

When blindness became a parable

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the story of Jesus healing a blind man in Bethsaida, highlighting the deeper spiritual lessons embedded in the event. It emphasizes the need to understand the true identity and purpose of Jesus beyond just fixing problems, but as the Savior who transforms lives profoundly. The sermon underscores the importance of leaving behind places of unbelief and darkness, allowing God to lead us into a deeper understanding of His transformative power. It also emphasizes the ongoing sanctifying work of God in our lives, urging listeners to seek a deeper, more profound experience of God's love and power.

Scripture: Mark 8:22, Matthew 11:20, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:3, 1 Peter 1:8

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Faith and Understanding"

Description

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Transcript

Well, thank you very much. Again, it's my privilege to be back. I've looked forward to this opportunity, and thank you.

I'm going to read from Mark's Gospel, and from Chapter 8. And I normally use King James, and I'm going to use a different translation for these few verses. And so I'm looking at the 22nd verse. So they, Jesus and his disciples, arrived at Bethsaida, where there was a man who was blind, that was brought to him, and they had an earnest request that he would touch him.

Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside of the village. And then he moistened his eyes with saliva, and putting his hands on him, asked, can you see at all? And the man looked up and said, I can see people. They look like trees, only they are walking about.

Then Jesus put his hands on his eyes once more, and his eyes came into focus. And he recovered and saw everything sharp and clear. And Jesus sent him off to his own house with the words, don't even go

into the village.

Amen. Now, I believe that Jesus himself designed this event. And he designed it to incorporate into it some particular lessons.

And he created out of this event a kind of parable, it seems to me. And today, my prayer is that the Holy Spirit will just reveal and apply these lessons to our own hearts. I'm sure you've read these verses before, and you will have noticed what was again obvious as I read it just now.

And that is that there are some unusual features in this event. I'm thinking of three in particular. I'm thinking of the way Jesus dealt with the man.

Once the request had been given to him by those who had brought him, he led the man out of the village. That seems strange. And then there was the strangeness of the method that Jesus used on this occasion.

And then thirdly, there was this somewhat puzzling need for a second touch, which we don't find in reference to any other miracles that Jesus performed. I also believe that when we're looking at and thinking about Jesus, and we're considering words that he spoke, there was never an occasion when we have reason to believe that his words did not have significance. In other words, everything he said had significance.

He wasn't just chattering about whatever came to his mind. He spoke words that were weighty and had eternal truth in them. And so let's just investigate these couple of questions that seem to be raised here with this passage.

I'm looking first of all into the 22nd verse, which was the first verse I read. And quite simply it says, and he came to Bethsaida, and they bring a blind man, they brought a blind man. And we don't know who the people were, who they were, that brought Jesus.

No doubt they were friends, associates, doesn't really matter. The fact is we just don't know their names. We don't know anything about them at all.

What we do know is that they came to Jesus and brought the man, and they had a very specific request. And they believed that if they were to bring the man to Jesus, that he would heal him of his blindness. That's very obvious, I think, foregone conclusion.

So that's what they wanted Jesus to do. They wanted him to heal him. And I believe they very lightly came with a sense of understanding or opinion as to how Jesus might do that.

I mean, it's very likely they'd seen him lay hands on people before with the miraculous result. Now then, for these people who came with this request, that was very reasonable. There's nothing complicated about this at all.

They've got a blind man, they wanted to be healed. They came to Jesus with this request, and so on. And yet, I want to suggest to you that as we read the Scriptures and we're continually looking for the Holy Spirit to illuminate to us what purpose he has incorporated this story or these texts or this information or whatever it is into the Scriptures that we have, because we remember how the Apostle Paul made that statement that is very well known, that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for the various reasons that he goes on to catalogue.

So we've got Jesus who always speaks with significance. We've got him in this particular situation where now the Spirit of God has incorporated this story into the text, so we're saying, well, there must be some particular reason for all of this. What is that reason? Is there something that lies behind the obvious here that we could so easily just pass over when we're doing our speed reading or whatever we do with the Bible? And the fact is, I think when I treat these opening thoughts with the idea, well, these men just simply brought the man to Jesus to get healed, yes, it was the right thing for them to do.

It was an understandable thing. But I want to suggest to you that actually, they were actually failing to grasp something that was truly critical, and that was the true identity of the one to whom they brought the man. It would be very easy, I don't want to criticise them, I don't want to accuse them of anything, but my reading of this text this morning brings me to a point where I cannot help but sense that the kind of mistake I think they're making here is the kind of mistake that so many of us make today, and that is we fail to fully appreciate the identity of Jesus.

