

January 13, 2019
To see or not to see? That is the question
John 8:12; 9:1-11, 35-41

In the Bellevue Mine, in the Crowsnest Pass, you don a miner's hard hat and head lamp and make your way back into one of the old mine shafts. At the furthest extent of the tunnel, you switch off your light. The darkness is intense. In the darkness you notice your other senses heightened. You are aware of the sound of water dripping you hadn't noticed before. You smell the sulphur in the drainage channel more intensely. You feel the slight breath of cold wind coming from deeper in the mine. It's disorienting. You feel panic. You are so relieved when the lights go back on.

Imagine the experience of this man born blind (John 9:1-12). He has never seen anything. He has refined his other senses – hearing, smell, taste, touch. This is the only existence he knows (How would you even begin to explain "sight" to such a person? He couldn't even begin to comprehend it). We, who can see, know that he is missing a glorious experience.

He could enjoy the smell of flowers but would miss the pageantry of the blooms. He may enjoy the sound of songbirds but cannot appreciate the wonder of their plumage. He may relish the taste of a fine dessert but miss the pleasure of its presentation. He might enjoy the touch of a silk carpet but not know the beauty of its pattern. He could get around his immediate, familiar world but his mobility and freedom to travel to new places would be impeded tremendously. He cannot see "the big picture." He can get lost and disoriented easily ...

This blind man had a life before Jesus blessed him with sight. He had a family, friends, food, etc. But he was living in "darkness." Although he may not be able to grasp it, his experience of life was limited.

Imagine the transformation when Jesus heals him and gives him sight. A whole new world – a world we take for granted – is opened up to him. He can see flowers, birds, mountains, and family for the first time. He can find his way more easily around his familiar world – which would be so much richer, more stimulating, and exciting. And he would be free to go to new places; places he could never have dreamed of going or enjoyed without his sight. Wow.

This story is an "acted parable" – a living metaphor of a spiritual point Jesus is making. Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."* His point? Just as this man's gift of physical sight has completely transformed his experience of physical life, coming to know Jesus as our Saviour, or mentor, our teacher, and our guide changes our experience of life, too.

Blindness ... in a spiritual sense

Jesus brings spiritual "light." If Jesus is the light, then spiritual "darkness" or spiritual "blindness" means ... what? People do not know or have the light – Jesus. This is Jesus' point at the end of this story as He confronts the Pharisees: by their refusal to acknowledge or believe in Jesus, they are in spiritual darkness; they are blind.

So what is the experience of spiritual blindness like? Many of us here have the blessing of having lived all of our lives "in the light" – we have always known and loved Jesus. Some of us, however, can resonate with what spiritual "blindness" means. We have been there ... or we know people, dear to us, who are there ...

When you live without knowing Jesus, life is different. John Lennon romanticized that kind of life: *"Imagine there's no heaven, It's easy if you try, No hell below us, Above us only sky, Imagine all the people, Living for today..."* Imagine – really – these few years are all there is. There is no future hope. No bigger purpose. No eternal significance. You are just an accident. Life is random chance and what we make of it. There is no such person as God, no guiding force, no rationality, no such things as justice, conscience, or truth. Death is the end. Period. A spiritually "blind" person can respond to this in one of three ways.

- I can choose to become existentially cynical, bitter, angry, and retreat into my own world and become self-centered and cynical (know anyone like that?)
- At the other extreme, I can heighten my experience of my other-than-spiritual senses. I can seek to experience the utmost in passion and emotional pleasure. *"He who has the most toys (money, one-night-stands) when he dies, wins."*
- Somewhere in between, I can just exist moment-by-moment, day-by-day – choosing not to think about the meaning of life, yet not finding fulfillment or satisfaction. I try not to think about the "bigger picture" of the purpose of life or the future – until awkward times like funerals force me to deal with ultimate issues. This is where most people live – vaguely unhappy, dimly aware there must be more, but unable to comprehend what "sight" might be like.

