

Title: Eyes wide shut – John 9v1-41

Purpose: To encourage us to test our SIGHT at a Spiritual level and to see which person or persons in this story we are most similar to.

INTRODUCTION

Happy endings

It is always a wonderful thing when a story has a happy ending – I suppose it is that sort of feel good factor that most of us prefer.

In this story, here in John chapter 9, where we meet the man born blind, the disciples of Jesus are not so much interested in the end of the story but rather in the beginning of the story.

We see this in the opening two verses of the chapter:

John 9 verses 1-2 “As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’”

Speculation is a start

For the disciples, when they saw this blind man, they immediately were launched into thinking mode – and for them, the man represented **A THEOLOGICAL PUZZLE**.

The prevailing view re: suffering

At this time the Jews took the view that if someone was undergoing suffering, then this was because of God's displeasure and that could only be because somewhere in the picture there was sin lurking about unconfessed, undealt with.

Their options

For them it seemed to be a **somewhat BLACK & WHITE issue** – two options presented themselves:

- the **FIRST POSSIBILITY** – is that somehow **this man, himself, must have sinned**.

Now obviously this is a bit confusing because his blindness was from birth.

However, they may well have taken on board the Greek philosophical views of the day and have believed that perhaps his soul might have sinned in some past life and only now was receiving its payback in this life.

Alternatively, this child might have somehow “sinned” in vitro, inside the womb. As David says in Psalms 51 Verse 5 “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

Perhaps Verses like Jeremiah 17 Verse 9 contributed to their thinking, where we read:

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

- they also recognised that there was a **SECOND POSSIBILITY** – and that was that if it wasn't down to the man himself, **perhaps it was the parents** instead.

And in this they were simply covering all the bases that they could really conceive.

Speculation better than nothing

Now, before I give the impression that the disciples were once again showing how very lacking they were, let me simply say that **to SPECULATE is always better than to NOT DO ANYTHING.**

Curiosity, asking questions, wanting to know – is a really good starting point and is a really good sign – and perhaps that is, more or less, where you are today.

But let me just add to that by saying that **YOU CANNOT SPECULATE FOR EVER:**

- **SPECULATION ALONE** – never brought anybody into the Kingdom of God.
- **SPECULATION ALONE** - must at some point (and that might be across a period of months or years even), be changed finally into **FAITH ALONE** by which we are saved through **CHRIST ALONE.**

Jesus' response – a third way

Well before we look at the main story – let me simply summarise Jesus' response to the disciples question.

Verses 3-5 read "'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'"

Jesus here gives what you might call **A THIRD WAY.**

This is so very typical of Jesus – he is always giving us fresh revelation as only the Son of Man, the Son of God can do.

He says you are not right on either account – the truth is that this man's life is going to **SHOWCASE the might working of God.**

Following this he goes on to speak about **Day** and **Night & Light** and **Darkness.**

- When speaks about **working in the day**, he is meaning working **whilst we have life.**
- When he speaks of **the night time** (when no one can work) by this he means **when we are no longer living.**

And then he closes things by repeating **one of his 7 great I AM statements:**

Verse 5 "**I AM** the light of the world."

This is repeat of what we read in John 8 verse 12 where we read:

"**I AM** the light of the world, whoever follows me will have the light of life."

We all know that darkness makes us blind to the things around us, makes us blind to what is actually reality.

It was only a few weeks back and Bola and I had gone to visit Simon and MaryLynne out in their house at Woolhampton and when we left it was pitch black and (being the technological people we are) we all **reached for our mobile phones** to turn on our **torchlights** so we could see and find our way without crashing into things.

Jesus says that he has the light for our path and he wants us, in our lifetime, to do the work of “him who sent me” (that is His Father) and for this we will have to take a path that will at some point go beyond the point of SPECULATION ALONE.

Our structure

This morning, although our passage is quite long, I want to simplify it down to just two headings:

#1 – “Eyes wide open” with the subtitle - “Where seeking is finding”

and then

#2 - “Eyes wide shut” with the subtitle - “Where looking is lacking”

So with no more ado #1:

1. Eyes wide open - “Where seeking is finding”

Jesus wastes no time

Now it seems that Jesus wastes no time and sets immediately to work. In this case he doesn’t ask any question of the man to ascertain whether he has faith to be changed.

