

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: Sight to the Blind**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **John 9:1-6**

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

<sup>3</sup> "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

<sup>6</sup> After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.

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### **Transcript:**

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The scripture comes from John 9.

As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, whose sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sin," said Jesus. "But this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works 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."

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with saliva and put it on the man's eyes. "Go. He told him. Wash in the pool of Siloam." This word means sent. So the man went and washed and came home. So, Holy Spirit through these words in the next few minutes, help us see, what you see. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, last week my wife and I were visiting our oldest daughter in Orlando, and fortunately I recovered from COVID in time to be able to go do that. And we spent a day at Epcot theme park and they had these life-size pictures of famous paintings that you could step into, sort of like this famous painting right there, of the Scream. Or this painting by Renoir and when we stepped into it, it looked like this. This. And at first you're kind of not sure what you're looking at there, right? You're like, is Christina looking at that guy? And you kind of have to do a double take because you're not quite sure what you're actually seeing.

So it's sort of an optical illusion, maybe a little bit like this picture that a lot of us have seen. It's either two faces or a vase. If you look at the white, you see the two faces. If you look at the dark, you see a vase. And what that goes to show, what all those pictures go to show, is that how we see something, affects our experience of that thing.

So for instance, I was talking with a guy this week who on the night before he had to go to an out-of-state job interview, his basement got flooded. So, instead of preparing for this out-of-state job interview, he ended up having to clean the carpet and clean the walls. But then he thought, "You know what, if I actually get this job, I'm going to have to get this house ready to rent on short notice, so maybe it's a good thing that I'm doing that work now." And so he felt better about his flooded basement. Nothing in his circumstances changed but how he viewed the circumstances changed and that changed how he was experiencing his circumstances.

When we see things the way Jesus does, we experience more of His Hope, His joy, His courage that He can give us when we have His eyes and see things the way He sees them. And the story I just read is about how Jesus helps us see correctly, literally by healing this blind man, but also in some other ways.

So for instance, Jesus helps us see our circumstances, the way He sees them. The story starts out as, "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?'" These disciples, man, I love that, right? "Oh, it's got to be somebody's fault. Who can we blame?" And this is one of the oldest questions there is. Why is there suffering? Why is he blind?

And there are only three possible answers to the question of why is there suffering? There's only three possible answers and all of history. The first is stuff happens. It's random. Sucks to be you. The second one is the one the religious leaders love in Jesus day. And that is, well, if you're suffering, you must have done something terrible to deserve it, either in this life, or a past life, or maybe it was your parents, but one way or another you deserve it.

But Jesus introduces a third way. When he's asked the question as he is here, why is there suffering? He doesn't answer it because he knows the answer really wouldn't help. If he gave all the philosophical reasons, this guy would still be stuck with the pain of blindness. So instead of

answers, Jesus gives us three promises and he changes the question. And those three promises and a switch question help us see our circumstances differently.

Promise number one. In the face of suffering, Jesus says, "I'm with you in it." And only the God who comes to us in Jesus can say this with authority. Because in Jesus, God himself was born into poverty, died a painful death on a cross, while everyone He loved abandoned Him. Jesus knows what it means to suffer, and so He can say to us, "You're not alone. I'm with you."

Second promise I will bring good out of it. Suffering isn't good. It's not what God intended. But in order for us to be able to love God, we had to be able to choose not to love Him because if he forced us to love Him, that's not love. And we chose to separate ourselves from the author of life, which means now even our bodies don't work right and so we get sick, we die. Folks are born blind. So in that sense, sin in general, does cause suffering, but it's not this man's particular sin that made Him blind.

And suffering is bad, but God brings good out of it and this is the truth grounded in the cross, where God took the worst thing, we killed our creator, and brought good out of it by using it to pay the price for our sins and conquered death by rising again.

God's first promise; I'm with you. You don't suffer alone. Second, I'll bring good out of it. Third promise. I will return someday and set everything and there'll be no more suffering.

And when Jesus heals this man, it's not because he's doing him a special favor, because he likes him better. That's not how miracles work. When He heals this man, He's giving a preview of what's coming for all of us. All of us are headed for ultimate healing.

Now those three things, they aren't perfect answers. They're not meant to be. They're meant to speak to our heart. I'm with you in it. I'll bring good out of it. I'll put an end to it someday. And then Jesus says, "Neither this man nor his parents' sin. This happens so that the works of God might be displayed in him." And right there, Jesus switches the question from, "Why did this happen?" To, "What's it for?" What good thing is God going to bring out of it? And that question is the essence of hope. Because hope is just a synonym for curiosity.