Solomon, who grew up with God, chose to explore "the dark side" of life – without God. In Ecclesiastes he explores life without God. He attains great education; he becomes fabulously wealthy; he has every physical pleasure he could want; he works hard; he is the most powerful person of his day (Solomon is the Donald-Trump-Kanye-West-Oprah of his age). He has a good life. The best life. He concludes, *"Everything is meaningless, utterly meaningless ... Everything is so weary and tiresome"* (Ecclesiastes 1:2-8). Something's missing.

Spiritually blind people have a life. They have family, friends, jobs, vacations; they experience joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain; they have fun. Sometimes those of us who know Jesus assume that all people without faith are lonely, miserable, and

unhappy. That's not necessarily true. After all, this is the only life they know – like a blind man in a world of blind people, this is normal. They make the best of their lives, given their worldview. But we know there is a so much more.

The blind man had a decent quality of life – yet we know he is missing the richness and experience that comes with the gift of sight (he may have an inkling to that effect). In the same way, people who do not know Jesus can have a decent quality of life – but they miss some of the richness and experience that comes with the gift of Jesus.

Sight ... in a spiritual sense

What do we "see" when we come to know Jesus? Does "spiritual sight" make a difference? Does life really change? Jesus says that life – before faith in Him – is dark and confusing. We experience life, but we are missing out on so much (although we may not be able to understand that and appreciate the difference sight makes). If we've never experienced life without Jesus we cannot really comprehend what it would be like – can you imagine it?

Imagine: without Jesus you have no reason to live. You, as an individual have no real value. Economically, your body is virtually worthless. Socially, you really serve no purpose. Physically you are a drain on the resources of a stressed planet. You are the result of a random accident; to have no eternal significance, value, or purpose.

In Jesus we have an identity. It's only "in Christ" that you have real value. We are the people, whom God loved so much He gave His only Son to die for us. We are "*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God ...*" (2 Peter 1:9-10). You are a beloved child of God. Does that change the way you view life? You bet.

In Jesus we have a purpose. We are God's priests – priests intercede for people before God and bring the reality of God's presence to people. We can pray for people. We are Christ's ambassadors to our friends, relatives, and neighbours (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are the means God chooses to spread the good news about Jesus: "*You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:14-16)

In Jesus we have hope. What's the future for someone who does not know Jesus? From their point of view? Nothing. Death. That's not much to look ahead to (one of the reasons that "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die" rings true for some ... and the reason others seek to prolong their lives at all costs). As people of God, we have hope. One day, some day, we will pass through death to eternal life with Jesus.

We look forward to a time when there is no more pain, illness, suffering, sorrow, or death – where we live with Jesus and with those who have gone before us. In Paul's words: *"We are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power that he will use to conquer everything, everywhere."* (Philippians 3:20-21).

In Jesus we have power. Where does power – to change our circumstances, our lives, our characters – come from without Jesus? Only from within ourselves. That has its limitations. But that *"same mighty power that he will use to conquer everything, everywhere"* – the power of the Holy Spirit – is within us. Does God answer our prayers for help and healing? Not always (in His grace and sovereignty He always knows best) – but He can and does. Does God answer our prayers to help us manage our thoughts? Feelings? Circumstances? Yes, He does. We still struggle with temptation and failure, but God's Spirit does change us and help us.

We see life in a different light – in the Light – through Jesus. *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.* (2 Corinthians 4:5-9)

In the *Prince of Egypt* (about Moses' life), during Moses lowest moment, Jethro, priest of Midian, sings a song *Through Heaven's Eyes* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaPJQRuHbWE>)

*A single thread in a tapestry, though its color brightly shine
Can never see its purpose in the pattern of the grand design
And the stone that sits on the very top of the mountain's mighty face
Does it think it's more important than the stones that form the base?*

*So how can you see what your life is worth
Or where your value lies?
You can never see through the eyes of man
You must look at your life, look at your life through heaven's eyes.*

I invite you to come into the Light. To **see** differently. To see life in the reality of a God who loves you and is with you. To hold a little less tightly to the things of this world. To see and celebrate the "God moments" of your life, when His Light breaks in, every day. And to allow God's Spirit to give you a bigger vision and a bigger purpose.