

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

This sermon was preached in Shalom Church, Singapore in 2004.

### Scripture Reading: **John 9**

Nothing is more contrasting than light and darkness. This sharp contrast forms the backdrop for our text this morning, **John 9**. In fact, this theme of light versus darkness started in **John 7**. We are told, in **John 7:2**, that it was the time when the Jews would hold their Feast of the Tabernacles. It has been reported that for the entire duration of this Feast, four huge torches would be ignited at night, near the Temple. The night is of course dark. And they live at a time in human history when electricity has yet been discovered. So they don't have street lamps, like we do today. Transport yourself into that situation, and I am sure you will agree with me, those four huge torches are very eye-catching. You can't miss them, and I am sure you are very thankful for them.

It is wonderful to be able to walk in their light, even at night, so that we will not stumble and fall. **John 7:37** informs us that we have come to the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. After the Feast, probably quite late at night, everyone would have gone home. The four huge torches would then be extinguished. **John 8:2** brings us back to the Temple, but this time it is the next morning. And it is before the extinguished torches that Jesus announced, "*I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.*" (**John 8:12**) These people have experienced the light given by those four huge torches.

For those few nights, they need not walk in darkness. But from tonight onwards, it is back to 'walking in darkness'. Because the four huge torches have been extinguished. The light they give is temporary, only for a time. Standing in sharp contrast is Jesus Christ. He is the Light of the world. He gives light, and if you follow Him, you shall never walk in darkness. If you follow Him, you shall have the light of life. Not for one night, two nights, seven nights, but for the rest of your life and for all eternity.

This world is in darkness. We all live in darkness. Jesus is the Light of this world. He makes a real and vital difference. If we follow Him, then we have left the darkness, and are now in the light. Our past life, and our present life, they stand in as sharp contrast as light with darkness! This theme of light versus darkness continues into **John 9**.

So we read in **John 9:5** the words of Jesus once more: *I am the light of the world*. The miracle that follows, the healing of the man born blind, illustrates this great truth. It is a sign. The fifth sign in the Gospel of John. It once again points us to Jesus Christ. Not everything it says about Jesus is new. We shall find a repetition of some of the things already said in the 1<sup>st</sup> four signs. But the new and distinct message is this:

*Jesus is the light of the world. What does this mean, and how does this affect you and me?*

Let us begin by looking at this man who was blind from birth.

Here is a man who had never known light. Darkness was all that he had ever known. Blue, green, red, orange --- all these beautiful colours are just words to him. The green grass, the beautiful orange sunset, the red roses and the clear blue sky --- he cannot conceive of them, not one. Perhaps, he might even think that they do not exist at all. Perhaps, he might think that all the talk about colours is but one big conspiracy put together by some people with ulterior motives. As far as he is concerned, all is dark. Black is the only colour he knows, if you insist on talking about colour.

Now, is he happy or miserable? Imagine that he was not blind from birth, but maybe due to a disease in childhood or an accident during his teenage years, he became blind. Having experienced sight and then became blind, having lived in a world of colours and then now in a world of total darkness, this is misery. No doubt about it. But can we say the same for someone who was blind from birth? He had never experienced what is sight. He had never seen colours. Is he miserable?

Ask him, and he could reply, "I am not. I am quite happy if I can be successful in my begging today, and rake in quite an income by the end of this day." This man could measure happiness by 'how successful his begging would be', not by whether he could see or not see. Therefore, subjectively, he is happy, not miserable. That is, from his point of view, from all that he has experienced thus far in his life.

But is that the complete picture, the total truth? No, because objectively, he is miserable. For people around him who can see, sight equals happiness, blindness equals misery. Colour is real. Colour is beautiful, and brings enjoyment and pleasures to us. Not having eyes to see, and therefore to enjoy the beautiful sights, is positively, objectively a misery.

Let us imagine that 100 metres below this place is an underground city. There is a big bonfire around which the people gather. Because of the bonfire, these people don't live in total darkness, but in shadows. They use the bonfire to help them hunt for worms, and then use the fire to roast the worms for food. That's all that is to their lives --- shadows, bonfire and worms. Now, what will you say to these people and about them? Are they happy or are they miserable?