Remember that in John 5 with the man that had been a cripple for 38 long years – he asked him:

Q. Do you want to get well?

Now we should *not* read into this that faith does not play a part.

You see FAITH is if you like the currency of the Kingdom of God. Remember what Romans chapter 1 and verse 16-17 says:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, **a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’**”

Jesus does not erect high fences

Having said that FAITH is required here – we should similarly say that Jesus does not erect high fences for this man to jump – in fact the very opposite. Jesus makes it really easy for this man to take straightforward steps of faith and obedience.

He makes clay

Notice the procedure which Jesus uses – a bit of SPIT and a bit of DIRT – and we’re already well on our way to a healing!

Now I think that we all realise that if you want to cure blindness, you are not going to get very far by smothering the eye ball in a liberal application of SOIL & GRIT – if anything this is going to make your blindness all the more certain!!

Jesus’ instruction

What is more significant, of course, is Jesus’ instruction:

Verse 7 “Go,’ he told him, ‘wash in the pool of Siloam’ (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.”

It is that familiar biblical sequence where we see that:

- “believing is seeing”
- and *NOT* “seeing is believing”

Q. Have you ever had someone say to you: “**IF** you can **prove** that God exists OR that Jesus is really God **THEN** I will become a believer?”

John’s gospel – again and again – reverses the order of things – and it is important that we get in line with this sequence that God has designed – let me give you a couple more verses in John’s gospel (though we could find the same thing in other places too):

John 7 verse 17 “**If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.**”

John 8 verse 31&32 “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘**If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**”

Obedience and faith basic in Christianity

You see **OBEDIENCE** and **FAITH** are **tightly coupled** in Christian life – this is very much **CHRISTIANITY 101** stuff:

Romans 1 verse 5 puts the two together: “we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the **obedience** that comes from **faith**.”

Faith is very simple

We should never overly complicate faith – coming to a place of belief and new life in Christ.

See how simple it is: “...the man went and washed and came home seeing”.

It is as simple as ABC:

- A – ADMIT that you are a sinner and that you need a saviour
- B – BELIEVE that Jesus IS – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world
- C – CONFESS your faith in Jesus as your own Saviour and Lord with other people through the remainder of your life – starting with the public confession which we call BELIEVER’S BAPTISM

I guess by putting something rather uncomfortable in the man’s eyes, he was given him an initial push, giving him an initial desire to get that SOIL out of his eyes.

The man immediately starts confessing

And the man, because of the very immediate change in his life, starts to confess straight away.

People keep asking him about things – they can’t really believe it is him – however the man is very straightforward in his response and really this is always the best way.

We can over-complicate things when really we should just tell things how they are and then let the impact hit people. We should never make people's decisions for them. Once we have been faithful to give testimony to Jesus and to what he has done in our lives then it is down to the hearers to respond or not.

The happy ending

Before we come to the middle section of the passage and to a matching story of blindness – I want to go to the happy ending for our man born blind.

So we are now at **Verse 35** and **Jesus goes looking for the man** – and actually this should ring some bells in our heads because we've seen this all before just a couple of weeks ago with the previously crippled man:

John 5 verse 14 "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."

Jesus also sought out the crippled man

Jesus is never in the habit of leaving people, who he has changed, high and dry.

Q. Do you ever worry that God will do exactly that?

Maybe you say to yourself:

- well if I become a Christian – well I will pretty soon lose all my friends
- I will become completely isolated
- I will then start being hated by everyone around me, even my own family will turn against me

But notice what happens when this previously blind man starts to feel the rejection of the Jewish authorities:

Verse 35 "Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and **when he found him**, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

You should take away the clear lesson here that if you are rejected by the people of this world for following Jesus, you will soon discover that Jesus will see you out and he himself will draw near to you.

- Abandoned by people of this world – vey possibly
- Abandoned by Jesus himself – never!

Jesus' work not finished yet

Now Jesus' work with this man is not finished yet – it would be almost cruel to use the man's blindness as nothing more than a platform to showcase God's power healing power and glory.