I wonder what good thing God is going to do with this bad thing. That is hope. And when we have that, by switching this question... By switching to that question, Jesus is helping this man view his circumstances the way Jesus sees them. This isn't because you're bad. This isn't because you sin and God's going to do something good with it. And that helps this man see his circumstances the way Jesus sees them, which helps him experience those circumstances differently. Now, with hope and courage and joy. Jesus helps us see our circumstances differently.

So then the story goes on and it says, "After saying this, Jesus spit on the ground made some mud with the saliva and put it on the man's eyes." Which is just gross, right? Can you imagine

being this poor guy? Like someone, he can't see, says, "I'm going to heal you." And the next thing he hears is... Right? And then the guy puts mud, saliva, and mud in his eyes, which is even grosser. And then Jesus says, "Go wash in the pool of Siloam," which is a good idea because he is got spitting mud all over his face. And then when he does that, the man suddenly can see. So, yay. Happy ending, right? Yay. No, not so yay. Because the story goes on. Next verse.

"Now, the day on which Jesus made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath." And whenever it says it was, Jesus healed on the... The Bible, whenever it says Jesus healed on the Sabbath day, that's like the theme music from the movie Jaws. Dun, dun, dun, dun, dun. And it means the religious leaders are coming to devour him. It means yet again, He's in trouble with the religious leaders because making mud was considered work and you weren't supposed to work on the Sabbath. Plus Jesus made this man go wash in the pool of Siloam and there was a rule that you couldn't walk more than 2,000 cubits on the Sabbath day, and that pool was probably just a little bit past that distance. And so the religious leaders are mad because He broke all their rules. Could they miss the point even more? Like, are you kidding me? A guy's miraculously healed and you're counting cubits? Seriously?

Now, observing the Sabbath is a command from God. That is true. But the religious leaders had invented hundreds of little rules about how to do that, none of which were in the Bible. They're all made up. And what this shows is Jesus helps us see what's most important. What's truly important. The religious leaders thought the most important thing was their stupid little made up rules. And Jesus says, "No. The most important thing is this man. That's what's the most important thing." And we do this. We miss the most important thing, in big ways and also in fussy, picky little ways like the religious leaders.

Pastor Tony Campolo tells a story of one time after a church, a man said to him, "Pastor, you made three grammatical errors in your prayer." And Tony said, "Oh, who cares? I wasn't talking to you anyways." And we do that. We miss the point in these big ways, in these fussy little ways. So then, the religious leaders call in the man's parents and they say, "Is this your son? Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that he can see?"

"We know he is our son," the parents answered. "But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He's of age." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, would be put out of the synagogue, which would've meant social rejection for them.

So, just to make it clear what's going on here. Being socially accepted was more important to the parents than their own son. So they just threw them to the wolves. "Ask him. He's of age." Their priorities are all messed up. You know what? So are mine. My priorities are all messed up.

For instance, I think about times when I've been in a frustrating situation like say, my flight's delayed and they keep delaying it and they won't answer my questions. There have been times where I've lost my temper and I've had to go back and apologize to the person at the counter.

Now, over the years, I do that less and less because God has shown me, Jesus has shown me, helped me see that what's most important is not my missed flight. It's how I treat people and not

just for their sake, but for my sake. For the sake of my soul. The sake of my character. What's most important God has helped me see is God and people and how we treat them, which Sergio reminded us of last week when he talked about how as a person of color, he is not always treated fairly.

God and people is what's most important in life. Jesus helps us see that. But I miss it sometimes. That's why I need Jesus help. I miss it sometimes. I can get so focused on my career, or my reputation, or who likes me and who's mad at me and all this stuff. Jesus helps us see what's truly important. He says, "You don't always have to get that A. I know you think that's most important, but it's not the most important thing. God and people are." "Maybe you don't need that promotion as much as you think you do. God and people. That's the most important thing."

See in this story, Jesus is not on board with the religious leaders priorities, which was their stupid little rules. Jesus is trying to rearrange their priorities. So, if you're having a hard time getting Jesus on board with your agenda, maybe He's trying to change your priorities. And he made a little sound, that one hurt, didn't it? Yeah. Yeah. That one hurt. I'm going to say it again because I need to hear it, even if you don't, but you almost certainly do. If you are having a hard time getting Jesus on board with your agenda, maybe He's trying to change your priorities, help you see what's important.

