

A Willing Worshipper

John 9

Sophia Lee, writing in *World*, tells of a chance encounter in Washington, D.C. with an Uber driver, an immigrant from Jordan. The man talked about how much he missed his family back home. He also spoke of his Muslim faith. He talked about Musa—Moses—being sent to the Israelites in Egypt to bring revelation from God. Jesus too, he said, was a prophet to the Israelites with a messianic message. Then the man said, “Christians believe Jesus is God. No! No! We reject that. How can God take the form of man? Impossible!”

Sophia was amazed that this taxi driver would so excitedly and passionately share his faith. She told him that she and her husband are Christians. She said, “Muslims believe God is all-merciful, most kind, most compassionate, just and righteous, forgiving and loving, correct?” “Yes, yes!” The man nodded. She continued: “And Muslims believe humans sin, no?” “Yes, definitely,” the taxi driver affirmed.

“We Christians believe that too. And because of that, how much more awesome is it that the almighty God would put on our skin and walk on this earth with us, to die for our sins?” The man emphatically replied, “No! Impossible! How can God become us? How can he be three? To believe that is an unforgivable sin!”

Sophia concluded: “It was a tough conversation—we were both fully committed to our faiths, and strangely enough, both of us were trying to save each other’s souls.”¹

Here was a Christian conversing with a Muslim. The Christian maintained that salvation is only through the death of Christ. The Muslim said that to believe the Christian gospel is an unforgivable sin. These positions are incompatible; they cannot both be right. One must be wrong.

Our Bible text this morning is John 9. If you are following the Bible reading schedule on our website, you just finished the gospel of John yesterday. I likewise finished reading the Greek text of the gospel of John yesterday. When I read chapter 9, our text this morning, late last month, I was profoundly moved. Here is a story of a man’s encounter with Jesus, a man born blind—a man whose eyes never functioned from birth, a man who never saw a human face, never personally observed the world around him.

There is a lot in this chapter—far more than we can consider in one sermon. We are going to pick out a few central ideas and focus on them, but I wanted to read the entire chapter to give the context.

Blindness is a pitiful condition. A person without sight has huge challenges to overcome. Think of Helen Keller, who lost both sight and hearing as a result of a

¹ “A Good Friday Ride,” *World* 6-26-21, p. 46

childhood illness at 19 months, but through the heroic commitment of her teacher and lifelong companion, Anne Sullivan, eventually attended Harvard University and became the first deaf-blind person to earn a bachelor of arts degree. But the unnamed man in our story had *never* seen, not even for the first 19 months of his life.

Congenital deformities such as blindness are the evil fruit of sin's entrance into the world through our first parent, Adam. As we learn in Romans, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Deafness, blindness, disabilities, birth defects—all are our human lot because of the fall. But the gospel declares: "Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ; *ye blind, behold your Savior come*; and leap, ye lame, for joy." Through the grace of God the man in our story received both physical and spiritual sight; though born blind, this man had the unique privilege of gazing upon the Savior of mankind at his coming. The coming of the Messiah was prophesied in Scripture: "Then the eyes of the *blind* shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing."² The eyes of the blind man in our story were opened as incontrovertible proof of Christ's messiahship. The Lord Jesus is indeed the long-promised Messiah of Israel, God come in human flesh.

I heard just this week the sad story of a little girl, 14 months old, an otherwise happy and apparently well-adjusted baby who has never walked, never turned over in bed, never sat up. Thankfully, she is being raised by loving parents endeavoring to bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But she, like most of us, will face specific challenges in her young life. Such challenges as she will face are a result of the fall. As our Catechism observes, "The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery"—not just miseries arising from physical challenges, but even worse, "All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever."³

How thankful we are as Christians that God had mercy on us in sending Christ into the world to experience our human condition and ultimately go to the cross to deliver us from sin and misery and bring us into his blessed presence forevermore.

So our story this morning is the story of a man who had never seen the light of day. At the beginning "God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night." But here was a man

² Isa. 35:5–6

³ Westminster Shorter Catechism 17, 19

who had never seen light. His entire life-experience was darkness. He lived in physical darkness—total darkness. Because of his blindness he couldn't work, he couldn't be independent. His entire life consisted in begging, living off the charity of his fellow man.

Here was a man who was blind from birth. This is suggestive of man's *spiritual* condition. All of us are spiritually blind by nature. The glories of the Savior are proclaimed, but we just do not care, we do not understand, we are not interested. We are absorbed in ourselves, the things we enjoy, the things that give us pleasure, our work, our hobbies, our families, our relationships. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." This is the purpose for which we were created: to have a deeply satisfying connection with our Creator, to know him, to praise him, to experience him for all eternity. Anything short of this cannot truly satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart.

