
Jesus heals the blind man

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 22th March

Isaiah 6:1-10, John 9:32-41



Let's pray, Lord Jesus open our minds and hearts to the truth of your word. Help us to see aright that we might live aright, amen.

Let me introduce what we are looking at today by asking the question, why is it we so often fail to see the obvious? This can apply to political or social issues. It can apply to personal or working relationships. It can apply to lifestyle choices.

What about spiritual things?

Why is it that so often we miss what the bible says is obvious? Psalm 19: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge."

The message is that God's glory can be seen in creation. Most profoundly and completely though God is seen in the person and work of Christ. But what if we miss it?

In our Gospel passage the religious leaders, who claim to be able to see, prove to be blind. A man blind from birth sees physically after Jesus heals him, and spiritually, after Jesus opens his eyes to who he is.

The context. In chapter 8 Jesus has declared himself to be the light of the world. He says “whoever follows him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Ch 9 gives evidence that Jesus is true to his word.

Rather than read the first 34 vs of ch 9 here is a very quick summary.

- Vs 1 - 12 Jesus meets and bring sight to the blind man.
- Versus 13 to 34 the Pharisees investigate, interrogating the man and his parents. The parents acknowledge their son was born blind, but they will say nothing about how he was healed, fearful they will be bared from the synagogue.
- The Pharisees again interrogate the healed man and drive him out of the synagogue.

That's where we pick up the story, vs 35ff.

Jesus hears that the religious leaders have driven the man from the synagogue. Jesus finds him and asks. “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” That's a title that points to Jesus deity and humanity.

“and who is he sir? Tell me that I may believe in him.”

Jesus had literally and miraculously opened the eyes of this man. He is now leading him see the truth of who Jesus is.

“you have seen him and the one speaking with you is he”

How God makes himself known to us is my focus. It helps us better understand this baffling statement of Jesus in vs 39, “I came into this world for judgement, so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind”.

There is both encouragement and a warning in what Jesus says.

The encouragement is our equally in understanding the things of God. Rich or poor. Educated, or not. At the top of the pile, or the bottom.

The warning? We are all equally dependent on God because understanding is more about revelation than discovery.

How do we know that? Because the very method that God uses to make himself known is both a form of grace, and a form of judgement. Did you wonder about those vs that we heard read from Isaiah?

They help us understand what Jesus is getting at in verse 39, “I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind”.

In Isaiah ch 6 Isaiah sees God. It is a terrifying and awesome experience. “Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the king the Lord of glory.”

God graciously provides a solution as seraphs take a live coal from the Alter and touch Moses’s lips with it. It is a pointing to the atoning work of Christ as foreshadowed in the sacrificial system.

God has dealt with Isaiah’s sin. In so doing God has made a way for Isaiah to be his spokesman. Here are Isaiah’s instructions.

Go and say to this people:
“keep listening but do not comprehend,
keep looking but do not understand.
Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes
and listen with their ears
and comprehend with their minds
and turn and be healed.

It sounds like God is blocking our understanding. What’s going on?

In Mark chapter 4 Jesus tells a parable. His disciples ask him why is it that he always teaches in parables? Jesus’ answer.

“To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God,
but for those outside, everything comes in parables;
in order that they may indeed look, but not perceive,
and may indeed listen, but not understand,
so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.

Jesus is clearly recalling and utilising the passage in Isaiah. He answers the disciples why parables? question by pointing to parables and the way they both reveal and conceal truth.

Here’s the point. Parables in effect are both a form of grace, because they help us understand the things of God. But they are also a form of judgement, because they expose and test our heart attitude.

In our story a man blind sees. And those who thought they could see were proved to be blind. You've no doubt heard the saying "there are none so blind, as those who will not see".

Here's the point when it comes to spiritual revelation and understanding.

- We see and understand only as God discloses.
- We see and understand only as we are open, and the Holy Spirit deals with our natural state of spiritual blindness, and enlightens us to the truth of the gospel.

Here's a question to ponder. Would it be fair if spiritual understanding was dependant on our gifts and abilities? Would it be fair if those with social standing or advantage had a spiritual head start?