And on the surface of things, and I think this is the way many people think about Jesus, he's one who just fixes problems. He's got this supernatural gift of empowerment, and he somehow is able to fix things. And I think this is where we go wrong, quite frankly.

We have lots of things that go wrong in our lives, and there are lots of situations where we could jolly well deal with some supernatural help, no question. But the fact is that God is, and Jesus in particular who I'm speaking about, is so much more than that. We can end up with an impression, if we're not very, very careful, that he is where we go when things go wrong, when something's derailed in our lives.

And we imagine that he somehow is at our beck and call, that we can just call on him and somehow he is able to sort of pick up our fallen plates and get them spinning again for us, and perhaps even keep them spinning for us. And what we really need more than anything else is to see beyond those facts. I'm not saying that he doesn't do those things, but there's something more, and that's something more, and this is not going to sound strange to you because it's so fundamentally obvious, and that is Jesus, as he stood there on that occasion when the men came with the blind men, he was in fact God incarnate.

He was God Almighty incarnated in human form there. The fact of the matter is this, that he came with a commitment, with a purpose to accomplish something that was far, far, far superior than anything we can truly understand in our minds. He had not come primarily as one who would fix all our problems, he'd not come with the purpose to just improve our lives and make life easier for us, but he had come with a transcendent mission, and not merely to deal with the darkness of human blindness in a man, but he had come to deliver men and women, he'd come to deliver you from the kingdom of darkness and to recreate your life, and less than this is not the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He alone is the one that can accomplish this, that I'm now attempting to draw your attention toward, and so when I read this story again, I have a sense that Jesus is, if you like, he's painting a full color picture of how this works, and let's just watch that together as it unfolds. The first step, I alluded to it a few minutes ago, is that we must leave the village, and he incorporated this into this divinely designed order that takes place on this occasion, because, excuse me for repeating myself, because he had these important lessons to teach people, to teach people like me, and to teach people like you, that in order for him to accomplish his great supreme purpose in our lives, we must first leave the village, the place where we've been living, the place where we've belonged. You know, I'm not going to turn to another passage of scripture, but I'll give you the reference to it, we could turn to Matthew's gospel, chapter 11, and verse 20,

and there's a context that I don't want to get into just now, but in the 20th verse, he actually condemns three communities, and he condemned them for their indifference and their unbelief.

He makes references to the fact that he performed great miracles there, and yet they had not repented of their sin, and those three communities were Chorazin and Capernaum and Bethsaida. That's the town that we're looking at here on this occasion. The fact of the matter is that God cursed those cities we read in the earlier passage that I've just referred to, and the fact is that for him to fulfil his purpose, he has to get us away from the place of curse, to get us away from the place of unbelief, and to bring us to a place of his appointment where he will quicken faith in our hearts.

It's like a fixed principle, I believe, that we'll never know God's true miracle power while we're residing in a city of unbelief, while we're residing in the context where the very curse of God abounds. That village that I'm thinking of now is a dark, hollow world where self is worshipped, and we're entertained by immorality. I think you're maybe beginning to understand what I'm talking about, and we can't discover God in that context.

We need to be brought away from that place, and it could be described far more graphically than I'm attempting to do just now. He needs to get us away even from false ideas of what the gospel is. We need to be brought away from false ideas as to who God himself is.

We need to be brought to a place where there's a fountain for uncleanness. We need to be brought to a place where sin is washed away. These are words that are coming to my mind from my Sunday school days, where sins are washed away, where night is turned to day, where burdens are lifted, where blind eyes are made to see, and then we used to sing on, there's a wonder working power in the blood of Calvary.

He must bring us to a place where believing becomes simple to us. In the text here, and this is another unique feature, that Jesus takes the man by the hand. So the request has been made by those who brought the man.

Jesus just simply takes his hand, there's no reference to anything else going on, and starts to lead him out of that context that I've just been describing. And you know, that's exactly the way God deals with you and me. Every work of God, every act of God pertaining to our lives, begins with divine action.

The Apostle Paul writes in the opening sections of the book of Romans that there's no one that seeks the Lord. In other words, God himself has taken the initiative, he is always the initiative taker. He took the initiative to bring salvation to mankind before the foundations of the world.

It wasn't man's idea that came up with it and tried to persuade this deity to do something to help us, it was God's idea. And it's always that way. And even when we're thinking about our own lives and our own experiences, it will always be that God takes the initiative.

