



*We have been studying the gospel of John for some time now and one of the things I love about John's gospel is that we meet all kinds of fascinating characters. We started out and we met two of Jesus' early disciples—Andrew and Simon—and we also met Nathaniel. Then later on we met a Pharisee—Nicodemus—as he came to Jesus by night with some very important questions. Then we met the woman at the well, a Samaritan woman, and we saw the interaction Jesus had with her that forever changed her life. Then we saw a man that was lame for 40 years. He sat by the pool of Bethesda, waiting for the Angel of God to cause a ripple over the surface of the water so he could jump in and possibly be healed.*

*In John chapter 9 there's another interesting character. I have come to deeply appreciate this man. He is called the man who was born blind. Church tradition tells us he actually had a name: Celidonium. I thought we would do something different this morning and have a visit from Celidonium himself. This is the testimony of a blind man.*

You're probably wondering what this is. It means nothing to you, but it means everything to me. I guess I should explain. What this represents to me is my ability to see. You look at me now and you think it's always been this way for me, but it hasn't. You see, I was born without the ability to see at all. For much of my life, I never sat in wonder at the setting of the sun. I never saw a child smile. I never gazed at a beautiful woman.

If you've read your Bible you may know me simply as the "man who was blind from birth." I do have a name though—Celidonium. But it's true, I was born blind. What I realize now is that I was blind in more ways than one.

Today my condition would be diagnosed medically. Your doctors would have some fancy name for it like congenital amaurosis, but in the first century it was much more simple and much more cruel. My condition was attributed to sin. You may be thinking, "Sin? If you're born that way, how could it be caused by sin?" Well, some of our rabbis believed that an infant could sin in the womb. I'm not sure how that happens. Maybe that's why, more often, diseases such as mine were attributed to the sin of parents. That always made more sense to me. I'll tell you about my parents later.

But it wasn't the easiest childhood. You talk about what you want to be when you grow up—a lawyer, an engineer, a carpenter, a writer. In my world, as a son, this was even more important because I was responsible to care for my parents as they grew old. But, a son like me, born without the ability to see, what could I do? The only option for me was to sit here on my mat and beg.

And that's what I was doing when I sensed them standing there. It's true about us, you know. We may not be able to see, but we sense things that others don't. I sensed that I wasn't alone. Then I heard a man speak to one of the others. He said, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The question didn't surprise me at all, but the answer intrigued me. The Rabbi answered, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. This isn't about cause and effect. This is an opportunity for God to show his power. While the sun shines, we need to be at work. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I'm in the world, there's plenty of light." Then he said something I'll never forget. He said, "I'm that Light." Honestly, I had no idea what he was talking about, but I liked that he didn't put it all on me or even my parents, and I wondered how my disability could be an opportunity for God to work.

Then I thought I heard him spit. I sensed him kneeling close to me. I felt his breath on my face. His firm and gentle hands began to wipe the dampened clay on my eyes, and he spoke to me, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." At first I wondered if it was all a cruel joke. I'd been the butt of a few of those, but something told me this was different; something about the way this rabbi spoke. I had heard stories of this kind of thing; stories of the magical powers of the saliva of certain men. So I started out in obedience to his command, with just enough faith to believe something good might finally happen to me. It wasn't easy, you know. I felt like a fool, walking through the city of Jerusalem with mud cakes over my eyes. The pool of Siloam was quite a trek, especially for a blind man, but eventually I found my way. When I stood before the pool, my heart was pounding out of my chest, "What if this really works?" I can hardly describe what happened next. As I began to wash, searing light pierced my eyes; my soul. Slowly things came into focus, and the first thing I saw was my own

reflection in the water, then sky, and then an olive tree, and then more faces.

The next hour or so is a blur to me. I know that I made quite a scene, running and shouting through the streets of Jerusalem, "I can see! I can see!" Instinctively, I sprinted home. Soon the whole neighborhood was in an uproar. "Celidonius, what has happened to you?" I even heard some of them begin to argue over whether it was really me. Some said I was indeed the same man who used to sit and beg, but others said I just looked like him. I was beginning to think **they** were the ones who were blind. They'd known me my whole life. "Of course, it's me!" I insisted. They wanted to know how this happened, and I told the truth, "A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.'" I did what he said. When I washed, I saw." That's was Adonai's truth. I didn't even know this man named Jesus. I wouldn't have recognized him if I'd seen him. They wanted to know where he was and told them, "I don't know."

That was the beginning of the difficulty. They brought me before a group of Pharisees. You might have heard about them. They were like the religious police, handing out tickets to those who committed even the most minor infractions of their law. They asked me how this had happened, and I told them "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see." Instead of rejoicing, they were infuriated. It became clear they knew all about this rabbi and detested him because he ignored their petty rules. Even in healing me, he was in trouble with them because this had all happened on our Sabbath. They even had a rule: No spitting on the Sabbath. That would be making mud. That would be work.