The real redeeming work is to be done, for this man is more than a body – he is body AND soul too.

Thus Jesus brings out into the open the real issue with the question: **(Verse 35)"Q. Do you believe in the Son of Man?"**

Such openness

(Verse 36) "'Who is he, sir?' the man asked. 'Tell me so that I may believe in him.'"

Such openness is beautiful to behold. It really is most precious in God's sight.

And it is not because he is a simpleton who has never been to school – it is more like that precious child-like manner which is happy to operate an uncomplicated and straightforward faith.

Remember that occasion in Matthew's gospel when Jesus uses a small child as a prop:

(Matthew 18 verses 2-4) "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, **unless you change and become like little children**, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

So many overlaps

It really is quite noticeable how many overlaps there are in these passages in John's gospel – where we see people meeting Jesus and coming to faith.

It is like we keep hearing echoes of the other encounters.

Remember the occasion with the Samaritan woman in John 4 – where Jesus finally reveals himself to the woman as the Messiah:

(John 4 verses 25-26) "The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "**I who speak to you am he.**"

Verse 37 "Jesus said, 'You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.'"

This is Jesus goal that we would, each one of us, have a personal meeting with him:

- it is one thing to believe all the details, all the facts and doctrines about Jesus
- it is another thing, another clear step beyond, to have a PERSONAL ENCOUNTER with Jesus

Q. Have you yet had that PERSONAL ENCOUNTER? If not – Q. What is holding you back? Ask him to reveal himself to you. He wants to come and find you, perhaps you are the one being elusive.

Well that was the man born blind, he finds his sight, he also comes to SEE Jesus and believe in him PERSONALLY, as we put it: "**Eyes wide open – 'Where seeing is believing'**" – NOW #2:

2. Eyes wide shut - "Where looking is lacking"

Now I am quite sure, this morning, that a good many of us will have seen one or more of the Jane Austen films, ones such as **Pride and Prejudice, Persuasion, Emma, Northanger Abbey** etc. etc.

And as an introduction to a second "blind story" sandwiched right in between the main "blind" story – let me play you a particular section out of the film "**Sense and Sensibility**".

This part is where **Miss Marianne Dashwood** has just received a letter formally ending any romantic notions that she entertained regarding a certain **Mr John Willoughby** (boo-hiss, for those who know the story):

*****PLAY VIDEO CLIP*****

And you notice the particular phrase that I sought to highlight there – in case you missed it:

It was "...everyday IMPLIED but never STATED..."

What I want to do is, by 4 stages, to show how the spiritual blindness of the Jewish leaders operates as they question

A) the man: who was blind but now sees,

B) the man: who was lost but now is found:

- **Stage #1 - everyday FACTS but never FAITH:**

As in the case of the crippled man, there has been a Sabbath day violation (no healing on the Sabbath day – unless it was a life-threatening situation, which blindness was clearly not).

And so the man is brought to the Pharisees and they want to know all the details, they want to get the facts straight. And the man gives them the PLAIN TRUTH – “He put mud on my eyes and I washed and now I see.”

It really is the simplest of stories. But, just like the people who recognized the man at the start, they were a bit sceptical. They wondered if there wasn't a simpler explanation, that didn't require some miraculous healing.

So they send for the man's parents so that they can really get an authoritative statement beyond that of the man himself (afterall, perhaps he was simply deluded!).

Well they come, they corroborate that this is indeed their son and also that he was truly born blind. But beyond this they are not going to be dragged into this because they know that being thrown out of the synagogue was the equivalent of being completely ostracized from the Jewish community. So they were not going to court that disaster.

So, by this point, they have had: 1) evidence from the people that brought the man, 2) the man himself and 3) the parents of the man. Still this is not enough so they get the man back and press him more forcibly to tell the truth of the matter and he replies in Verse 25 “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

Four sets of facts and they are still hunting for more. They are now only asking the same questions that they have already asked – they will get no new information – especially since the case is such a black and white case.

Let me ask you: Q. How much evidence do you need before you will start believing?