Parables are the great leveller. The fact that Jesus taught in parables put us all in an equal position of dependence.

In a sense the whole of scripture is a parable. It is the story of Gods redeeming work told through many literary styles. History. Prophecy. Poetry. Allegory.

How is it that some see and understand, and some don't?

Over the years I've had a few conversations with very learned and clever people. Much more so than myself. Very often you get a sense of genuine inquiry, and a real grappling with faith given the world we live in. Regrettably, sometimes even the actions of some Christians add to the grappling.

Sometimes though, when I hear questions and justifications, I get a sense that more about smokescreens and avoidance. I get a sense that even if you could answer all the questions, which of course you can't, it would not be enough.

The gospel tells us that the God of this world has blinded the minds and eyes of unbelievers. Put bluntly, sin and deception keep us in the dark.

Even believers can sometimes be somewhat blinded. In the story of the two travelling on the Emmaus Road, following Jesus death and resurrection, Jesus joins the two downcast disciples who don't realise it is Jesus.

The text says "they were kept from seeing him".

The inference behind the original language, is that there was something spiritually going on that meant they were unable to see. Then later as Jesus spends time with them and they share in the Lords supper, the text says “and their eyes were opened.”

There is a link with what happens to Saul on the Damascus Road. Saul is struck blind on meeting Jesus.

Later as Ananias lays hands on him, and prays for him to receive his sight, we read, “ and something like scales fell from his eyes”.

Here is something that many will not accept or understand. But unless we understand and accept it, we will be fighting a battle that we can never win in our own strength.

The bible tells us that there are spiritual forces of darkness that want to keep us in the dark. And there are spiritual forces of light that want to lead us into light and truth and life. “I am the light of the world” Jesus said.

The gospel tells us that as Jesus opens our eyes to see him for who he is, and as we give our allegiance to him, we are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

The mystery and warning that Isaiah signals, and Jesus reinforces in his method of teaching, is that we are dependent on God to lead us into understanding and truth.

We don't discover God. God discloses himself. Jesus healed the blind man physically. Then he sought him out, enlightened him spiritually and helped him understand who it was that had healed him.

“Do you believe in the Son of man?” “And who is he sir, tell me that I might believe in him.” “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he”

Jesus still speaks through his word. His word is enlivened and made understandable only through the work of the Holy Spirit.

As we recognise our dependence on God we grow more open and more grateful.

Let me in in a practical way make a connection between God opening our eyes and the importance of being constant students of the word of God.

In the story of the two on the Emmaus rd, after their eyes had been opened, we read a little later, “then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”

Jesus had already given them what must have been the best bible study in all history as he travelled with them down that rd.

He goes on to open their minds to understand the scriptures and tells them, “to stay in the city until they have been clothed with power from on high.” They needed what we all need. The word of God and the power of God working together.

To that end I want to encourage something. Bible study groups. One of the key things in helping a parish grow, both numerically and spiritually, is when the gospel is proclaimed and people understand the gospel.

But as important as the proclamation of the gospel on a Sunday we need more. We grow best as we engage and participate.

So how do we open the Word in a way that engages and invites discussion, enquiry, questions and answers?

Most usually in a small group context. I believe down to my toenails that biblical Preaching is crucial if you want to grow a church. But worship services will only do so much.

Imagine if you had only one meal dished out to you a week.

- You won't learn to cook.
- You will be hungry most of the time.

So with this in mind one of the strategic plans and goals that the parish wants to encourage is bible study groups where folk can question, share, support, pray for each other in a way you can't do in the weekly services.

Imagine if every person in the parish had the support we can give to one another, and the opportunity to discover together the wonders of the gospel in a small group context.

John and I both plan to start a bible study group. After Easter I hope to kick one off at Prebbleton ideally in a home if one is available. Think and pray about that and let's see where it lands.

Let me finish by saying this. We are dependant on God to enlighten and lead us into the way of truth and life. For our part it's a great idea to give God as much opportunity as possible.

Let's pray, Lord Jesus, light of the world. By your gracious hand may our eyes be ever open to the truth of your word, and the example of your life, amen.