



John 9:1-12 (1-41)
So That You May Believe: John
“When The Lightbulb Goes On”

Rev. Brian North
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This morning’s passage continues our journey through the gospel according to John. I’m really grateful for Krista, Paul, and Dan who each took a Sunday in the pulpit the last three Sundays as I took some much-needed down time to be with my family on vacation. Hopefully you were able to be here in worship, or watch online, and keep going with us through John’s gospel, as well as engaging in worship songs, prayer, and fellowship with one another.

Near the start of the pandemic one of my “pandemic projects” that I took on was to sand, stain, and put up a couple of solid wood doors that slide along a rail I installed in our house. These doors allow us to close off our bonus room from the rest of the house, which is nice because our washer and dryer are in the bonus room, and that’s where the tv and stereo is as well. The opening is big enough it needs two doors. So, when they’re open, each one slides away from each other along the wall until they get to their bumper stop thing at the end. When you close them, they slide toward each other until they meet in the middle. My problem is that if you close one at a time, or even both at the same time but aren’t careful about how you do it, one of them will slide past the mid-point where they need to meet, and if they go more than a couple inches, they slide past the little track thing in the floor that keeps the bottom of the doors in place – I can’t have one of those in the middle as it would be a tripping and toe-stubbing hazard. So, the upshot of it all is that I’d like to devise a way for the doors to stop in the middle without going too far past that mid-point.

The problem is, I’ve pondered all kinds of solutions, and all of them have problems with them that are bigger than the current problem I have of occasionally over-sliding the doors. (My kids have even suggested using bungee cords. No way those are sitting in my living room/dining room area!) So, I’m still waiting for that “a-ha” moment when I say, “*That’s* the solution!”

We’ve all had those moments when the light bulb went on in our head and we suddenly understood something or figured out a solution to a

problem. A project at work or around the house, a concept in a subject at school, a relationship issue with a friend or family member, and so forth. We've had those "a-ha" moments, and we've seen others have them as well. For instance, the Mariners had an a-ha moment back in early July that we all saw when they finally figured out how to win ball games and won 14 straight; this last week I had a lightbulb go on when I finally figured out after almost 25 years of marriage, that if I just say, "yes, sweetie" things goes so much better. 😊 These kinds of eye-opening experiences can have a transformative effect on us.

And: When you look at the life of Jesus, it's evident that Jesus wants us to have those experiences. In fact, he wants to be part of giving us those a-ha moments. He wants to flip the switch so the light bulb turns on and we say, "Wow! *That's* what I was looking for...*that's* what I needed...*now* I get it." And we get one of those moments in today's passage where Jesus does this, and then we'll see what the impact is of this a-ha moment in the verses that follow it. So, let's turn to **John 9:1-12**. This is God's Word to you and me today.

Right off the bat, we get into one of the great questions of our time: Is the root of our suffering our own personal sin? Is there some kind of cause and effect correlation between the two? In his commentary on this passage, John Milne writes, "**While the Bible allows a general relationship between suffering and sin, due to the fall, it refuses to permit the principle to be individualized in every case. Sin has produced a suffering world, but an individual's personal suffering is not always attributable to his or her personal sin**" (John Milne, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of John*).¹ Sometimes it is...but not always. His disciples want to attribute this guy's blindness to a particular person. "Who's at fault?" is the question that goes through their mind, and it gives us a window into the general mindset of Jewish thinking in their day. This question is at the heart of the book of Job, and one of the key messages of Job is, in fact, to dismiss this simplistic theological view of suffering and connecting it to a specific sin.

So, rather than looking to the past and the cause of this, **Jesus looks to the future and the good that can come out of it, that "the works of God**

might be displayed in” this man. Jesus then acts on that, and goes through a particular process to heal this blind man, making some mud with his own saliva and the dirt on the ground. There are two other occasions where Jesus uses saliva to heal people – once in Mark 7, and another in Mark 8. So, it’s not unheard of in Jesus’ ministry, but definitely out of the ordinary.

Jewish culture then tended to frown upon a method such as this, whereas Greek and other influential cultures were more open to the idea of saliva having healing properties. Regardless, after Jesus puts the mud on him, he tells him to go wash it off in the pool of Siloam – probably it was the one closest to where they were right then – and sure enough, he’s able to see.

His neighbors notice, though they debate whether he really is the same guy who’d been blind from birth. That might sound a little strange, but it’s not as though a healing like this was an everyday occurrence, and so maybe we can’t fault them for doubting if he really is the same guy.

