

Sermon Transcript from September 25th, 2016
Jesus Reveals
Pastor Dave Dealy, Reality San Francisco

This is John 9. We're going to read through John 9:38. So, settle in. Here's what it says:

"As he [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

"Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 'Go,' he said, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam.' So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

"His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, 'Isn't that the man who used to sit and beg?' Some claimed that he was.

"Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.'"

But he himself insisted, "No, you guys. I am the man. It's me."

"How then were your eyes opened?' they demanded.

"He replied, 'The man they called Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.'

"Where is the man?' they asked him.

"I don't know,' he said.

"They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 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.'

"Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.'

"But others asked, 'How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?' So they were divided.

"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.'

"The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 'Is this your son?' they asked. 'Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it now that he can see?'

"We know he is our son,' the parents 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.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, and already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

"A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. 'Give glory to God,' they said. 'We know this man is a sinner.'

"He replied, 'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!'

"Then they asked him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?'

"He answered, 'I have told you already and you do not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?'"

I like it. He's getting like saucy now.

"Then they hurled insults at him and said, 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.'

"The man answered, 'Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'"

Now he's preaching.

"To this they replied, 'You were steeped in sin from birth; how dare you lecture us!' And they threw him out.

"Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'

"'Who is he, sir?' the man asked. 'Tell me so that I may believe in him.'

"Jesus said, 'You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.'

"Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him."

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray.

Lord, I just confess from the outset of this that there's so much richness in this passage. It's a bit overwhelming. Lord, the thought that You can make blind people see, Lord, in the physical and in the spiritual, I know, God, is something I'm not capable of. So, I surrender this time to You, Jesus, and ask that You would do a great work tonight. I pray for us as a family tonight, that we would have eyes to see You, Jesus, that we would have ears open to hear You, that our hearts would be soft to receive You. May You do whatever it is You have to do tonight. In Jesus' name, amen.

My great grandmother is 106 years old. I know. Crazy. You can clap. She earned it. 106. She lives in Yuma, Arizona, which I'm kind of convinced is where old people just kind of go to die. Anyone here from Yuma? Didn't think so. Alright. There actually was a guy this morning from Yuma in the crowd, and he called me out literally in front of everyone. It was great. So, my grandma lives in Yuma and she has her little nursing home apartment, and this was a few years ago when this happened. We went and visited her in her little spot and she has her Bible, which is almost the size of this podium, on her little table. And then she has a magnifying glass like this big. And she sets it on the giant Bible and then she gets like this close to it, and that's how she reads everything. But, that's how she reads the Bible.

And I think this is a good metaphor to kind of launch into tonight. See, because if my grandmother's lens is smudged or dirty, God forbid if that lens got cracked or broken, she would be lost. She would not be able to read anything. She'd be completely lost. And you and I have a lens like this through which we see everything. The way we see ourselves. If you are smart enough, if you are attractive enough, if you are successful enough. You are measuring that through a lens of interpretation. It's the way we see and experience relationships in our family of origin, in community, in our church, with your spouse. The way you give and receive love and even the ability to give and receive love goes through this lens. The way we see the world and how it's formed. Is it a safe place or a scary place? Even our spirituality is interpreted through this lens. And to get more specific, even the way we see Jesus is interpreted through this lens.

Now, many of us believe we see Jesus clearly. We know what Scripture says. We know what Jesus is about. But, as we'll see today, that can be trickier than we might think. That's why we ask tonight that Jesus would reveal Himself to us. This necessity for us to be able to see clearly is such a central focus of Jesus' work that His apostle, John, one of His disciples, dedicated so much of his writing and his Gospel to this idea of Jesus being the light of

the world. Thirty times in the Gospel of John is that reference of light used about Jesus. And one of the times is in the story we just read, and it all starts with a literal blind man who ends up being the only person in the story, ironically, to truly see Jesus.

This blind man lived in a time that was much different than ours. There was little to no social services for a person with disabilities. So, this blind man was left to beg for money for his existence. And the best place to beg was at the gate of the temple, because you might catch people feeling generous or guilty. Either one is fine. Whichever way gets the money in the jar. Generous or guilty.

So, this blind man is begging at the gates of the temple when Jesus and His disciples walk by. And I want you to envision this. This is like the mama duck walking with all her little ducks in a row, right? This is Jesus walking through the streets and all of His disciples following at His feet behind Him, similar to what John Mark Comer was talking about. Jesus as our teacher; as the rabbi. There's this vision of the disciples just following in the footsteps of their teacher.