I've told you before about the first time we took our oldest daughter to the eye doctor, she was six or seven, and he showed her the eye chart and said, "Can you read this line?" And she said, "No." And then he increased the magnification and said, "Can you read it now?" And she said, "No." And he kept increasing the magnification until finally she should have been able to see the rings on Saturn, right? And she still, she said, still couldn't read it. Finally, my wife realized what was going on and said, "Holly, it's not a word. Just read the letters." She's trying to read the eye chart like a word. It didn't work. Like Holly, I can sometimes get focused on the wrong thing. She didn't have a vision problem. She had a focus problem. She wasn't seeing it correctly. Sometimes I don't see things correctly. Jesus helps us see what's important.

Third, Jesus helps us see our story. The text says a second time, the religious leaders summon the man who had been blind. They'd already talked to him once. Now they want to talk to him again. And they said, "We know this man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know I was blind, but now I see." What a great line. He doesn't understand the complicated theology of why God heals and when God heals. He doesn't understand all that theology, but he doesn't have to. He says, "I don't know the answer to all your questions. One thing I know. I was blind and now I see." And thank you, Alexis. And that is his story and he is going to tell it to anybody who will listen to him. Because telling our stories of what Jesus has done in our life is so important because it helps Jesus become more real to us. It encourages others that Jesus can work in their life.

And third, our stories of how Jesus has worked in our life makes Jesus look good to people who don't know him. Your stories, plural, of the ways Jesus has worked in your life, is the most powerful thing you have. Most powerful thing you have, to help other people know Jesus.

Like this blind man, you don't need to know all the answers to every possible philosophical question that could ever be asked of you. All you need to be able to do is say, "I don't know the answer to your question. What I do know is this. I was blind and now I see."

So what are your stories of how Jesus has acted in your life? And they don't have to be big dramatic stories. Just what are your, I was blind, but now I see, stories. I used to find my identity in grades, or my career, or what social group I was part of, but Jesus helped me know how much I'm loved and now I don't need those things as much anymore. I used to be addicted, but then I met Jesus and he set me free. I was going through some terrible circumstance; divorce, cancer, loss of a loved one. But Jesus helped me see my circumstances the way He does and now I have more of His hope and joy.

We can say to people, "I don't know the answer to every question you have. One thing I know. I was blind but now I see, because of Jesus." Jesus helps us see our circumstances the way He does, see what's important, see our story. And finally, Jesus helps us see Him, correctly.

After this man says, "I was blind and now I see," the religious leaders said, "You were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you lecture us." And they threw him out. How arrogant. And Jesus heard that they had thrown him out and when He found him, that's a beautiful sentence.

When everyone else rejects us, Jesus goes looking for us. And Jesus says, "Do you believe in the son of man?" "Who is He, sir?" The man asks. "Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "He is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped Him. And that word worshiped is so important because what it shows is throughout this story, this man progresses in his understanding of who Jesus is.

In verse 11, he says, "The man they called Jesus made some mud and put it in my eyes and I could see." Then in verse 17, the religious leaders ask him what he thinks about Jesus. And he says "He's a prophet." And then in the verse that I just read, it says, "He worshiped him." So this man goes from seeing Jesus as a man, to a prophet, to someone to be worshiped. In other words, God, because only God can be worshiped. And notice it's in the repetition of his story. It's in having to tell his story over and over and over again to the religious leaders., It's in telling his story over and over that he begins to see who Jesus is more clearly, which is why we need to tell our stories of how Jesus has acted over and over because it helps us know who Jesus is.

And it's in telling this story, that this man is fully healed because he sees who Jesus really is and that is ultimate healing. Because see, there are two things broken in this man's life. The first thing is his eyes. The second thing was his relationship with God because he had been told that he was blind because God is mad at him. But Jesus heals that broken relationship and sometimes Jesus does heal us miraculously, physically. I've told you some of those stories. But always the miracle that Jesus does is He restores our relationship to the Father.

So, two action steps for this week.

First, what is Jesus helping you see correctly. Your circumstances? What's important? Your story? Him? Ask him to help you see things correctly because we need His help. And then pay attention to what He's trying to help you see correctly in your life.

And then second, tell your story of how Jesus has helped you see things correctly. Tell it to people in your all-in group. Tell it to friends you know. Tell your stories. And one of the ways to tell your story is baptism.