Now, the narrative of these events continues beyond where we read, and I want to summarize and pull out some key verses. The neighbors take him to some Pharisees to show them what happened, and probably to get some answers about this miracle. They are, after all, the Jewish religious leaders, and turning to them for an explanation and some understanding makes sense.

But the Pharisees latch on to the fact that the guy was healed on the Sabbath, which, according to their definition of “work” means that Jesus worked on the Sabbath instead of resting. As we’ve seen earlier in John and as probably many of you are aware, this is a major problem for many of the Pharisees in their view of Jesus. In fact, in verse 16 we read this, **“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 perform such signs?’ So they were divided.” (John 9:16).** So, there’s a theological debate about whether Jesus is a godly man or not.

So, they finally have the bright idea to ask the man who was healed what he thinks about Jesus. “What do you think about him?” they ask. And he says, “He’s a prophet.” So, that’s pretty high praise, but not totally one of faith in

Jesus as who Jesus claims to be. And many of the Pharisees still doubted that he was actually blind before this. So, they go to his parents to ask about him.

They take the son with them, and ask the parents, “Hey, is this your son, and was he previously blind from birth? And if so, how’d he get healed?” And here’s how the parents respond: **“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” (John 9:20-21).** So, the parents affirm that he’s their son and that he had been blind his whole life, but they answer truthfully that they don’t know about who healed him.

So, the men question him again, and implore him to tell the truth because that will “bring glory to God.” And they add that they “know this man [Jesus] is a sinner.” And here’s how the guy responds: **“Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:25).** This man acknowledges his own lightbulb moment, his own “a-ha” when things become clear to him – in this case, literally – as he plainly says that he once was blind, but now he sees. He simply and clearly states the truth of how his life has been changed by Jesus.

After some further conversation where he ruffles their feathers, John tells us that they “threw him out.” We aren’t actually told what they threw him out of – whether they were at the Temple at that point, or some other building, or if it’s meant more as a metaphorical or spiritual throwing out, or what. But either way, they’re rejecting him and his testimony, and in the process rejecting Jesus. In today’s vernacular, we might say that this is a case of first-century “cancel culture.” They don’t like the facts before them – that this man was blind, but now he sees, because of Jesus, and so they’re just done with him.

Now, one interesting point to note is that up through this point in these events is that Jesus’ name has not been mentioned by anyone (after verse 11 where the formerly blind man calls Jesus “the man they call Jesus”). The man who was healed doesn’t seem to be certain about Jesus’ identity, and doesn’t even know what Jesus looks like because he was still blind and had the mud on his

eyes when he left Jesus to rinse off. And while it seems that the Pharisees have an idea of who it is that did the healing, they never explicitly ask for the name of the person who healed him, nor do they say, “Was it Jesus who healed you?”

Anyway, Jesus hears how the Pharisees responded to the guy, and Jesus tracks him down. Jesus asks him, **“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (Jesus, John 9:35)**. As we’ve seen elsewhere, this is a title that Jesus often uses about himself, though it has its roots in the Old Testament, oftentimes speaking of one who comes from God to rescue His people. Well, the guy doesn’t know who Jesus is speaking about, at least not specifically and particularly that Jesus is the one he’s asking if he believes in. So, he asks who that is. Jesus says that he himself is this “Son of Man.” And then John 9:38 says, **“Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him” (John 9:38)**.

So, the man said earlier “I was blind but now I see” and that really is the a-ha statement, right? I mean, that’s the kind of thing we’d say when the lightbulb goes on: “*Now I get it*”... “*That’s what I was trying to figure out*”... “*Now I understand*.” That’s what he’s saying there. And it’s true: he was able to see after a life of blindness. But there’s a deeper sense of seeing that is an a-ha moment for him that comes later, here in verse 38, when he confesses faith in Jesus as Lord. That’s the lightbulb moment that Jesus is ultimately driving toward. Besides helping the man see physically, this new spiritual vision is the deeper reason Jesus performed the miracle: to lead the guy to a place of faith...to “see” who Jesus really is. This is where “the work of God” is “displayed in this man” as Jesus had said earlier would happen.

And: Jesus is leading us along that same path. We might have moments in life where the lightbulb goes on for us with certain things – from miraculously understanding a math concept to a miraculous healing. But will these things lead us to Jesus, the light of the world, so we really see him? We can actually start by learning from the Pharisees.