We may feel as though we're taking it, but he has actually prepared us and he's prompting us in ways that we're possibly completely unaware of. But God is taking us, as it were, by the hand. And he's leading us forward.

We may not hear, and likely will not hear him say these words, but it is as though these very words, I'm going to quote in just a moment, are being whispered into our hearts. It is I, be not afraid. It's a mystery, the whole process of God's dealings with us and his divine leading is a mystery.

He awakens something within us that we're really unaware of before. We're busy in that city that I've alluded to. We're worshipping ourselves and taken up with all the things of our own lives.

And insofar as God has his hand upon us, he starts to work in our circumstances. He causes issues and people and circumstances to converge in a manner that brings us slowly but slowly, it may be more quickly than that for many, but he brings us to that place where he's beginning to get our attention. And I believe this is exactly what was happening here.

And God has taken an action to do something. He's positioning the man, he's getting into that place where he is able to accomplish his purpose. And that's exactly what this is illustrating to us.

It could be, because I don't know who I'm speaking to just now, it could be that there are those listening to me today who are still in that city and still part of all that city. You know, as I'm saying this, it's reminding me of something. I'm from the city of Liverpool in England.

And there'll be a few of you listening to me who will have heard of Liverpool. And there'll be perhaps a smaller group of you who will know that four boys who were known as the Beatles, the singers, they came from Liverpool, and they lived very close to where I lived, and not far away from my age as well. And of course, they became very famous very quickly.

And lots was going on in their lives. But there came a point where they, because they were living in that city, in that village, if you will. And they ended up calling for the Maharshi to come from India at their expense to talk to them.

And they traveled down to London to Heathrow Airport to meet him. And while they were waiting for him to arrive, because there were newspaper reporters everywhere. And there's one documented event that I recall, made a note of years ago, where this newspaper reporter said, like, like, why are you doing this? What's going on that you would do such a thing and call this man.

And one of them said, we realized that we need a deep spiritual experience. Now, tragically, they were looking in the wrong direction. But nevertheless, we know very well, and I've met many, many, many over the years, who recognize that there's an emptiness within.

Sometimes we refer to it as a thirst, just a longing, a desire for something more. I remember hearing about a woman who was standing in an airport standing before one of those big plate glass windows looking out of the aircraft taking off and the cloud cover was very, very low on this occasion. And there was a plane that just took off.

She seemed to be from all accounts a very well to do woman. And as those years, you got on somewhere in life as far as that's concerned. But the plane which lifted up very, very quickly disappeared into the cloud and in an unusual with unusual speed.

And she was heard to say, how I long that I could do that and just disappear and somehow start my life over again. That's why so many people live. Some of the issues that people suffer under are not of their own making, but the results of other people and circumstances in which they found themselves perhaps from childhood.

There are many other things that people engage themselves in and they create this kind of havoc in their own lives. And that seems to only compound their sense of emptiness and darkness. And I could talk and

tell a lot of stories about people I've been able to talk to over the years right along these lines.

What a wonderful thing it is to remind ourselves that this Jesus, He's still alive today. He's very much alive today. He's present here even now as I'm sitting in this room alone talking to you.

He's here by His Holy Spirit. And He's here with this same unchanged intention to bring about this supernatural transformation in men and women's lives. And we headed, and Scripture's headed this work, this redemptive work under the simple term, the gospel.

It's the gospel, the good news that there's a God who loves you and who knows everything about your circumstances. He loves you. He's paid a price, the highest price that could ever be made that we can't begin to compute in order to rescue you from that village, from that lifestyle, from the darkness, from the bondages.

And He's looking to draw you to Himself. What a wonderful thing. And so the circumstances under which He draws you to Himself will differ from one person to another, certainly.

But there'll be this fixed principle that's true in each and every case where it's the Holy Spirit taking an initiative who begins to draw us before we even know what's happening. And He causes, as I've said already, situations to converge which somehow seem to highlight and underscore not only my own need but that I need help. And slowly but slowly the Lord is revealing Himself.

I've wondered to myself what the conversation would have been between Jesus and that man as they walked outside of the village. I'd love to know what Jesus said to him. I'd love to know what the man felt as he had the very hand, the hand of God incarnate resting upon him or perhaps on his shoulders.

I don't know. I tend to think he had his arm around him as they walked, but I mean I don't know. But that surely would be what this man would feel.

The source of perfect love incarnate is conducting him on this little journey that he knows virtually nothing about really. But this person who is leading him, well we know he was the most wonderful person that has ever lived on the face of the earth. And he was there in company with that man.

