

Seeing God

What Is It Like to Discover Something You Never Knew Before?

Years ago I was going to visit some people who had just recently attended our church. Because I had never been to their house and it was before cell phones were popular and GPS was still not available for normal people, I had to pull out a map to find my way. Since it was nighttime, I turned on the inside dome light of my car but couldn't read the street names. Then I brought the map outside my car and stood under a parking lot light to try and read the map but couldn't. My next idea was to turn on the headlights of my car and put the map in front of them but still I couldn't figure out the street names. Because I had pulled into the parking lot of a fast food restaurant, I decided to go inside and see if I could figure it out there and fortunately the light in the restaurant was bright enough to read the map. That was when I realized that either I would never be able to read a map at night again or I would need to get my eyes checked. It turned out, much to my humiliation, that I, a "young man", needed bifocals.

The big idea we will explore today is this. The transformation God works in His people comes in stages so be patient. You use the expression, "my eyes were opened" to describe being surprised by what you discover. I don't believe you have ever had your eyes opened like one particular person described in John 9. He is simply called a "man blind from birth". It would be nice to know his name but man blind from birth pretty much tells us a lot. Most likely "blind" was what identified him everywhere he went. It marked every interaction, every activity, every task he attempted. While walking through Jerusalem, Jesus' disciples noticed the blind man and asked Jesus what for us would be a rather absurd question. Almost no one now thinks this way but back then it was universally considered a legitimate concern. **His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"** (John 9: 2 NIV) There were among the Jews at the time three major schools of thought. The Sadducees, the biggest percent of Jews, believed that God had nothing to do with human affairs. The Pharisees, a quite vocal minority, concluded that all events were decided by God but some matters in life were determined by the decisions people make. The third group, the Essenes, the smallest of the Jewish people, held that God decides everything that happens. We see these three views today and you probably hold to one of them. The question of the disciples was a reasonable one to the Jewish people. Being born blind was bad in the minds of everyone but perhaps Jesus, and the disciples wanted to know why God would do that to the unfortunate fellow.

Many among the Pharisees believed you could sin, even before you were born and so you were accountable to God for what you did then. Others were sure that God could and would punish children for the sins their parents or even grandparents committed. Certain this was a punishment of God, the disciples wanted Jesus' take on this moral question. Christ's response was not what they expected. **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."** (John 9: 3 NIV) The blindness was not due to sinning. The man born blind was not being punished for his sins or for the sins of his parents. However, God was going to make the blindness of the man a part of His plan. This is the mistake we all too often make. We misidentify what is good and bad. We think something is bad if it inconveniences us, makes tasks more difficult or generates pain. No one likes to go through struggles and hardship. Satan brings us all sorts of heartache and trouble because he is counting on us following the advice of Job's wife. "Curse God and die!" The urge is there. Give up on God and decide He is cruel and unfair, absent, uncaring or nonexistent. That is what Satan wants you to decide. Too many focus on what seems so wrong, so unfair and they become blind to the most important part of life. It is not about what you face, it is about who faces you. To paraphrase Jesus. "Get your eyes off the man's blindness, focus on God and see what He does.

The theology of blame is rampant. It is the toxic side of religion. Who is at fault? Who is wrong? Why won't God fix this? It is fascinating to me that there were only two people who actually saw what was happening and one was the man born blind. One of the strangest miracles described in Scripture happened next. **Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the 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 seeing.** (John 9: 6-7 NIV) I have heard plenty of commentators and Bible teachers justify Jesus' use of His spit here. Many theological and esoteric explanations have been offered. Let me just address the elephant in the room. This was an odd thing to do; spit in the dirt, make mud out of it and then slap it on the eyes of the man born blind. I am guessing that someone blurted out in disgust what Jesus did and so the blind man knew what was being caked on him. Even if he didn't know, that is irrelevant to what is of greatest importance.

This is the crisis point. The man born blind had to make the most important decision of his life. Go down to the Pool of Siloam and wash the mud off his eyes or bitterly wipe the goo off with his hand and gloomily pout about how unfair and cruel God was. I get notes from those who are convinced Christ has let them down, has abandoned them, has slapped mud on them without reason, without love. Keep in mind that what Jesus told the man born blind to do was not an easy task. He was after all blind. The pool was at the southern part of the city, probably a long way away and there were thirty-three steps cut out of stone that led down to it. Not easy for any of us, treacherous and demanding for someone born blind. Notice this underemphasized aspect of this command. Jesus never promised the blind man he would be able to see once he washed off his eyes. The trek down to the pool could have ended in more disappointment for the man born blind. Pure, simple faith in Jesus took him down to the Pool of Siloam, no questions asked, no promises offered. How many Christians have that sort of faith in God? Do you? Could you?

Faith in God is not something you process and discuss; it is always something you do. Let's take a look at how faith in God happens in real time and the transformation that takes place. After he was healed, some Pharisees came to the healed man, wanting to know how he came to see. **Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."** (John 9: 15 NIV) The man knew how it happened. It was Jesus. Stage one. He knows who came to him—Jesus. The Pharisees were convinced that Jesus had acted irreverently by healing on the Sabbath and confronted the poor guy who just wanted to be left alone to enjoy his ability to see. **Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."** (John 9: 17 NIV) Stage two—Jesus is not just an ordinary fellow. As the Pharisees began to hurl insults at the healed man, he stood up for Jesus. **If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."** (John 9: 33 NIV) Stage three. Jesus has the hand of God on Him. Jesus, after the Pharisees left, approached the man He healed and invited him to put his hope in the Son of Man. **Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** (John 9: 35 NIV) Immediately the man eagerly wanted to know who the Son of Man is. **"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."** (John 9: 36 NIV) Stage four. He was ready to believe in Jesus. His response to Jesus telling him who the Son of Man is was immediate. **Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.** (John 9: 38 NIV) The man believed in Jesus and worshipped Him. Stage five.

Each person who puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ for salvation goes through stages of belief. It never happens all at once but is a growing awareness that is like an unveiling, as if the curtain is slowly raised and there He is, your Savior. For some it takes a day or two, others nearly a lifetime. It requires patience and faith in Christ to finish what He has started when you watch those you love so far away from God, seeming to have no interest in Him. Take a moment to grasp the immense mystery of salvation and faith in Christ. On one side of heaven, it is a progression of belief. The blind man slowly came to realize that Jesus Christ was more than just a good and decent man, He is in fact the Savior he needs for eternal life. That is how it is on our side of heaven. It feels like a human determination. But here is where the mystery grows deeper and more profound. Heaven knows it was Jesus who came to the blind man, and it was Jesus who revealed Himself to the man. He never would have known who God was if Jesus didn't come to him. On the heaven side of faith it is God who comes to us and reveals Himself and the salvation He brings.

Did you notice the final transition of salvation? It was not excitement about being able to see. It was not even any attention to the miracle. There was no consideration of what sort of person the healed man became or how it changed his life. The last phase to meeting Jesus and gaining His salvation is worship of Him. Until you worship Jesus and love Him with joy and gratitude, you are still a work in progress. Faith has not reached its goal. Worship is where your transformation will take you; worship of Jesus is how eternal life looks in you when you are fully healed and made whole. Never think of worship as something you do, it is who you are when Jesus has made you completely new. When worship of Christ becomes just as much a part of your personality as eating and sleeping, you will know that you have been made complete and whole.