Jesus and His disciples are walking through the streets. And as they walk, they're talking about Scripture and they're talking about God and they're talking about the heavens and they're talking about humanity. And then one of the disciples sees the blind man sitting at the gate, and it triggers a theological question for him. Now, it's interesting to notice what question he doesn't ask first. He doesn't ask Jesus, "Why does evil exist?"

He doesn't ask that. He doesn't ask, "Why is there suffering in the world? Or, more specifically, why is that man suffering; the blind man at the gate?"

The disciples don't ask this question because they presume to have the answer already. "Who sinned?" they asked. "This man or his parents?" The disciples are convinced that blindness must be the result of some sin in this man's life. This was the lens through which they were interpreting suffering in human existence. This was an important lens throughout which most Hebrew people interpreted life and suffering and faith. We call it karma today, but in this setting it was the normal order of things. Essentially, it went like this: if you are good, meaning you follow the laws of Moses very strictly, your life will be good. Praises go up, blessings come down. If you are bad, i.e. you have sin in your life or you are not strictly following the laws of Moses, you should expect suffering; you should expect bad things in your life.

This is the same interpretation of suffering as we read through the friends of a man named Job a couple months ago when we were reading the book of Job in the Old Testament. The book of Job is a story of a man who loses everything. Everything. His family, his home, his health, his finances, everything is gone. Things get so bad that his wife tells him, "Job, you might as well curse God and die."

Note to spouses: maybe don't do that. That's called kicking them when they're down. Just give the guy a break. Not long after Job loses everything, his friends show up and they do something very powerful; very important. They sit and grieve with him. They mourn his loss. His suffering becomes their suffering and they get into the dirt and the ashes with Job and they weep. That's a very powerful moment. But, soon after, an interrogation begins. The friends begin asking Job what hidden sin he has in his life that has caused such suffering. It must be a big one. "You must have something significant hiding in your closet, Job. That's why this is happening."

But the author of the book of Job makes it clear from literally the very first verse what kind of man Job was. It says this:

"In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright, he feared God and shunned evil."

Job was not suffering because of sin. The author debunks that theory from the very beginning. Similarly, Jesus debunks the disciples' theology here. They're walking by the gate, they see the blind man and the disciples make an assumption based on their cultural and spiritual lens. "This man is blind because of sin. Was it his sin or his parents' sin?"

Before we unpack how Jesus responds to that, I think it's important to acknowledge what the disciples get right about this concept. First, the disciples are correct that the man is blind because sin has entered the world. But, we're talking general sin. We know that this is not the way God intended things to be. God did not create blind humans in the

beginning. But, there was a disorienting. There was a vandalism of the peace of God; the Shalom of God in Genesis 3. And that has had all kind of destructive consequences on humanity. So, the man is blind because sin has entered the world. But not particularly because of his own sin did he bring blindness on himself.

Secondly, the disciples are correct that human sin has consequences that are felt by the person sinning. As author Francis Spufford describes human sin, he says, "It is our propensity to 'F' things up."

I think that's a pretty good definition of sin. Our propensity to "F" things up in our own life and in our world seems to be limitless. And there are real consequences that come with making decisions that are sinful. For example, if I, as a father, choose to neglect my three daughters and pour my life into ministry and work with the hopes of gaining praise and accolade from people, I should not be surprised as a natural consequence there will come a stage where my girls detach from me; disassociate from me; no longer desire a relationship with me. I'm telling you, I have to keep that at the forefront of my life and my face all the time. That is a natural consequence that will happen if I choose to disassociate with my children, with my family.

There are consequences that come with our decisions. But, Jesus rejects the hypothesis that this man or his family have brought on a particular consequence, i.e. blindness, because of their particular sin. Instead, Jesus responds to His disciples by saying this:

"It is neither his sin nor his parents' sin, but that the glory of God might be displayed in him or that the glory of God might be revealed."

What is Jesus talking about? How will the glory of God be displayed in this man's suffering? Jesus is going to shine light on this situation and reveal two ways that humans miss out on seeing Jesus and His Kingdom. In this story, Jesus reveals two important barriers to seeing spiritually. Two barriers to seeing spiritually. The first is spiritual blindness. Spiritual blindness. This, I'm happy to report, is something Jesus will gladly heal of anyone. The second is spiritual pride. This, as it turns out, is much harder to cure.