I'm sure that he didn't walk in total silence, but again I don't know what was said. But that's what happens. I could speak on myself.

I could take you a long time. I've lived a long time. I've got lots of information to draw on.

But I'm thinking back just now to the fact that I was raised in a Christian home and I believed that I had everything together spiritually and so on. I'll move very quickly through all this. And my young brother found some people who clearly had an experience of God that he recognized to be something that he needed.

And he responded. He came to my home where I lived and he did all he could to persuade me that I needed to go to these meetings. But that wasn't part of what I was living for at that point in time.

I was freshly married. I was a policeman. We had everything to look forward to.

We had one child already. And life was good, I thought. And I was a Christian.

That's how I thought of myself. But then the Lord, I'm thinking back to the way he causes things to converge. He brought about influences and some people into my life.

And little by little my heart was melting. And I was compelled ultimately to recognize that I had need in my life, that I needed to know God in a way I had not known him. Jesus moistened the eyes of this blind man with saliva.

Let me just tell you, there's nothing stereotype about the way God deals with us. And even when I look at the stories of Jesus, sometimes he touched people, sometimes it was just a word. I'm thinking of one occasion that stands out in my mind when he didn't say anything, he didn't do anything.

All he did was look. Of course, it was when Jesus himself was in the judgment hall and he turned his head. He knew which way to turn his head because there was a man looking through some opening in the wall or however it was.

And that man was Peter who had denied the law, the Lord. And Jesus just looked at him. And I love the text because I can relate to it because it says that when he saw Jesus look at him, he went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus broke his heart with just a glance and it wasn't a condemning glance, we can be certain of that. It was a glance of love and kindness. Amen.

And so here's Jesus. He didn't give the man a copy of four spiritual laws or he didn't say kneel down here and pray this prayer after me. Sometimes he said to people, come to me and drink.

Sometimes he said, follow me. Sometimes he said, you need to be born again. Or to another person he said, hey, I'm coming to your house.

And you know, this is who we're dealing with. He knows us individually. He knows you individually.

He knows how to reach you in the deepest need of your heart. And he knows when to do it, at what stage in your journey to be the perfect time. This could be the very moment in your life when he's speaking to you and he's just putting his finger on what we could call a live nerve in your inward being.

And you recognize that there's something here that I really need to pay attention to. John Wesley once talked about his experience. He said that his heart was strangely warmed.

And as he did his dealings, another songwriter wrote these words, when I feel the touch of his hand upon my life, it causes me to sing a song that I love you, Lord. Amen. And I think this man had the hand of Jesus touching him as they walked.

But that wasn't the end of the matter, of course, as we know. And he's separating him from everything that was wrong in the city and creating this new environment here. Amen.

And he touches the man's eyes. He says to the man, can you see anything? And the man, he says, well, I can see men, but they look like trees, but they're walking. It's an interesting description, isn't it? Definitely.

But let me just make this statement. The fact that he wasn't completely healed on that occasion immediately was not a lack on the part of Jesus, not at all. But Jesus had something to teach.

And he's needed to teach me this. Maybe he needs to teach you this, and so on. His early touchings of our lives, his expressions of kindness and assistance or blessing or refreshing or whatever it is, every touch of God, whether it's with saliva and he's touching my eyes, whatever it is, it's a miracle.

It's always a miracle, whatever he's doing for us along the way. But there's still always a bigger, deeper, more profound work of his sanctifying power that needs to penetrate down into the deepest parts of our lives. And I think this is quite well illustrated in this strange little narrative that we're looking at here on this occasion.

God always has the great or the grand end in view, as it were. And I'm not talking about eternity, I'm talking about the here and now. Paul puts it so well in Romans chapter 8, verse 29, where he tells us that his plan and his purpose is to conform each one of us to the very image of Jesus.

His intent is to conform me inwardly to his image. His intent is to cause the sweetness and the fragrance of his life to be manifested through me outwardly. It's a thorough, radical work.

It goes by different names, but it's the regenerating and sanctifying work of God that's made possible because of what Jesus did at Calvary. But it's made available to men and women like you and me today by the person and through the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Amen.

So Jesus wasn't lacking power. He said, well, let's have another shot at this. He didn't do that, did he? But he was teaching something very, very important.

Amen. You know, just yesterday, yes, yesterday, I phoned my uncle. I tried to think whether it was this morning.

I've been up a long time. I phoned my uncle in England. He's just 10 years older than me, and I can tell you a lot about him.