The Pharisees don’t have light-bulb moments because they’re too locked into their rules and regulations and religious boxes. They’re blind to who

Jesus is because he doesn't fit in their religious box – he heals on the Sabbath. He “works” – by their definition of “work” – on the day of rest; he makes claims about himself, and others make claims about him as well, that upset them, and they're unable to see the good that Jesus does. In short: they're unable to comprehend who Jesus is. They're unable to see the light he shines in the darkness. And so, they (most of them, anyway) never have a lightbulb moment. Sometimes, like them, we're stuck in certain ways of doing things or stuck in how we respond to people in certain situations, unwilling to step out of those boxes and try something new, to learn and grow, and we prevent the lightbulb moment in our lives, as well. Too frequently, we're closed off to Jesus doing something new and out of the box, and so the “a-ha” moment of grace and healing and flourishing doesn't come.

The night before I wrote this sermon (back on July 27th before I went on vacation) a pastor friend of mine shared a quote on social media that struck me. It says, **“We will not experience renewal by following the same patterns of life and ministry that are not delivering renewal.”** It's similar to the definition of insanity you've probably heard before, which is to “keep doing the same thing but expecting different results.” Now, not every new thing that comes along is from Jesus, of course. And there's something to be said for persistence and consistency and deeply rooted spiritual habits.

But sometimes we get stagnant and stop growing – in our own personal discipleship, and as churches. Churches can really get stuck in some ruts and we keep saying, “Hey, this *used* be a great discipleship tool...this *used* to really minister to people...this *used* to be something God worked through powerfully to reach people for Christ.” Rather than being like the Pharisees and trying to keep confining ministry to a certain box: **We need Jesus to open our eyes to so we'd see Him more clearly.** We need to start there. Like this man who was once blind, we need Jesus to open us up and see him, and understand that He really is Lord (he's got everything in the palms of his hands, he's got us even in stretching experiences), fall down in worship of him, and be open to his transformative work in our lives and in our church.

And so, what we need now is for Jesus to open our eyes up to have an “a-ha” moment and have the lightbulb go on for new ways to mature in faith and

disciple people and minister to people and share the good news with people. And like the guy that Jesus healed, it might mean a little effort and work on our behalf. Jesus told him to go and rinse off. That was a key part of the miracle. And the guy was obedient. He did what Jesus asked him to do. Are we so willing? Are we willing to try something that might not be in our comfort zone? How many of us would be comfortable with someone putting mud on our eyes, made with their saliva? We're not talking "mud" like a skin treatment that maybe some of you women get at a spa, with lemon slices put over your eyes²...we're talking dirt and saliva mixed together and applied to your eyes. Who would do that – especially post-Covid? That would be a comfort zone stretching experience, which it probably was for this guy. But it's what leads to his a-ha moment. That's what allows the lightbulb to go on for him and ultimately to realize who Jesus is.

This fall (as most of you are aware, if you've been here the last several months) we're going to start stepping into our new vision of what it means to be a church here at Rose Hill. We believe, like the quote I mentioned a moment ago, that **"We will not experience renewal by following the same patterns of life and ministry that are not delivering renewal."** I won't go into details here today...but it might mean that some things we do are new to us, maybe a little comfort-zone stretching – like mud on our eyes. But our Elders believe that through this new sense of mission and new sense of what it means to be a church, that we will see Jesus more clearly. That we will flourish. **We believe we will have more "a-ha" moments, more clarity of who Jesus is and what it means to be his disciples, more experiences of the lightbulb turning on in our spiritual lives.** ...more experiences of "*now* I get it...*that's* what Jesus meant...*That's* what it really means to be his disciple...*that's* what it means to be a part of a church, part of the body of Christ." That's my hope, and that's the hope of our Elders.

And, I hope that you're willing to be like the guy in this story, and let Jesus minister in you and through you – perhaps in unexpected ways. Jesus is probably already doing that in you, softening your heart to his grace, his leading, his transformative work that might come in unexpected ways, like mud on your eyes. And as time goes on, our prayer is that each and every one of us – even if we are following Jesus closely right now – our prayer is that

somewhere down the road (and not just one time...but continually) we might be able to say something like: “Wow. I thought I could see Jesus clearly back then, but I realize now I actually was pretty blind, and *now* I see.” Jesus wants you and me to have those kinds of experiences, where the lightbulb goes on and we see Jesus more clearly...where we see him for who he really is, and how he’s working in each of us. So, let’s pray for more of those experiences of Jesus in our lives, and in our church, ultimately so that he would be glorified. Let’s pray...Amen.

¹ P. 136.

² I was corrected in the service that it’s cucumber slices that usually go on the eyes. What can I say? I’ve never been to a spa or had a mud treatment!