV. They see the Truth of Their Own Sin

Verse 41 should be convicting and heart-searching to every Christian. Christ says to the Pharisees *If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.* Isn't that what we say as Christians? Don't you want to say this morning – *I see?* — *I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see?* Is it true of anyone who says that he sees that his sin remains?

Oh, it's truly a good thing to be able to say that you see your sin because men that are spiritually blind don't see it. The Pharisees certainly didn't see their sins because they were blinded by pride. And the church at Laodicea didn't see its sin because it was blinded by a sense of its' own self-sufficiency. That church was in danger of being spewed out of the mouth of the Lord - *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked* (Rev. 3:17).

The man, then, the Christian man, that sees is able to see something of his own wretchedness. He can relate to Paul who saw his own wretchedness and cried out in Rom. 7 *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Rom. 7:24). The man who sees will know and appreciate and be humbled by the truth *that the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would* (Gal. 5:17).

Are you able to say with regard to your own sin that you see? I hope you can pass this part of your spiritual eye examination and I suspect that most people here can. But I fear that we don't see our sins clearly enough. If we saw our sins the way we should we'd be much more abhorred by the sight and much more abhorred with ourselves. I remember Dr. Cairns making the point on numerous occasions that the best way to see your sin is not by groveling in the grotesqueness of it. He was critical of preachers that take that kind of approach to sin and describe in detail its ugliness. He suggested, and I'm inclined to agree, that the best way to gain the right view of sin is to see Christ on the cross.

See the lashes on His back. See the crown pressed into His brow. See the nails being driven into His hands and feet. See Him suspended between heaven and earth, nailed to a cross, undergoing shame and scoffing rude, until a veil of darkness is brought across the scene for 3 hours and from behind that veil we hear the excruciating cry - *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani - My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

This is what your sins and mine brought upon the Holy, Harmless, Son of God. It's at the cross that our spiritual vision with regard to sin can come into its clearest and sharpest focus. Here's what sin deserves and here's what Christ bore. So let's say humbly that we see when we see our sin. And let's apply to God constantly for that eye-salve that is held out to the church at Laodicea that we may see our own with a degree of clarity that moves us to repent and plead the blood of Christ for forgiveness and for overcoming power. That overcoming power is something to note the next time you read Revelation chp. 2 & 3. *To him that overcometh* is the refrain that repeats itself throughout that section of the book.

It's the same word in the Greek that Paul uses in Rom. 8:37 when he writes *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us*. And there's the key to overcoming or being a conqueror - it's done through Him that loved us. And this leads to my next and final thought on spiritual sight.

V. Those that have it See the Truth of Christ

The man born blind was sought out by Christ after the Jews kicked him out of the synagogue. So we read in v. 35 *Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? And in v. 36 He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? Oh the man could see just fine physically at that point, but spiritually his vision was not quite where it needed to be but then Christ identifies Himself to the man in v. 37 And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.*

And in v. 38 the man born blind shows us exactly what the mark of a man is who has gained his spiritual sight - *And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.* There's the truest symptom of good spiritual vision – the man believed and worshipped Christ. We've seen other instances in which there have been men who are said to believe but who question Christ and even challenge Christ and in the previous chapter took up stones to cast at Christ.

They believed, but they were still blind. In the previous chapter we saw that they were blind regarding their own bondage. They didn't even see that they were in bondage. *We be Abraham's seed, they say in Jn. 8:33 and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?*

Those that gained true spiritual vision find themselves compelled to worship and serve Christ because they know they've been the recipients of great grace and mercy from Christ. And they're able to perceive the love of Christ. I've been quoting J.C. Ryle a lot this morning. Listen to what he says here:

“These verses show us, lastly, that nothing convinces a man so thoroughly as his own senses and feelings. We read that the unbelieving Jews tried in vain to persuade the blind man whom Jesus healed, that nothing had been done for him. They only got from him one plain answer — "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." How the miracle had been worked, he did not pretend to explain. Whether the person who had healed him was a sinner, he did not profess to know. But that something had been done for him he stoutly maintained. He was not to be reasoned out of his senses. Whatever the Jews might think, there were two distinct facts of which he was conscious — "I was blind — now I see."

“There is no kind of evidence so satisfactory as this to the heart of a real Christian. His knowledge may be small. His faith may be feeble. His doctrinal views may be at present confused and indistinct. But if Christ has really wrought a work of grace in his heart by His Spirit, he feels within him something that you cannot overthrow. "I was dark, and now I have light. I was afraid of God, and now I love Him. I was fond of sin, and now I hate it. I was blind, and now I see." Let us never rest until we know and feel within us some real work of the Holy Spirit. Let us not be content with the name and form of Christianity. Let us desire to have true experimental acquaintance with it. Feelings no doubt, are deceitful, and are not everything in religion. But if we have no inward feelings about spiritual matters, it is a very bad sign. The hungry man eats, and feels strengthened; the thirsty man

drinks, and feels refreshed. Surely the man who has within him the grace of God, ought to be able to say, "I feel its power."

It is true, you know, that though the Christian sees, he only sees darkly. Paul says as much when he writes to the Corinthians - *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known* (1Cor. 13:12). Our recognition of this truth should also humble us and lead us again to seek Christ for that eye-salve promised to the church at Laodicea. This we gain by going to the Lord in prayer and utilizing the prayers of Paul for the Ephesians. In Eph. 1 there's the prayer for spiritual illumination – *O Lord grant the eyes of my heart may be opened that I might know the hope of my calling* etc. And in Eph. 3 there's the prayer that the saints at Ephesus would know the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of Christ.

So take the test this morning and ask yourself the question the Pharisees asked Christ – *Are we blind also?* Their pride kept them from asking the question sincerely. In their obstinacy and pride they were sure that they did see. It's a sad mark of spiritual blindness that men are deceived by such blindness.

But if you will ask the question humbly and sincerely then this 9th chapter of John will give you a lot of help in truly answering the question. A man who is spiritually blind is blind to the reality of sin and he's blind to the law of God and he's blind toward Christ Himself.

The man who sees, sees his sin. He may not see it fully but he does see it. and sees the truth of Christ and he's experienced the mercy of Christ and he finds himself compelled to believe in Christ with the kind of faith that leads to worshipping Christ. How have you done this morning with this spiritual eye exam?