

A Cure for Blindness

John 12:37-50

Do you remember the story of the man born blind? We read about it in chapter 9, where Jesus' disciples asked him a very direct question,

John 9:2 "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The idea was that this blindness must have been someone's fault. The infirmity of blindness must represent the judgment of God against some specific sin. We often think that same way also. So the logical question was, "Whose sin?" And Jesus had an answer that must have surprised his disciples,

John 9:3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. 4 I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Why was this man born blind? It's the same reason Jesus waited to visit the family of his friend Lazarus until Lazarus was dead. So that God would have the opportunity to show forth his power! In this case, the power to enable a blind man to see, "that the works of God should be revealed in him." And that power to heal the eyes is presented to us in our text this morning as the same power needed to bring salvation. It is the power to save.

So I want to start today with a very important thought—not a new thought, I think, for most or even all of you. But one worthy of great emphasis. God saves. God saves us, we don't save ourselves, and that work of salvation is pictured for us as the power to make a blind man see. God's power.

Let's keep John's imagery in mind. He makes reference to light and darkness, and light, of course, is what enables us to see. Darkness, of course, is blindness, the inability to see, the absence of light. Very simple concepts, but very, very significant in terms of what they represent spiritually.

So keep that idea of light in your mind, the light by which you see. And keep this idea in your mind as well, that those who do not believe in God, those who do not have saving faith, who do not trust in Jesus for their salvation, they live in the darkness of unbelief. With reference to the things of the Lord, they live in blindness.

But in our text this morning, that blindness found in so many is actually their own fault. There is a cause for their spiritual blindness, and the Bible calls it the hardness of heart. And,

I. UNBELIEF REVEALS THE HARDNESS OF MAN'S HEART.

They do not believe, according to verse 37. But notice how clearly Jesus finds fault with them.

v.37

You see,

A. Many suppress the truth and refuse to believe.

Jesus had given everyone plenty of signs, plenty of evidences of his power, many miracles. And despite seeing all of those displays of supernatural power, they still would not believe in Jesus.

Surely, they should have. And John tells us specifically in, John 20:30 "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31

but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

So, ultimately, Jesus performed all his miracles for that great purpose, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the savior of the world. Jesus performed his miracles to attest, to prove and to demonstrate that he also had the power to forgive sins, the power to save.

Mat. 9:1 “So [Jesus] got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. 2 Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.” 3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, “This Man blasphemes!” 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’? 6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” 7 And he arose and departed to his house. 8 Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.”

Jesus performed miracles so that you may know that he also has the power to forgive sins. The power to heal is supernatural, and supernatural power includes such power to forgive sins. It is an argument from the lessor to the greater, if he has the lessor power, he also has the greater power.

But still, having seen the miracles, still many wouldn’t believe! Why not? Simple answer, they hardened their hearts. And they refuse to believe. They refuse. And so they suppress the truth.

We learn about such sin in Romans 1, where Paul pronounces

the wrath of God “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

That’s a crucial point that you need to understand. Sinful, rebellious men and woman see the truth of God, even in the supernatural power of the miracles, and they refuse to believe because they suppress that truth. Therefore, still back in Romans 1, we read that ,

Rom. 1:20 “...that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

Many, many people suppress the truth of God in their unrighteousness. They refuse to believe. John gives us another reason why many people refuse to believe.

B. Many refuse to believe because of their own selfish pride.

v.42-43

Interesting, here it says they actually did believe, but that they did not confess him. So they claimed some measure of intellectual agreement, but they didn’t declare their faith in Jesus. They didn’t “confess him.” They didn’t admit that they knew him, or that they would honor and serve him. They might claim some form of outward adherence to Christ, but it is all pretense. They are pretending.

And what does Jesus say about such people? Some pretty strong words.

Mat. 10:32 “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My

Father who is in heaven.”

And likewise,

Luke 12:8 “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. 9 But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.”

That’s a very, very serious thing! Public profession of faith is a necessary thing. Public acknowledgment of faith is a very essential thing. Without it, without a willingness to confess Jesus, you are rejecting him. And that is an appropriate warning for all of us. We need to have the willingness and the commitment to stand up and be counted. “I belong to Jesus.” You have to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.

And in our text this morning, many people wouldn’t do that because, according to verse 43,

v.43 “...for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

We’re told in the previous verse the details,
v.42

That’s dangerous, isn’t it? Loving the praise of men. You could actually express that as the fear of men, rather than the fear of God. It’s selfishness and pride all wrapped up together in one. People who are afraid of what others might say or do to them will often refuse to believe in Jesus. And they are held accountable for that, but before we look at God’s judgment upon unbelief, note one more important thing about unbelief. And this actually receives the emphasis in this text.

C. Many are hardened in their sin by God’s sovereign justice.

They “could not believe,” we read in verse 39. And John quotes Isaiah 6,
v.39-41

Let me begin to explain those words by emphasizing that they mean exactly what they say. Words have meaning. And we read that God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. And it even goes further, as that hardening by God prevents them from being able to believe. Let me explain.

First, this is God’s judgment! Hardening the heart, and blinding the eyes, is God’s judgment. It is his judgment upon those who are guilty in their sinner. And that helps to answer what is often our chief objection to this idea, namely that it isn’t fair. How can God hold them responsible if he hardens their heart?