Let's look first at spiritual blindness. Back to the blind man at the gate. This man would have been a social reject. The assumption that the disciples had about him, that his sin or his family's sin had caused this suffering, that would have hung over his entire existence. Every day going out to the gate he would have lived under this shame, guilt, rejection. Can you imagine that life, living in a state of self-loathing, self-hatred, self-doubt for your entire existence? And to add insult to injury, every day this man would be dependent on others to get around, to get to the gate and to get home. It seems his family was perhaps not the most supportive.

How lonely this man must have been. And yet, how dependent he would have been also. And this brought up for me the talk that Andy Crouch gave on Monday. Andy was here with us and did a lecture on power, privilege and injustice, and I can't recommend it enough. It is so, so good. I won't do it justice here, but it struck me as I was studying through this passage the interplay between authority and vulnerability that Andy talked about.

He showed us a slide that looks something like this on the screen. It shows the relationship between authority and vulnerability. We all start out as young children, as babies, in a place of low authority. Not any ability to make a decision for ourselves. But also of low vulnerability. Assuming you grew up in a house where someone fed you and cleaned you and put you in a crib and picked you up in the morning. Low authority; low vulnerability. But, as we grow as humans, our propensity – we cannot help but desire for high authority with very low vulnerability. As much as we can get into that upper right hand corner. That's the sweet spot. Give me all the control, give me all the decision-making power, give me all the benefits of my position with relatively low exposure to harm.

This is the American dream. Be that financial, emotional or physical, we want high authority and low vulnerability. Now, here's the trouble: that there are more that live in the other end of the spectrum than live in the upper right hand corner. Those are the ones who live in a state of low authority. Very little decision-making power over their own affairs. But who also have high vulnerability. We call these people those who live in poverty. They are completely dependent on the generosity of others to exist. They live under the authority of others regularly and have almost no control of their own.

So, where does our blind man fit in this scale? Any guesses? Thank you. Yes. He is high

vulnerability and almost no authority. So, I want you to keep this scale tucked in the back of your mind. We're going to come back to it as we work through this. But, let's get back to our story.

Notice that the blind man at the gate, he doesn't ask Jesus to heal him. He doesn't even ask Jesus or His disciples for money. He just happens to be the subject of their discussion, and it's Jesus who says, "This man is here to display the glory of God."

Can you imagine what those words must have meant to the blind man? A person who was told regularly throughout his existence that he had done this to himself or his family had born the shame of their guilt, their sin every day for his whole life. And then Jesus comes and says, "This man will display the glory of God."

Even if we stopped the story right here and Jesus walks away with His disciples, He has given dignity to the rejected man. He has given a name. He has elevated the outcast. But, Jesus isn't done. Jesus frames what He's about to do with His greater purpose for coming into the world. And He says this:

"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

What Jesus is saying is He is here to reveal the glory of God in our world, to bring restoration and renewal to the world. Jesus is the light that disarms and dispels darkness in our world and He's about to do that in this man's life. So, the next thing Jesus does is just gross. It's just gross. If you're like me, you read through portions of the Bible and weird stuff happens and you just kind of say, "Oh, that's the Bible," and you just keep reading.

But, if you stop for a second, this is really weird and gross. What Jesus does is not normal. This is not normal at all. He spits in the dirt. He spits a lot in the dirt. I mean, think of how much spit it takes to make two spa treatments on the eye. Like, that's a lot of spit and saliva. I mean, the story gets really detailed here for some reason. Lots of saliva in the dirt and Jesus kind of molds it and makes it and He rubs it together and then He puts it on the man's eyes.

And then He makes the man go to the pool across town and rinse it off. But, He doesn't go with him. He just says, "Good luck."

Why does Jesus do this? Why? Why not, "Open your eyes and see."

He says, "Get up and walk." He says, "Your faith has healed you." He says, "Lazarus, come out of the tomb."

Like, He just says it and it's done. But, for some reason, the spit and the mud and the eyes and the wash and the whole thing with this guy. I don't understand it. I don't know what it is. But, it's an amazing part of this blind man's journey because he is obedient to Jesus even when it doesn't make sense. There is no logical reason for him to do this. He doesn't know Jesus. It doesn't make a lot of sense cognitively. He is obedient to Jesus. Jesus – and I felt this as I was kind of preparing this for us. I think there's some of you in the room tonight that Jesus may be asking to do something that sounds ridiculous. Something that doesn't make sense on paper. Something that may not even feel responsible to your parents. Jesus isn't asking for any of that.