You live up here, in a world of beautiful colours, a world of much nicer food than worms, and a world of wonderful fresh air. Would you not say to the people living down there, "*Your life down there is miserable. It is a wonderful, a much better life up here. I wish you will be here!*" Is that arrogance? No, it is not arrogance, but just a statement of facts, as well as an expression of goodwill. I can't deny that the underground city is real --- that the shadows are real, the bonfire is real and the worms are real. But I will say that that is not all that is meant to be. Subjectively, they could be happy with their lives. They could reason, "*as long as we can get enough worms to eat every day, as long as we can keep the fire burning, we are happy.*" They may even invent things and activities

to make themselves happy. Subjectively happy ---- I cannot and will not deny that. But objectively?

I am sure you will agree with me that their state is miserable. Why? Because there is much more to see and enjoy in life than just shadows and worms! Because they are meant for better things than that! They are man and woman, boys and girls! They are not meant to live in that state! If we can, we will try to bring them out of that underground city into this wonderful world. They may deny that there is such a wonderful world, that our talk of colours and fresh air is just one big delusion. But their denial does not change the facts, will not change the reality. Now, telling them about colours and fresh air will not make very much sense to them, to people who only know shadows and lived 100 metres below ground all their lives. If only we can bring them up here, if only.

Come back to this man in **John 9**, blind from birth. He must have heard much about colours from others around him. He could dismiss them as all fabrication and false. He could set himself up as the test of everything. If I don't see it, then it does not exist. If I don't understand, then it is not true. To say the least, that's arrogance! If he could just pause and think more carefully and humbly, all those talks about colours should alert him to one thing. That he is missing out on something precious and wonderful. Yes, you have never seen or experienced colours, but it does not mean they don't exist. You could be happy, subjectively speaking. But having enough to eat for the day is not all that there is to your life. If you are but a buffalo in the fields, then even if you are blind from birth, it does not matter very much. All that concerns a buffalo is enough green grass, and the movement of that grass from stomach 1 to stomach 2 to stomach 3 and then to stomach 4 is smooth. But you are not a buffalo in the fields. You are a man made in God's image. You are meant for greater things. Therefore, to be blind is positively and objectively miserable.

Now, what this man is physically is what you and I are spiritually. Spiritually, we are blind. Blind from birth. We have never experience spiritual life and communion with God from the day we are born into this world. Hence we could deny that God and heaven exist. Hence we could insist that we are quite happy where we are,

and define our happiness in terms of having enough to eat, having achieved some success and so on. Like those people living in the underground city. The only thing that now and then troubles us is the fact that there are some people, we call them oddballs, that keeps telling us about God and heaven. We have already decided --- made up our minds --- that they are talking rubbish. Our world, this life --- is all that there is. Friends, is that you? Is this your position all along? But have you ever think out of you box, at least once, and consider the possibility that they could be right --- that there is God and heaven? There is a such a possibility, is there not?

But we are actually beyond the area of possibility, because Jesus has come and said it very clearly that there is God and there is heaven. He says that the fact that we don't know and don't see, and may even deny it, is because we are blind! Spiritually blind! This is the essence of what He said in **verses 39-41**. You can either say that He is arrogant or uttering falsehood, or you will have to believe Him. At the end of the day, it comes down to that, isn't it? Who is Jesus? Can you take His word as true?

So it's time to turn our attention to Jesus. What does **John 9**, what does this 5<sup>th</sup> sign from the Gospel of John, tell us about Jesus?

First of all, once again, **JESUS IS VERY COMPASSIONATE**. We can see the great compassion of Jesus from a few angles.

