

# *A Blind Man's Story*

**John 9:1-41**

*Preached by Richard Bolin at Culver-Palms United Methodist Church*

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The story of the blind man given sight in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel has been described as two verses about a healing followed by 35 verses of how people reacted to the healing. Come with me today as we enter into the story, and hear the first hand reactions of the observers and the participants.

## **The story from the viewpoint of the crowd:**

That man, dancing in the street over there - didn't I see him sitting on a street corner yesterday? Wasn't he that blind beggar? Naw! Of course not, that man's not blind. You're not just blind one day and seeing the next, you know. I understand that beggar was born blind. It wasn't just a temporary disorder. But the resemblance is uncanny. Hey, do you have a brother who can't see? What? Naw! I mean, I saw a magician pull a rabbit out of a tunic once, but give a blind man sight? I find that hard to believe.

What's that you say? You've known this beggar most of his life, and he was really blind? Well, it sure looks like he can see now. No doubt about that.

Say, where is this miracle worker now anyway? You don't know! I still say you're putting me on. If there were really someone going around turning beggars into dancers, I'd think you would keep track of him, unless it's all a hoax in the first place. C'mon, let's take this guy downtown to the people in authority, I bet they will get to the bottom of this.

## **The story from the viewpoint of the Pharisees:**

All right, Isaac, what's on the docket today? Case of an unauthorized healing, eh? Seems like there's been a rash of those lately. These charlatans would save everybody a lot of trouble if they'd at least observe the Sabbath. So tell us young man, what exactly did this healer do to you? Clay in the eyes, huh? Washed in the pool of Siloam. And now you can see.

My colleagues, I am not sure we should waste much more of our time with this case. This story is so obviously flawed. No one can give a blind man sight. This would have to be an act of God, and obviously God is not going to work through anyone who doesn't keep the Sabbath. Oh, sure, the man can see, but was he really blind? This is probably some great hoax, or perhaps the man had some illness that affected his eyesight for a time, and it just so happened to have cleared itself up when this healer showed up and tried to take credit for it.

Well, of course, you are right, we do need to follow proper procedures on this, explore the evidence rather than jumping to conclusions. OK, let's call this man's parents in here and settle this question about just how blind he was.

Thank you for coming. You have a son, I believe. And what has been the state of his, uh, well, his general well being...his health. Born unable to see, was he? Blind. Hmm. Yes, well this gentleman standing over here, some say he bears a remarkable resemblance to your son, have you seen him before? He is your son. You're certain of that. But this man sees, and you just said your son was born blind... This man is your son. Can you tell me how it is that a man blind from birth is now able to see? Surely you must have some idea, some kind of explanation!

None at all? You're not very much help. I know. You don't want to get involved. I've heard that before. But this is your own son, how can you not be involved? Yes, he is of age. He can speak for himself. I just thought that as his parents you would want to help us get to the bottom of this.

What is happening to family ties these days? How are the traditions of Moses being passed down from generation to generation if we are so anxious to wash our hands of responsibility that we even push a blind child out the door to fend for himself as soon as it is legal? The Law of Moses is not just a set of rules and regulations, you know. It has a spirit. It has a reason for being. It has an essence that we must give heed to with our lives!

Oh well, this is not the time for a sermon on the value of our traditions. Never mind. You may go.

Now, young man, it seems we are back to you, and I do hope you will help us resolve this dilemma. You see that it is a dilemma, don't you? God put this world together in a certain way, and to live in it we must understand the ways of God, and live in the ways of God. These ways, these traditions, great prophets have handed down these laws to us. Central to this Law is the keeping of the Sabbath. God has decreed that as God rested on the 7th day of creation, so shall we rest, and to disregard the Sabbath is to disregard God.

This man whom you say healed you, did so on the Sabbath. He is obviously a sinner, is he not? Yes, you said before that you were blind and now you can see, but how could he do that? No, I don't want to become his disciple! I am a disciple of Moses! God spoke to Moses. Where does this man come from? Who told him he could heal on the Sabbath?! What? You would presume to teach me about the ways of God? You, a beggar, would dare to instruct a Pharisee? What do you know? What could you know? You were born blind, weren't you? We've already established that fact. We've already confirmed that you were born in utter sin, God's righteous wrath having been so obviously visited upon your household. Leave us at once. Get out of this sacred place...

How dare the blind seek to teach the sighted?

Yet ... what I have seen this day distresses my soul. A blind man received his sight. It is an extraordinary event, but not at all a proper one. God does not behave in such a manner - yet who but God...?

### **The story from the viewpoint of the man healed:**

This day I have gained my sight, though I did not gain it all at once. It has been gradual, piece by piece, each stage marked by an ever-greater revelation of light that pushes the darkness further into the background.

The man who gave me my sight was named Jesus. He put clay on my eyes and then he sent me to wash. But when I washed the clay off and saw for the first time in my life the light of day, it was only the first stage in gaining my full sight. The journey on which Jesus had sent me led further than simply to the pool of Siloam.

My friends and neighbors were astounded. The crowd that had grown accustomed to seeing me beg on the street was perplexed. It seemed right away that what was a miraculous gift to me was a great problem for everyone else. People had become comfortable relating to me as a blind man, and I was used to being blind in a world of sight. Now everything is different. People who used to take care of me have a hard time letting me take care of myself. I see the world differently now, and it is making me a different person. There is something more secure about always remaining the same. I got up every morning and knew where I was going; which street corner I would beg on; who would speak to me as they passed by; who would give alms. Now I

have changed and the street corner has changed, and the way I relate to the people has changed, and none of us can depend upon tomorrow being anything like today.

Everyone wanted to know who had done this amazing thing to me, where had he gone? I had to admit I didn't know. I was confused, too busy wondering over my new situation to give any thought to the one who had healed me.

They took me to the Pharisees, and there I met greater hostility. I was getting angry myself. A man blind from birth had received his sight, and all they could see was that the Sabbath law had been broken. Well, I suppose the most important thing to a Pharisee has to be the law, but at the time I couldn't keep from losing my temper. "I don't know whether this healer was a sinner or not," I told them. "All I know is that I was blind and now I can see."

I was seeing more clearly every moment. I hadn't given too much thought to who this man Jesus was, but the more they reviled him, the more convinced I became that he was a very special prophet. They said they didn't know where he came from. "Why, this is a marvel!" I shouted at them. "You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes...Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." I guess I got carried away. They kicked me out.

Outside, all alone, I was wondering what came over me. Yesterday I was a blind man, begging on the streets. Today I argued with Pharisees in the halls of power. I couldn't help but think that my new eyes were seeing things more clearly than even these wise men of the synagogue. Despite their devotion to study and wisdom, their eyes were so fixed on the traditions of the past, and so invested in the vision of God that they had constructed for themselves, that they could not hear or see any truly new thing. They could not take-in the reality of an event that did not fit into their worldview.

Yet to me all things were new, and if today I could see with my eyes, then in the next moment God might be revealed in ways never before thought of; and the content of what we call truth might be greatly amended.

As I sat by myself, Jesus came up to me again. He had heard what had happened, and he had come looking for me. He told me that God was doing a new thing. The world was being made new, and he asked me if I believed in the one coming to make all things new. "Who is this one, sir, that I may believe?" I asked.

"You have seen him with your very own eyes," he told me. Yes, I had seen him. And from that moment my life had been new. I could not expect that it would ever be the same again.