He is asking for faith and obedience. He is not asking for competence. Competence is not a prerequisite for obedience. Competence is not a prerequisite for obedience. Jesus could have found a lot more people competent than this man. That's not what He was looking for. And this man didn't earn a healing from Jesus. He didn't even display that much faith. He just did what Jesus asked him to do even if it didn't make sense to him or anyone else. So, he goes. He goes to the pool, he washes, and the man can see. He is no longer blind and everyone is tripping out. Everyone in his community, everyone in his family is tripping out. "Is this true? Could this be? Is he even the same guy? Are you the guy? I've never seen your eyes before."

"Yes, that's me. Jenny, I recognize the voice. Good to see you."

People are confused, and rightly so. The man's been blind his whole life. That's a strange thing to happen. "How were your eyes opened?" they asked.

And he says, **"The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."**

Pretty straightforward account. The man is then put through an inquisition by the religious leaders, and these religious leaders are divided about Jesus. Some of them believe He must be from God because He's doing crazy things. He's doing things that don't seem human or natural. He must be from God. But, others dismiss Jesus because He didn't keep the commandments the way they interpreted the commandments. Specifically, these religious leaders believed that Jesus was a sinner because He was healing people on the Sabbath. Jesus would later address this. He would put Sabbath back in its right order by stating that Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath. In other words, God gave Sabbath with a purpose to bring restoration, to bring renewal to humanity. The religious leaders had gotten the law out of order and made it a mandate to control people and their behavior.

But, here's where we see the real effects of spiritual pride, the second thing that Jesus is revealing in this story. The effects of spiritual pride. The blind man is brought before the religious leaders, they're called the Pharisees. And here's what you need to know about the Pharisees. They are the elite class of their culture. They are the most educated. They are the most respected. They are the most authoritative. They hold the most power in their circles. They were also incredibly insulated from the community. They were accountable to very few people. They lived their lives separated from the common man. In other words, back to our authority and vulnerability scale, they were living the dream. They were living the dream. They lived in a place of very high authority and almost no vulnerability. People could barely speak to these men. And this has a tremendous effect on their ability to listen to the blind man's testimony with open ears and open hearts.

So, I want to just pause and ask you to think about this. If you can identify in your own life that you are striving for that upper left hand corner, that space of high authority where there's very little vulnerability, where you have lots of control and very little chance of harm or people pushing back on you or holding you accountable to anything, if that is what you're chasing, I want to just caution you that you may gain much in this world and you may become so hard-hearted and so blind that you wouldn't be able to see Jesus if He was standing in front of you. Is it worth that?

Just think on that. Is it worth it? They asked the blind man how this happened and who did the blind man think that Jesus was? The man's answer was very simple. He said, "I don't know. I don't know who Jesus was. I don't have any answers for you. I can't check any boxes. I can't even tell you if Jesus is a sinner or not. I don't know. Here's all I know: I was blind and now I see. That's what I know."

I once heard Tim Keller, author and pastor in New York, doing a Q & A with a group of people and Tim Keller's written a lot about the existence of God and reason for God and all these philosophies and theories and things. And someone asked him, they said, "Tim, how can you really believe God exists? What if someone could prove to you that God didn't exist? What if there was some empirical evidence that we could show you and it just dispelled the idea that there was a God?"

And Tim said this. Maybe not word for word, but he said something to this effect. He said, "You may be able to disprove my hypothesis of God. You may be able to show some evidence that would prove my theory wrong. But, you could never disprove my experience with Jesus. You could never dispel my encounter with God."

When you have an encounter with Jesus in your life, when you experience God meeting you, when you're ministered to by the Holy Spirit, oftentimes it cannot be explained. It does not make a lot of sense. It doesn't fit into a neat, nice box for us. I think that is an incredible way that God has created us, to experience Him in deep ways that only we know as created beings in His image.

And then the blind man, he begins to preach. He gets all riled up. I imagine this is when his faith is really built up and he's moving in what God is doing and he says, **"Now this is remarkable, you wise men. You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."**

And what the blind man – not-so-blind man anymore – is doing is he is pushing back into the framework of everything, this lens through which the Pharisees understand the world and their faith and who God is and how He works. He's pushing this experience back through that lens and pushing it back in their lap and forcing them to make a decision. And here's the moment of truth. They're giving his testimony along with the testimony of his

family and community, this evidence, and it's wrapped in bold truth from the man's experience with Jesus. And at that moment, when the men in authority have the chance, are given the opportunity to slide their scale into vulnerability, to lay down some of their authority and listen and be humble, they can't do it. They won't do it.