Here is a man who, like the rest of us, was spiritually blind, oblivious to the gospel, dead in trespasses and sins, self-centered, an enemy of God, a worshipper of self, an idolater. But the sovereign Holy Spirit put within his heart a desire to seek the Lord, to know the Messiah of Israel. The Lord of glory sovereignly healed this man's physical blindness and at the same time healed his spiritual blindness, opened up his heart to know his need of Christ, to become his worshipper.

Those who knew the man—his neighbors—observed the profound change that came upon him. They had seen him sit and beg. They were completely convinced that he was blind. They knew that he had never seen anything, read anything, looked at anything, his entire life. Then he met Jesus! This Jesus did a strange thing. He spat on the ground and made a paste of clay with his spittle. Without warning he smeared this paste of clay, this mixture of the soil of the earth with his own saliva, on the sightless eyes of the man born blind. The word our text uses is "anointed": "He *anointed* the eyes of the blind man with the clay" (v. 6). The root of this word is the Greek word for Messiah, the anointed of God, the Χριστός, the Christ. Do not miss the significance here: the Anointed One, the Christ, the Creator of all that is, who in the beginning made man in his own image from the dust of the earth, this great Creator stooped down and picked up clay wetted with spittle from his mouth and anointed the eyes of a sightless creature, a pitiful character who lived in total darkness and could do nothing but beg. Such unsanitary touching would be a complete no-no in our Covid-obsessed world! Think of it! The Anointed One anoints a sightless beggar's eyes—a man both physically and spiritually blind—and tells him to go wash in the pool of Siloam, a name meaning *sent*. He who was sent from God sends a miserable beggar to the pool called "Sent." He instructs him to wash. Jesus made no promise or guarantee as to what would happen. Here was a man sent on an errand by a total stranger, and the man instantly obeyed. He got up and began to walk, no doubt led by the hand of

another. He told his friend to be sure to lead him to the pool of Siloam, because this total stranger told him to go there. When he got there, he washed away the clay moistened with the spittle of the Son of God, and suddenly he could see! For the first time in his life he could observe light. He could distinguish light from darkness. A world of sight and color suddenly came alive before his eyes. No longer would this man be dependent on another person to lead him from here to there. Now he could learn to read. Now he could see with his own eyes the animal sacrifices that were being offered every day in the temple. Now he could be self-sufficient. He who formerly lived on charity could “labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Eph. 4:28).

Here, then, was a man with profound blindness. The word *blind* (τυφλός) is used over 30 times. It can refer to either literal or spiritual blindness. Imagine living in a world of absolute darkness, never having seen your mother’s face, never having observed the interplay of light and shadow, never having seen color, never noticed obstacles in your path. Have you ever dropped an item at night, then struggled to find it? How much easier, rather than to rummage in the dark, to turn on a light and locate the item! Even better, to follow the item with your eyes as it falls and rolls and comes to rest. It is so much easier to locate a missing item with your eyes than to have to grope for it in the dark. The man in our story could never do that. He was *physically* unable. And like us all, he was *spiritually* unable as well. “For when we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). This man was perhaps the inspiration for the words “Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found—*was blind, but now I see.*”

All of us are spiritually blind by nature. We do not know the full extent of our peril. We think we are good people. We flatter ourselves that we are not so bad, that God would surely overlook our faults and receive us into his presence. We do not know that we are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). We, like the man in the story, do not grasp our eternal peril. But we have a mighty Savior who took the initiative. *He* is the Savior, to him be all the glory! When Jesus met this unnamed man, he determined to heal him both physically and spiritually. He did not ask the blind man if he wanted to be healed. He did not get his permission to anoint his eyes with moistened clay. The *Savior* took the initiative—and the blind man never regretted it. Christ healed this man. It was a true, undeniable miracle.

Afterward, the man who had been healed endured targeted persecution from the religious authorities—men who fancied themselves to be enlightened but who were themselves benighted, blinded by sin. At the close of the chapter the Pharisees ask him, “Are we blind also?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.” Here were men

who were spiritually blind—blind guides, guiding their flock straight to hell by rejecting the Messiah when he came. Yet in their pride and religiosity they fancied themselves to be spiritually enlightened; therefore, they would die in their sins, as Jesus said. These unbelieving religious leaders could not bear the thought of one of their flock receiving physical and spiritual sight. When this man would not deny Christ, they excommunicated him—cast him out of the synagogue straightaway. Surely this man never dreamed that on the same day he would both receive physical sight and be excommunicated from Judaism—all because he refused to denounce Jesus.