Q. Is it for you a case of: “...everyday FACTS but never FAITH...”

- **Stage #2 – everyday HALF-TRUTHS but never the WHOLE TRUTH:**

It can be the case that half-truths can be particularly dangerous – and the reason for this is that they tend to have the appearance of truth, (because, of course, they are part-true) and so they can easily gain acceptance and end up standing in the place of the real thing.

For the Pharisees, one of their half-truths was in regard to the Sabbath day – they said it was a day of rest and that meant “NO HEALING”.

Well, it is, of course true that the Sabbath is marked out to be a day of ceasing from your ordinary labours in order that you have enjoy rest and also that you may leave your weekly occupation behind and be pre-occupied with God and with assembling together for worship. (If you're not too sure about that just check out Lev. 23).

And we can do the same sort of thing – we might say, well religion is a very good thing BUT it is something personal, we should really be discussing it with other people.

Both some Christians and the secular world around us say that sort of thing – your religion is private, it's not for to be brought out into the public square. But it is a half-truth – YES Christian faith is personal between you and Jesus Christ, the judge of all the earth BUT it is also glorious and we are to be happy to shout it from the housetops and follow Jesus command to go into all the world making disciples of whoever will listen.

(...everyday FACTS but never FAITH...)

(...everyday HALF-TRUTHS but never the WHOLE TRUTH...)

- **Stage #3 – everyday ARGUMENTS but never AGREEMENT:**

It was **Thomas Jefferson** (one of the 'Founding Fathers' and the 3rd President of the United States) who said: "we are not afraid to **follow truth wherever it may lead**, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it."

You have to give it to the Pharisees that they were pretty good at stringing arguments together. For them they gave them the appearance of being quite watertight:

"He doesn't keep the Sabbath THEREFORE (just as 2+2=4) This man is not from God"

OR

"This man is a sinner THEREFORE He cannot have performed such a 'never heard of' miracle"

Verses 30-32 have to be some of the best verses of this passage because here we see how this straight-thinking, straight-talking man completely devastates the ARGUING of the Pharisees in all their seeming cleverness:

"The man answered, 'Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'" QED ('I rest my case')

Q. Are you always ARGUING but never AGREEING?

Q. If truth be known: Are you afraid to "follow the truth wherever it may lead"?

- **Last Stage #4 – everyday RESISTANCE but never ACCEPTANCE:**

The story is told of a preacher who left his sermon notes in the pulpit after the Sunday morning service – well one of the members took the opportunity to flick through the pages. They were beautifully printed, and in the margin there were some notes to help with the presentation. About half way through there were some strong red lines in the margin, and beside them the words: **"Argument weak – Shout louder!!"**.

And this is the tack that they take next – RATHER THAN accepting that their argument was clearly the weaker one – instead they just start SHOUTING. If someone is winning is clearly WINNING the discussion – JUST TALK OVER THEM!!

Verse 34 "To this they replied, 'You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!'"

It was as simple as that.

Q. What do you do when you run out of options, when you have no arguments, no obstacles left standing?

Perhaps you do **the smoke screen, the red herring**, the quick **change of subject** in order to duck the plain implications of the Christian faith.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude where our passage itself concludes.

Clearly [John 9](#) shows us one very need man who gets a DOUBLE CURE – he gets both PHYSICAL and SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS removed.

And as [Verse 38](#) says he gives the wonderful confession of faith: ["“Lord, I believe,’ and he worshipped him.”](#)

In the [closing 3 verses](#), **Jesus matches the man’s wonderful confession with an insightful confession of his own:**

(Verse 39-41) “Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, so that **the blind will see and those who see will become blind.**’ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, ‘What? Are we blind too?’ Jesus said, ‘If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.’”

It is a sobering truth that the more times you hear something and choose not to respond, the harder it is the next time to be responsive. We very quickly learn to ignore the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit. You know the Spirit is the ultimate Gentleman and will never, as it were, force His way in.

As [Jeremiah](#) says:

[\(Jer 5v21\)](#) “Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, **who have ears but do not hear:** “

Or as:

[Hebrews 5 verse 11](#) has it: (NASB) “Concerning him (that is Christ Jesus) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become **dull of hearing.**”