But he's been on the blind register for almost all of his life. But he enjoyed the ability to just see shadows and light and dark that he could detect. And over these many years, he's been a preacher of the gospel, and he is now 90 years of age.

And I was thrilled to talk to him yesterday. His heart is so light and so thankful to God for his many blessings. But the message that he's conveying right now is, in fact, almost his first words when he answered the phone, he said, Fred, you do know that I'm completely blind now.

That was predicted that that would happen, but he had a long spell where he could see faintly. And they've even taken his seeing eye dog from him because of his age now as well. And that was a big blow.

But in any event, what I'm trying to say is, he learned to live with shadows and partial sight for an awful long time and was very grateful for it. If I bring that idea into the context of our Christian lives, and I say very sadly, there are so many people who've learned to live with partial sight and a high degree of blindness to spiritual realities, and they've just learned to live with it. And just a couple of days ago, I've been told I could talk as long as I wanted, so I'm taking liberties here.

But just a couple of days ago, I turned the radio on when I was driving, and I heard a preacher denouncing people. He was denouncing people like me. If we were face to face, he would have called me a heretic, because anyone who teaches that there's such a thing as a deeper life, or that there's more for Christians

to know, are teaching heresy.

That's not right, because in Christ we have everything. Well, there's a great truth that lies in that second statement, certainly. But, you know, convince me that these men and women that I'm meeting, whose spiritual life is like half an inch deep and five miles wide, in other words, there's incredible shallowness, convince me they don't need some further touch of the power of God.

Of course they do. It's not that it's not been available all the time, but they've not come into the benefits. For many, many people, they've never really heard that God has something in his heart to accomplish in their lives that is bigger and greater than what they've already experienced.

That even the earliest touches have been miracles. But there's more. There's more.

There's much more. And I think this has been part of the focus of my ministry. God has given me over all these years to try and help people to see these are foundational truths.

But if we don't get these things right, nothing will really be right from there on. I was talking to one of my sons just the other day. He's worked in house construction for years.

And I was talking to him about foundations. And he just made the point that if the people who do the foundation, he comes to build a house on it, if they've not done the foundation properly, if it's not in the right place, obviously that's serious, the right shape or something. But he said if there's ups and downs in it, if it's not even, and they start constructing on it, he said that problem will translate all the way to the roof of the construction.

If the foundation is not right, nothing will be straight. It doesn't just automatically get straight on its own. And so of course, men who know what they're doing, they have a problem to try and compensate for that and level things off.

But the problem is the foundation has not been established right. And somehow the foundation of the gospel in so many cases is so misrepresented. And people don't know any better.

And that's all they know. And so they flounder and flounder through sometimes their entirety of their physical life. Without ever discovering that there's something so much richer, some knowledge of God that's so much deeper and more wonderful.

And praise God, we're able to share that message with men and women everywhere. Amen. You know, you can have a ton of doctrinal knowledge in your head, and yet have a grave scarcity of that mystical fragrance of the holy life of Jesus that God wants to impart and manifest through each and every one of us.

Amen. You know, this is that fullness of the blessing which is in Christ that Paul talks about to the Ephesians. That fullness of blessing, and then I'm reaching out to the Apostle Peter, who by his Spirit fills us with joy unspeakable and full of glory, as it's described.

And there's so many of us, and if you're one of them, I appeal to you to think about these things I'm sharing to you. But so many, it's as though we go into the bank and we rush out of the bank singing because we've just found that five dollars has been left to us in an inheritance. And we go out and say this is wonderful, when all the time there was a document in the bank that clearly stated that the inheritance

was a million dollars.

But so many just make do with something that to some degree gives them assurance that maybe when they die they're going to go to heaven, and we think well that's wonderful. And then they get on just living their own lives by their own schemes and with their own resources, when there's a life that God has that is so much higher. Amen.

This little sequence of events here ends with Jesus saying to the man who now has his full height restored to him, and I'll paraphrase it deliberately, Jesus said whatever you do man don't go back into the village, don't go back into the place of unbelief, don't go back into a lifestyle where the curse is on it, don't go engaging yourself with the pleasures and the entertainment, and although he didn't say all this but it's all implied surely, all the worldly lifestyle and the worldly things. And sadly so many who call themselves Christians live there, but inevitably it's such a great price. And Jesus would say again to each one, whatever you do as you yield yourself freshly to me, do not go back into the city.

And maybe I should just leave things there for this time. I trust that the Lord just seals all these things and quickens them by his Spirit to you. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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