1<sup>st</sup> angle: ***Jesus Starts***. Jesus saw this man. He did not see Jesus. Of course, he could not, for he is blind. Therefore, he does not know Jesus was standing there, he may not even know the existence of Jesus. He did not see Jesus, and he did not ask Jesus for any help. Up to **verse 6**, all we see is that this man is passive. The compassion of Jesus is seen in that He noticed him. The compassion of Jesus is seen in that He took the first step to help him. The compassion of Jesus is seen in that He healed him, unasked and unsought. The man did not ask for healing, and the man did not promise any compensation for healing. This act of Jesus

taking the 1<sup>st</sup> step, we call it grace! It is undeserved, unmerited favour.

2<sup>nd</sup> angle: ***Jesus Stoops***. More than one Bible teacher has made the observation that this man went through a process where he steadily increased in his knowledge of Jesus. If you use a line to plot his growth in knowledge, there would be the following 5 points:

- [1] No knowledge of Jesus whatsoever.
- [2] A man called Jesus - **verse 11**.
- [3] Jesus is a prophet - **verse 17**
- [4] Jesus cannot be a sinner --- **verses 31-33**.
- [5] Jesus is Lord! --- **verse 38**.

Now, let's answer this question. *At which point did Jesus heal him of his blindness?* [1], [2], [3], [4] or [5]? Correct answer: before [2]!! Yes, this is the same point that I have drawn your attention to a number of times in the past few weeks. Yes, it is repetition, but oh blessed repetition!! Jesus stoops. He comes to our level and deals with us at that level. I repeat --- He will not leave us at that level. He will act to bring us to a higher and better level. But He does not demand that we get to a higher level, or to His level, before He will roll up His sleeves to deal with us! Oh dear friends, how gracious and compassionate a Saviour is Jesus! If He waits till we are better, if He demands that we be clearer, before He will act, we are doomed! But He doesn't! Glory to Jesus!!

3<sup>rd</sup> angle: ***Jesus Seeks. Verse 35***. This man has just been harshly treated by the religious leaders and then cast out of the synagogue. He is not allowed to attend the services any more. He is now treated as an outcast. All the neighbours would now keep their distance from him. Perhaps even his own parents will keep contact with him to the barest minimum possible. Rejected, alone, shunned. Suddenly, this man finds himself standing there all on his own. Then Jesus came to him. Came to him in his moment of pain, of rejection, of loneliness. And also to continue to instruct him, and to bring him into enjoyment of more and better blessings. He has been healed physically. Now, moving beyond physical blessings, Jesus wants to give him spiritual blessings.

Three different angles from this one miracle, showing us this one great and comforting truth: *the great compassion of Jesus*. Surely, here is an attractive Person to know, to be a friend. That's not all.

Secondly, and yet once again, **JESUS IS VERY POWERFUL**.

Read **verse 32** and feel the impact you are supposed to feel. This was said in the 1<sup>st</sup> century in Palestine. Transport it to America, or Singapore, and to the current 21<sup>st</sup> century. Has anything changed? NO!!! No one has ever done a thing like this. Who has ever healed a man born blind? And once again, don't miss the impact of the majestic simplicity in which the healing was executed. So simple, so matter-of-fact, no stunts, no chants, no rituals! It did not take place after 3 days and nights of operation. And when he was healed, it was immediate, not gradual, and it was permanent, not for a limited time only. Feel the impact of **verse 32**, and realise just how big, how amazing, how wonderful is this miracle.

The One who has turned water into wine, healed a dying boy and a man paralysed for 38 years, fed 5000 men with 5 loaves and 2 fishes, now heals a man born blind. How very powerful is Jesus! If He can do such impossible tasks, is there any reason to believe that He cannot wash away my sins, bring me to God, give me eternal life, transform me from a sinner to a saint?

But we must go one step further. This ability to heal the blind is an important pointer. **Isaiah 35:5**, among other passages, says this: *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped*. This is speaking about what God's appointed Saviour will do, when He comes into this world. One of the things He will do, one sign that He is indeed the God-appointed Saviour, is that He will heal the blind! You may argue that there are the blind and the blind. Some are blind temporarily and some permanently. Some are blind due to disease and accidents, and some from birth. You may be able to point to some examples of

people healing those who were blinded temporarily. But not those who were blind permanently and definitely not someone blind from birth. Here in **John 9** is blindness in its most severe form. Jesus healed him! In the whole Bible, we only have one man who has accomplished that, and He is Jesus. Where does this leave you, with respect to that prophecy about God's appointed Saviour healing the blind?