But the good Shepherd would not abandon his sheep. Verse 35 says, Jesus “found him.” Here was one of Christ’s sheep, confused, dejected. But the Savior would not abandon his sheep. Jesus found him and spoke to him: “Do you believe in the Son of God?” Jesus regularly called himself the Son of *man*, emphasizing his humanity. Now he calls himself the Son of *God*, emphasizing his deity. As Psalm 2 says, “The LORD hath said unto me, *Thou art my Son*; this day have I begotten thee.” Here is the eternal generation of the Son. The Father must have a Son, in order to be a father. The God who cannot change has therefore been the Father *from all eternity*, for in the eternal day, the Son was begotten by the Father. Jesus is thus the Son of God—the eternal Son of the eternal Father. In scriptural usage “Son” does not mean *less than*, as the Jehovah’s witnesses insist, but *equal to*.

So Jesus asks the formerly blind man, now healed, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” What he was asking was, “Do you believe that I am the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Messiah of Israel?” The man responds, “Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?” Here was a sincere question born of genuine faith: “Lord, show yourself to me, and I will believe on you.” It is equivalent to the statement of the anguished father of the child possessed by a cruel spirit who seizes him, throws him down, foaming at the mouth in Mark 9, who plainly confessed, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” Sincere questioners are never turned away by our merciful God. Here was a man who truly wanted to believe, he just wanted to be sure that he was believing in the right person: “Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?”

Jesus clearly answers the man’s question: “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.” Here was a man, so recently blind, whose newly-opened eyes now could behold his healer, the Messiah of Israel! Jesus’ verbal testimony confirms the miracle he has just performed, restoring the eyes of a man born blind—a fact recently recognized by the man himself: “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing” (vv. 32–33). The man understood the logic: here is a man who performs a singular miracle never performed since the world began—healing a person’s congenital blindness—proving himself to be the

promised Messiah. Now Jesus identifies himself to him, and the man responds in saving faith: “‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him.” This is one of only two places in the Bible where faith and worship are expressly conjoined. The other is in Exodus 4:31, which says, “So the people *believed*; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and *worshiped*.” The Israelites enslaved in Egypt believed that the Lord had come to their aid in the person of Moses, so they bowed their heads and worshiped. So likewise the man healed of congenital blindness confesses his faith: “‘Lord, I believe!’” And he worships Christ. This requires great faith, to worship another man as God. Clearly Jesus is more than a man; he is God in human flesh, worthy of our worship.

But do not miss this lesson: *biblical faith is a faith that worships*. There are only two types of people in the world: those who worship Christ and those who don’t worship Christ. Here is a man, blind from birth, who is now enabled to see the incarnate Christ. He becomes convinced that the man who healed him is God’s Messiah. And there is only one logical response: to believe and become his willing worshipper.

The man born blind did not just want salvation as a type of insurance policy that would guarantee heaven. He was not saying, “Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul. You can go now, and I will live my own life as I please.” No! He was saying, “I am convinced that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord, God’s eternal Son. Count me in. I will willingly be his worshipper.”

Here was a willing worshipper of Christ. He did not have to be browbeaten or cajoled or coaxed or prevailed upon to do something against his will. No one came to him with the false argument: “Jesus is standing at your heart’s door, patiently knocking. He wants you to worship him. Won’t you please worship him. He has saved you; now he longs for your worship. Won’t you please do him a favor and worship him?”

The Scriptures know nothing of a saving faith that doesn’t issue forth in true, heartfelt worship. If a person truly professes Christ, then he becomes his willing worshipper. The heart of faith says, “Christ has saved me; therefore, I am indebted to him forever. I will gladly worship him both now and throughout eternity.”

Are you a willing worshipper of Christ? Do you *want* to worship Christ? Do you long to worship more than anything else? Are *you* a willing worshipper?

You, too, like the man in our story, “were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). By God’s grace we who believe in Jesus Christ “are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5).

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, *blind*, and

naked—"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" (Rev. 3:17–18).

Remember the Muslim taxi driver in Washington, D.C.? He protested: "How can God become us? How can he be three? To believe that is an unforgivable sin!" Yet this is exactly what happened, according to Holy Scripture! The eternal "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19), giving evidence by the miracles that he performed that he was indeed the long-promised Messiah. Contrary to the Muslim taxi driver, to believe that is not an unforgivable sin but life eternal: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Amen.