Baptism for 2,000 years, baptism is a way of publicly telling our story that Jesus has done something in our life. So on March 5th, we're going to do baptisms. If you've never been baptized, March 5th is your time to be able to make a public statement in baptism, that Jesus is your Savior and your Lord.

And if you have been baptized, if you already have been baptized, we're not going to re-baptize you. The first one is still good. There's no, used by date, on your baptism. No pull date on your baptism. But, we can reaffirm our baptism and it looks kind of similar, but it's different because there are different words and the words matter 'cause you're making a different statement.

So maybe you were baptized as a baby, but you didn't really own your faith until you're an adult. Or maybe Jesus has become more real to you recently for some reason. So you can be baptized, or reaffirm your baptism, on March 5th. And as I said a couple weeks ago, we're going to do this the most traditional way there is. Oh yeah, baby, we're going to dunk ya because that's how Jesus was baptized. And that's good enough for Jesus is good enough for all y'all. If you're physically able. If you're not, we'll sprinkle you.

And if all of this seems a little weird to you as an Eastsider or whatever, think of it as a spa day for your soul. Okay? Let's just put that into Eastsider terms, okay? A spa day for your soul. And biblically baptism does need to be done publicly in community because it's a public declaration, but also we make a vow to you as a community to help you in your faith. So, you can sign up to be baptized or reaffirm your baptism at the welcome desk after the service, as a way of saying, "I was blind, but Jesus helps me see some things correctly."

Throughout this sermon series about storytelling, some of you have sent me your stories, which I so appreciate because they can encourage everyone in the congregation. And a woman sent me her story and she said, "For many people writing this would just be routine, but for me, it's my one courageous thing. And if telling it can make anyone else feel more loved by God, please feel free to share it." And this is what she wrote.

She said, "I come from a very loving but also very staunch family and we were expected to stand up straight and move forward no matter the circumstances. Feeling immense pressure to marry right out of college. I did, and he's a big-hearted man, but one with many problems and we ended up in divorce. It was devastating to me beyond anything that I had ever experienced. Divorce wasn't something that happened in my family and the self-condemnation was intense and severe. While I was in the midst of an emotional breakdown and one day I ended up at the doorstep of a Christian friend. I told her what I was feeling and she asked if she could pray over me. In my desperation I said, 'Sure. Maybe this will help me find some sort of peace.'"

The next few minutes became the experience of my lifetime. As she prayed, I felt this warmth invaded my whole body and it was like nothing I could begin to articulate. I felt myself being raised up a few inches from the floor and the most loving arms enfold me completely. There was no doubt at the time, and there has never been a doubt since, that Jesus was holding me in that moment and letting me know I was loved beyond all comprehension.

Even thinking back to it after so many years, it makes me tear up and I know that I still remain loved, in the most incredible ways. Has my life been happily ever after since then? Of course not. I've had many struggles and dark times just like everyone else. No one escapes pain. It's part of the human experience. But never again have I doubted that Jesus is there for me in every circumstance.

And out of my experience, I became a more empathetic human being with more compassion for other people. Looking back over my life and seeing God work for good, out of my most painful experiences, has given me a life based on deep joy. Hallelujah." Channeling Pastor Alexis there at the end.

Nothing in her circumstances changed. Not one thing in her circumstances changed, but Jesus helped her see her circumstances the way He did and that changed everything about how she experienced them. Jesus helped her see what's important, helped her see her story, and helped her see Him correctly and His great love for her and that gave her hope, courage, and joy.

So where is Jesus trying to correct your vision? Where is He trying to help you see things more correctly? Ask Him to show that to you and then cooperate with him so that you can say truly from the bottom of your heart and mean it. "I was blind. Now I see. Hallelujah."

Jesus you are the ultimate eye doctor. You are the one who helps us see things correctly. Adjust our vision. Lord, where we are myopic, where we are not seeing things correctly, where we are not seeing what you see, Jesus, correct our vision. Help us see what you see and we'll give you all the glory.

In your name, Jesus. Amen.



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**Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Icebreaker Question:** As a child, what was your favorite comfort food or meal?

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- In what ways is the Pharisees approach to this blind man different than Jesus'?
- Has Jesus ever helped you "see" something in your life from a different perspective? What was it? How did Jesus do that for you? What changed because of it?
- Your story is the most powerful tool you have to help others meet or see Jesus. And the repetition of your story makes Jesus more clear to you and to others. Within the safety of your group, practice sharing your short (just a few sentences) story of how Jesus is changing your life right now. Who else could you share this with this week and in what context?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.