Or what about **Psalm 146:8** -- *The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; The LORD raises those who are bowed down; The LORD loves the righteous?* Here the psalmist is not talking about God's appointed Saviour, but about God. He says God is He who opens the eyes of the blind. Now we have Jesus standing before us in **John 9**. And He opens the eyes of the blind, the eyes of one born blind. What is your conclusion?

John says that this is the Christ --- God's appointed Saviour. This is God's Son --- the true and living God Himself!

I come back to the question I posed in the middle of the sermon. Who is Jesus? Can you take His word as true? He is the compassionate Saviour, He is the powerful Lord and He is God Himself. He tells us that there is God. He comes from God, He is God. How then can we deny that there is God and heaven? Unless you can show that Jesus is unreal!

He tells us that we are blind. He tells us that He is the light of the world. He and He alone can bring us out of darkness into light. Is Jesus arrogant? If He is God, then the issue of arrogance does not come in at all. Is Jesus uttering falsehood? If He is God, God does not lie. Friends, you are only left with one viable option.

In compassion and mercy, He is telling you the truth, and you should believe what He says and do what He commands. There is no reasonable reason why you should doubt His words. I want to end with two calls.

**ONE: BE OBEDIENT.**

That's how this man blind from birth responded. Jesus made clay with saliva, anointed his eyes with the clay and then told him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. He did as commanded. He came back seeing! Did he understand everything? No! In fact, pushed him to a corner, all he could say is, "*I once was blind, but now I see!*" I am not saying that the Christian Faith is unreasonable, a leap in the dark. No, what I have done above was to reason with you. But I am now saying that while the Christian Faith is reasonable, at the end of the day, we need to do what Jesus says, even when we don't fully understand. He says, believe Me and you will be saved. How? What's the process, and what is involved?

We can explain up to a certain point, and then words will fail us. The merciful thing is, we don't have to understand the mechanics of everything. We just need to know Jesus, knows He is trustworthy and trust Him --- do as He says. Jesus says to you today, my dear friends, children, teenagers, young adults --- turn from your sins and trust in Christ for your acceptance with God. Don't know how the move from darkness to light will take place. Know that Jesus can and will do it, and trust Him to bring us from darkness to light. **BE OBEDIENT.**

**TWO: BE OPEN.**

Be open to consider the possibility that all along, you have been wrong. The lack of openness was the big obstacles for the religious leaders mentioned here, is it not. A big, stupendous miracle has taken place right before their eyes. What was their response? They tried to deny that man was born blind, or that man is really the blind man, or that Jesus was the one who healed him. Every possible and even impossible option will be tried, but not that one. Why? Because they have already made up their minds to reject Jesus.

Instead of being open, and examine the evidences, they start from a closed mind and then tried to re-interpret all the data. So my call to you, my dear friends, is this: Be open. An open mind is like an open mouth. Remain open only until you meet something solid, and then close it. Here is something solid. Indeed, someone! Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Open your mind to examine His claims. Then close your mind upon His solid claims. Remember, He is the Light of the world. In all naturalness, light should be welcomed by all. We should all run to the light. No one should desire to live in darkness. But strangely, there are people who sees the light, turns away from the light, and tries to run away from the light as quickly as they can. Like one of the advertisement for a certain soft drink. Those people in the advertisement ran as fast as they can from the light, so that they can continue their activities in darkness. Oh friends, don't be like them! Why should you be like them? Jesus is the Light of the world. He and He alone can open our eyes, and heal us of spiritual blindness. Then, we shall see the real beauty of spiritual things, the real pleasures of communion with God, being at peace with Him and walk with Him and longing to be in His eternal home one day. Come to Jesus today. Come to the Light of the world. Walk in darkness no more.