And again, the answer is that they were already guilty in their sin. And because of their guilt, because they refused to believe, because they hardened their own hearts as well, God judges them with that very hardening. God blinded their eyes as a judgment upon their sin!

That’s what Jesus says. That’s what Isaiah prophesied.
v.39-40

There is another example in the Bible of God hardening the heart of man, again as a declaration of his judgment. That example is Pharaoh.

Ex.10:1 Now the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, 2 “and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among

them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”

And just to make that point even stronger, Paul refers to Pharaoh in Romans 9:

Rom. 9:15 For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.”

But that’s not fair, you say. Don’t you? As I answer that objection, notice,

v.41

The context of this hardening is the vision of the glory of God. Isaiah had seen the glory of God! And the judgment of hardening is one aspect of God’s glory. This is how our Confession puts it, chapter 4, paragraph 7, “The rest of mankind (those whom he has not chosen unto salvation) God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extends or withholds mercy, as he pleases, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.”

Is it fair? Is it fair for God to ordain people to dishonor and wrath? Is it fair for God to harden Pharaoh’s heart? Is it fair for God to fulfill this prophecy of Isaiah 6, which John quotes in our text?

Is God’s hardening fair? Sure it is. Because he hardens

people for their sin. There is no such thing as the person who wants to be saved, who wants to believe, who wants to repent and turn from his sin but God won’t let him. That person doesn’t exist!

God hardens those who are dead in their sins, as a judgment upon that sin. He ordains them to dishonor and wrath for their sin. And he is not obligated to show mercy to everyone, without distinction. That he shows mercy to some, is quite amazing, for we don’t deserve it at all. But just because he shows mercy to me doesn’t mean that he has to show mercy to everyone else.

God’s justice is fair, and, actually, every human being deserves it. His justice is sovereign, in that he chooses those who will be the objects of his mercy. And the others he hardens, he blinds, as a judgment for their sin. And for a display of his own glory to save.

The fact that God chooses to have mercy on some surely demonstrates his glory, the goodness of his glorious grace. The fact that he hardens some equally demonstrates his glory, his glorious justice. So many are hardened in their sin by God’s sovereign justice.

And in that context, as I’ve already mentioned,

II. UNBELIEF RESULTS IN CONDEMNATION.

Judgment. And unbelievers are condemned because of their own sin. Even more specifically,

A. Unbelievers are condemned by Jesus’ own words.

v.47-48

Jesus declares his intention in coming to earth to save

sinners, and he accomplishes that task. He came to save the world, and he does.

John 3:6 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Nonetheless, the words of salvation, the words of the gospel, if they are rejected, become words of judgment.

v.48

Perhaps this idea of the words of the gospel, when rejected, becoming the ground for judgment is never clearer than in,

Heb. 10:26 “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Unbelievers who reject Jesus are condemned by Jesus' own words which they rejected! And, in perfect harmony with that,

B. Unbelievers are condemned by the Father's own authority.

v.49

So you can't pit Jesus against the Father, as if the Father is the judge and the son is the Messiah-Savior. You can't consider God the father to be the God of wrath while viewing the son as the God of mercy and salvation. For the son came to do the Father's will, the son came to reveal the Father's purpose, both unto salvation and judgment. So when Jesus spoke even in the words of the invitation of the gospel, he spoke with his father's authority. And together, Father and Son, condemnation comes to those who will not believe.

Thus we read the words of Jesus,

John 9:39 “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.”

Let's move then to the main point, the cure for this blindness. How can you be made to see? What must you do to be saved? It is, of course, the most important question you could possibly ask. And the answer is to believe! To believe in Jesus. To believe, to accept and receive as true and life-changing, the word of Jesus.

III. SALVATION COMES TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE.

This, too, is connected with the purpose of God the Father.

v.44-45

God exists as a Trinity, three persons in one God. All working toward the same purpose, in perfect unity and harmony. So Jesus makes it clear for us in those verses,

A. Jesus reveals the salvation of God.

Jesus reveals his father, and Jesus, in the flesh, reveals the fullness of the godhead, the fullness of the Trinity working together as one God. And

B. Jesus reveals that the nature of salvation is light.

I already made mention of this at the beginning of this sermon.

Salvation means to live in the light, it means to see, to understand, to believe. To have the light, to see the light, is to know God, to believe in God. To have the light is to have the gift of salvation.

v.46

Eph. 4:5 “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

That’s salvation. Light shining in the dark places of your heart. Light, that gives you the knowledge of God, that you might believe, and be saved.

John 12:35 “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.”

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

So where do you live? In darkness, or in the light? Do you belong to the kingdom of darkness or have been transferred into the kingdom of his light? There is only one way to enter that kingdom, by saving faith. Trust in Jesus as your savior. Believe his word to be true. Surrender your life to the Lord Jesus. And believe the promise of the gift of life. It is so clearly stated here,

v.50

C. Jesus reveals the promise of eternal life.

To those who will believe in him.

1 John 5:11 “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”

There is only one cure for spiritual blindness. That God would open your eyes, so that you might see and believe. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.