

Darkness. That's all I'd ever known. I'd never seen a beautiful sunset, or a flickering lantern, or a star shining in the night sky. My life was total darkness. Because I was born blind. From the moment I came into the world, I couldn't see my mother's smile, or the Sea of Galilee's deep blue, or the grandeur of Jerusalem's temple. I was blind to it all.

As you can imagine, the nonexistent employment opportunities for a lifelong blind man fated me to a life of begging. I usually sat outside the Temple, counting on people's pity as they went to worship their God.

Notice, I said "their God," not my God. I stopped believing in a God who would allow me to suffer in darkness. My whole life, I'd heard people's whispered accusations against my parents, "God is punishing them for their sins by giving them a blind son." The Rabbis had taught our people that whenever a child had some sort of affliction, it was because of some sin their parents committed. I often asked my parents what they'd done that left me blind, but they never knew. I so often asked, "Why would God allow this to happen to me?" that I eventually gave up on God. If he didn't care about me, I wouldn't care about him.

Maybe you've felt like that. The cancer raging inside you; the addiction you can't shake; the unexpected death of a loved one; guilt weighing heavily on your shoulders as the question, "Is God punishing me for my sins?" creeps into your head.

People had asked, "Who's fault is it?" my whole life, so it wasn't surprising when once again, stationed outside the temple on the Sabbath, feeling people's eyes locked on me, I heard some men ask, "**Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**" The question was the same, but this time, the answer was different. This "rabbi" replied, "**Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.**"

Pardon the pun, but his words "opened my eyes" to a new possibility. Could God be using my blindness not in angry vengeance to drive me away, but as a blessing to draw me closer to him? Could God be using your ailment, disease, or hardship not to punish you, but to bless you and let his grace shine through your life?

It seemed too good to be true. "No, the most I can hope for is spare change from these men." But then, this Rabbi said something that caught my ears, as a man who'd spent his entire life in darkness. He said, "**While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.**" I chuckled, "If he's the light of the world, I won't be seeing him!" Or so I thought.

He had something so much greater than spare change for me. Spitting on the ground, he made mud and smeared it on my eyelids, telling me, "**Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.**" I was skeptical, but that phrase, "I am the light of the world" stuck in my head, so I went. Scooping water from the pool, I rinsed the mud off my eyes, and looking up...I saw! I saw trees, birds, smiles, vibrant colors, sunlight, things I'd never imagined. For the first time, I was freed from darkness--by the Light of the World.

I joyfully sprinted home, wrestling with one of Isaiah's prophecies I learned long ago, "**Your God will come...then will the eyes of the blind be opened.**" Could it be? Could this man who'd given me sight actually be the promised Messiah? "No" I thought. "He's just a man."

As you can expect, my parents, neighbors, and friends were floored! I must have told the story a thousand times as people stared incredulously at my eyes. Some doubted. Others believed. So they rushed me off to see the Pharisees, the religious leaders of our day.

As people excitedly relayed my story, I could see the Pharisees' shock, faces that said, "Isn't that the blind beggar we see every day? It can't be. He can see us."

Finally, they asked me what happened. I simply explained, the man they call Jesus **"put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see."** My whole life, I'd never seen. Then, Jesus did something, and now I can see everything. Shouldn't it have been obvious?

But the Pharisees, refusing to see the evidence right before their eyes, looked for reasons to not believe. Some argued that Jesus couldn't be **"from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."** They thought Jesus couldn't have done this unbelievable miracle by God's power, because certainly, someone from God would keep the extreme Sabbath laws that they, such holy Pharisees, had written for Israel to follow. But others argued, **"How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?"** Finally, they turned back to me, the evidence, and asked what I thought about Jesus.

I'd heard how the Pharisees' hated Jesus; how they'd threatened his disciples; how desperately they wanted to stop him. Honestly, even I was still wrestling with the question, "Who is Jesus?" But the more I thought, the more I realized, he must be more than a regular man. I answered, **"He is a prophet."** If Jesus could give sight to my blind eyes, he must at least be a great prophet like Moses or Elijah.

No matter what I said, the Pharisees wouldn't believe anything except their preconceived notions that Jesus was an impostor. They even called in my parents, hoping to prove that I was lying about being born blind! It wasn't just that they didn't want to see the truth about Jesus. They were unable to see the truth about Jesus through their stubborn, blind unbelief. They refused to open their eyes and see the truth. As they continued searching for reasons not to believe, I kept thinking, "The Light of the World. You can see, because the Light of the world has shined on you."

My thoughts about Jesus progressed from, "He's just a man, to "he's a prophet," until finally, I couldn't help it. I boldly proclaimed to the Pharisees, those blind guides, **"Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."** Jesus is from God. He's come to do God's work.

The Pharisees were irate, but they couldn't refute the evidence they wanted to stay blind to. They threw me out of the temple, accusing, **"You were steeped in sin at birth!"**

They wanted to discredit my testimony. Who should believe a sinner like me? But for the first time that day, the Pharisees spoke the truth. Everyone is born steeped in sin—me, you, the Pharisees, everyone. All people are born spiritually blind sinners—unable on our own, by faith, to see the truth; not wanting to see the light. We're trapped in spiritual blindness, clinging to the darkness of unbelief like people hugging the back wall of a cave. As King David wrote, **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."**

I wasn't just born physically blind. I was born spiritually blind also. I was destined for hell. That's the reality for all people, the Pharisees included, unless the Light of the World shines into our darkness. Jesus changed my life by giving me physical sight, but Jesus changed my eternity with an even greater gift, part of his perfect plan from eternity.

After I was tossed by the Pharisees, Jesus came and found me, this man I'd never seen before asking me, **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** I recognized his voice, and I wondered with my heart racing, "Is this him?" I believed in the Savior, I just didn't know who he was yet. That's when Jesus opened my spiritually blind eyes with his Word, **"You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking to you."**

I had seen him; with the eyes that he himself had opened, I saw Jesus. But more importantly, I viewed Jesus through eyes of faith, seeing him for who he is—our Savior from the sin and unbelief we were born with. The Light of the World who shined into our darkness. I threw myself down at his feet, worshiping him, and rejoicing in my new faith, ***“Lord, I believe!”***

I suddenly realized God’s plan. Before he formed my blind eyes in my mother’s womb, the God who breathed life into Adam’s lifeless clay knew he would one day spit into clay and give me physical sight—so that he could also give me eyes of faith; so that God’s grace and mercy could shine in my life. He used my blindness as a way of drawing me to him. How merciful is our God!

If I told you that I have so much joy, love, and thanks for Jesus in my life now, you’d probably say, “Well, duh! Look what Jesus did for you!” Absolutely!

But that’s the joy, love, and thanks that each of you can have in your hearts too. That’s the light each of us can shine forth in our lives as parents, spouses, children, employers, or employees. As Paul says in Ephesians, ***“Live as children of light.”*** Live your lives with thankfulness, love, and joy, because just like me, you are formerly blind people. ***“You were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord.”***

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has given you eyes of faith! Whether your blindness was washed away with the water and Word of Baptism, or whether the Light shattered your darkness through the Word, all of us can rejoice every day, motivated to live in the light, because you once were blind...but now you see!

Don’t let that thought leave your heart and mind. Don’t let daily life snatch away your joy in Christ. Don’t let your thankfulness that Christ has opened your blind eyes fade into your life’s background. Live it. Share it, so God’s grace will shine through you too! As we watch our Savior go to the cross to free us from eternal blindness this Lent, hold this truth before your eyes. You can see, because the Light of the World has shined in your darkness. Thanks be to God!