Their authority is being threatened by this man and Jesus through this man. If they don't have control, if that framework begins to break down, who knows where this cold lead? Their authority could vanish. They're threatened by Jesus. And Jesus doesn't fit in their understanding of God and how He works. Their lens of God cannot make out a clear view of who Jesus is. And this is the irony, the incredible irony of this story. A blind man can see Jesus clearly; a spiritually proud man is too blind to see Jesus. A blind man can see Jesus clearly, but a spiritually proud man is too blind to see Jesus.

So, the Pharisees can feel their authority being threatened, and they do what you would expect them to do when they feel threatened. They attack. They reply to the man.

"You were steeped in sin from birth; how dare you lecture us!"

"Who do you think you are?"

Can you just see them coming right down on this guy; putting him in his place? Can you hear the condescension in their voice? And imagine for this man the rejection and the pain. It said, "Anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Christ would be thrown out of the synagogue."

I don't know how much time is in-between when this man was healed and when he goes through this inquisition. Probably not long. But, maybe he got a taste of being inside the gates for a little bit and now he's thrown back out and he's rejected by his community. He's right back outside the gates alone. But, Jesus. Jesus isn't done.

It says, **"Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him..."**

Isn't that a beautiful statement? Jesus had heard that they had thrown him out, and when He found him, when He went on the look for him, when He went out to pursue him, He found him.

And He said, **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"**

"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. **'Tell me so that I might believe in him.'**

'Jesus said, 'You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.'

"Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him."

This is the compassion and love of Christ. He seeks to find those who have been thrown out by others. And notice this man's response. He believed in Christ, and not just that, he worshiped him. The man could see physically and spiritually. He saw who Jesus was and he worshiped him. The religious leaders saw who Jesus was, what He was doing and they rejected Him. They eventually killed Him.

And this is, you guys, as we close, the upside-down Kingdom of God, where authority is matched with vulnerability. Think about it. Jesus has unlimited authority. He's a man who can restore the physical, healing the sick and the broken and the broken-hearted, cast out demons. He was the most wise teacher that ever lived. A following of thousands in His time and millions in generations after. Incredible authority. And at the same time, when He's at the height of His authority on earth, when His disciples believe that the all-powerful Jesus will now start a revolution and overthrow Rome and set the people of Israel free from oppression, when Jesus is at the height of His earthly authority, He allows Himself to be captured and mocked and abused and eventually killed at the hands of the same religious leaders.

In other words, Jesus is the perfect example of living in full authority and full vulnerability. And this is the upside-down way of living in God's Kingdom, where the greatest are the least and the least are the greatest. And you guys, this is the Kingdom that has been passed down to you and me; those who call ourselves Jesus followers. Jesus called Himself the light of the world, but this incredible transference happens when you experience life with Jesus. His light begins to shine in you and in me and through you and through me.

Jesus describes it this way when He's explaining the Kingdom of God in Matthew 5. He says, "You are the light of the world." He had always said, "I am the light of the world. I am the light of the world. I am the light of the world."

And now, **"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."**

So, what about you? What will you do with Jesus? Could it be that the lens through which you've been looking, the way you see the world, the way you see yourself, even the way you see Jesus may be cracked, may be foggy? Maybe it needs a good cleaning and maybe even needs restoring. That's what this time is for that we're about to go into. But, let me say this: there are a lot of circumstances that can cause damage to our lens. It may be trauma, it may be abuse, it may be living under lies for a long, long time.

I want you to hear, tonight, that those are not your fault. There is no guilt or shame at having a dirty lens through which we look through. But, there's a promise that Jesus will clean our eyes tonight. He will give us sight, maybe for the first time.

So, let's pray.

If you are a person tonight with much authority, I want to pray that you would use that authority for the upside-down Kingdom of Jesus to love and serve others more than your self and not to be insulated from harm, but to call out your fear, to face it and invite Jesus into it. I pray that you would lean into vulnerability right now. And if you're a person living in much vulnerability, dependent on the generosity of others, I want to pray tonight that you would know that Jesus sees you, that He pursues you, that He delights in you. That you are a valuable treasure in His Kingdom. That you would live with the knowledge that you are a son or daughter of the King.

And finally, I sense tonight that there are some of us who have become comfortable in our darkness, scared of being in the light, and I want you to know that you are safe with Jesus. He is gentle and He is kind and He welcomes you with an invitation out of the darkness and into His glorious light that you might see and know Him and know your self truly. We surrender these prayers to You tonight, Jesus. Would You meet us as we worship You? Amen.