Then, like my neighbors a few hours earlier, they began to argue among themselves. Some of them said he can't be from God—he broke the Sabbath. Others wondered how a sinner could do such wonderful things. It was then that they turned to me and asked me of all people. "What do you have to say about him? It was you he healed." That made me think. What **do** I say about him? He had to be from God, but if I said that I could get in trouble. If I didn't acknowledge that, what would that say about me, so I said, "He is a prophet."

They still didn't believe that this had happened to a man born blind. So they called for my parents. "Is this your son? Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" My parents were quiet people. They kept to themselves. They weren't accustomed to this kind of interrogation. "We know he is our son," they answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know.

Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." There are some things that seeing eyes would rather not see. Fear blinded them. They knew what the Pharisees could do. Already there were rumors of some who believed Jesus was the Messiah being put out of the synagogue. To be put out of the synagogue would mean being cut off from the whole community. That's why my own parents pointed them back to me.

So there I was again, standing before the Pharisees in what felt like a trial. "Give credit to God," they said, "Tell the truth. We know this man is a sinner." I stuck to my story: "I know nothing about that. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind . . . I now see." They said, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" I was starting to get angry, and said, "I've told you over and over and you haven't listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?" That might have been pushing it. They didn't appreciate my sarcasm, and they jumped all over me: "You might be a disciple of that man, but we're disciples of Moses. We know God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from."

Again, I could feel the heat rising from my collar. I blurted out, "This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! We all know God doesn't listen to sinners, but to those who do his will. No one has ever opened the eyes of a man born blind—ever. If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't be able to do this." Honestly, I surprised even myself with my boldness. Now they were incensed, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you take that tone with us!" So they cast me out.

There I was—alone, on the street. It wasn't unfamiliar to me. For years, I'd spent long, hot days here, sitting on my mat as an outcast begging with outstretched arms. But now I was an outcast of a different kind. It wasn't my inability to see that caused this, but theirs. My neighbors, the religious leaders and my parents had all rejected me.

I had some time to think, and it began to dawn on me that these men were the ones who were blind. These men who seemed to know it all and had locked up all the right answers in their traditions about the laws God had given to Moses. It's like the very ones who claimed to see and know it all were blinded to the truth right in front of them. Hadn't the prophet Isaiah spoken of a time when, "the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped" (Isaiah 35:5). Could that be me? If it was me, who is he?

I thought about that for the rest of the day. I really wanted to meet this man named Jesus but had no idea where to find him. I was wandering around in the vicinity of the Temple when I heard

a commotion. A man walked up to me and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" I knew the voice. It was him! He found me! But what did he mean—Son of Man? I'd heard that term before in the writings of the prophet Daniel. He'd written of one called the Son of Man who would come at the end of time and judge the nations. But, still, I wasn't sure what he meant, and so I asked him, "Who is he, sir?" Then he said, "You're looking right at him. You're speaking right to him."

When I tell my story, I like to say that it was then I really received my sight. When the day started, I just thought he was a man named Jesus. Then I came to see he must at least be a prophet sent from God. But now I understood what he'd meant the first time I heard his voice: "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Well, now that light burst forth in my own heart. I began to understand why he sent me to wash. Like the water had washed the mud from my eyes, he'd wash me clean from the dirt of sin. I fell on my face and worshipped him, "Master," I cried out, "I believe."

When I finally rose to my feet, I could see that quite a crowd had gathered. There were more than a few frowning faces among them. Then the Master spoke, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see, and those who think they see will be exposed as blind." I heard a Pharisee in the crowd sneer, "Are you calling us blind?" Jesus said, "If you were really blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

Funny thing about the light. It's like the sun. It's not the purpose of the sun to cast shadows. But where the sun shines on objects, shadows are inevitable. Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, didn't come to cast shadows; he didn't come to bring judgment, but when people reject the Light that's what happens.

Then I understood. The distinction among men isn't between those who are blind and those who see; it's between those who know they're blind and those who claim they see. The real blind people are those who think they can see everything clearly. Usually, they're religious people like these Pharisees; people who take the law of God seriously and who work hard to keep it; people who know what they believe. Somehow in all of that they've become proud. They've constructed a system within which they can never see that they're wrong. They comfort themselves in their ability to see the sin in others, but they're blind to the sin in their own hearts. They comfort themselves in having correct doctrine, but that doctrine has become a weapon to lash out at others rather than a sword that divides their own heart.

But those who know they're in darkness and know their desperate need, they're the ones who really see. It's not easy to live in the light. Light constantly shows us our sins and shortcomings. The good news is it also encourages us to seek forgiveness and change. And that forgiveness is possible. I understood that even more after I watched them nail the Master to a Roman cross. I know now that he took my sin upon himself on that cross so that I might forever live in that light.

So those who think they see are really blind. They hate the light because it exposes them and it drives them even deeper into darkness. But those who know their desperate need for The Light will come to The Light and find healing and forgiveness and the ability to change.

That's my story: I, Celidonius, was blind. He put mud on my eyes and I washed, and now I see.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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