

Encounters with Jesus

Week 4: The Blind See

John 9

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- February 4, 2024

If you'll turn into your Bibles to John 9, we're in a series called *Encounters with Jesus*. It's when the infinite comes and touches the finite. And when that happens, lives change. They don't always change for the better, but they change. Because when He invades and has an encounter with people, that serves as a point in their life to choose—a defining moment in their life. So, let's all listen carefully, because this encounter might be just the thing that you and I need to hear.

Introduction of Characters

Jesus the Messiah

Introduction of characters: the main character is first Jesus the Messiah. "The Messiah" literally means "the promised one." And I want you to see that Jesus is the fulfillment of our non-physical parts—our spirits and our souls. He is the fulfillment of the longings of our spirit. Also, He's the fulfillment of multiple Old Testament prophecies and rituals. And I want you to envision those longings, our soul's longings and the Old Testament teachings—those longings—as arrows. All arrows are pointing to Jesus.

So, Jesus is going to take advantage of those arrows pointing to Him. So, last week we saw, *Oh, you're thirsty?*

Sure, water is life in the desert.

And then He says, *Your soul thirsts for something that can't be satisfied by something temporal. I'm the living water.*

Today He's going to look at someone and the theme will be blindness. And He'll turn that into spiritual blindness, and He'll say, "I am the light of the world for those who are living in spiritual darkness." This is Jesus the Christ.

The Man Born Blind

The second character in this story is the man born blind. He doesn't have a name, he's "the man born blind." And his entire life, in a word, was miserable. Back then there was no protection, no organizations or non-profits to help him. He would be condemned to sit by the roadside and beg his entire life. And there would be no hope for him to have some of the things that we take for granted, like simple employment or marriage. And India is not the only country that has a caste system. I think most every country does. And you're going to see, even this story, that they're going to see this man born blind and say, *You know what? I bet he did something. I bet he had this coming.* And that allows people to have no pity on that man born blind.

The Pharisees

The third set of characters are called Pharisees. And they were religious leaders of the time. And they're threatened by Jesus. And one of the reasons they're threatened is because they yield a great deal of power. When we read this and see this, I want you to look at the power they yield. And look at the fear. You can see the power by the fear of the people who are being interrogated by them. Because here's what they can do: they can banish people from the synagogue, and what that means is, *We're kicking you out of your community and we're kicking you out of even being able to have access to God.*

And the second thing I want us to all notice in the storyline is how much they know and how confident they are in what they know. As a matter of fact, the word of the day is "know." This is going to be a conversation that takes place where eighteen questions are going to be going back and forth and back forth, and people are going to say, "Well, we know ...", and someone will say, "Well, I don't know, but I do know ..." "Know" is the word. And that's the key to understanding this.

And the issue with these Pharisees, the illness that they have, is what I would call arrow worship. All that God has revealed in nature and in the Bible and within our own souls are arrows pointing to Jesus. And what is revealed in nature and in the Bible points to the nature of God and the plan of God. And these people, these Pharisees, are experts in the arrows, but they don't know where the arrows point. They're just really good at knowing the arrows.

It's like a dog when you tell it to go somewhere and they just smell your finger. They're staring at your finger, not where you're telling the dog to go. That's what they're doing.

And this is the nature of the human mind after it's bent and fallen. Look at what Paul says in book of theology in Romans. He says this about how we take arrows and don't see where they go. In chapter 1 he says, "God has made His nature evident to us, for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that we are without excuse."

The Grand Canyon, the Swiss Alps; look in a microscope, look in a telescope. We're supposed to back away and say, "Wow! Oh God, those are expressions of Your eternal power and divine attributes!" Do we do that? No, we do not do that.

Romans 1:25

For we exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.

Look at the next verse, verse 25: "For we exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator." We'll go hug a tree, but we won't ask, *I wonder who made the tree?* We won't worship the tree maker.

So, what is true with creation pointing to the nature of God, and sometimes even to the plan of God, is absolutely the same in the revelation of God in the Bible. There are stories and rituals that are all pointing to the nature of God and what He's up to. And these men—wow—they know all about the arrows, but they don't know where they point.

Still today you can find a lot of Bible studies and a lot of Bible teachers that will tell you what the Bible says, but they don't know what the Bible means. There's a difference. That's what is happening here.

At the end of the day we're going to see a blind guy who doesn't know, but sees. And then we're going to see guys who aren't blind who say they do know, and they can't see.

Three Parts to This Storyline

There are three points or movements in this storyline. There's the healing, and then there's going to be the defense of the healing, and then the last movement is that he's all alone

but he is loving that first sunrise. It's a playful little drama about being physically blind versus being spiritually blind.

Let me tell you the context of what's happening so you can appreciate it. Jesus is going to come across a man who's been born blind, and He's going to heal him, but in a way where Jesus has to "work." And it's going to be on the Sabbath, and you're not supposed to work on the Sabbath. I keep saying "work" with quotes because it's not in the Bible's definition of what the Sabbath is. It's not from God. This is tradition. These are things that have been added to the definition of what it means to work. So, Jesus is making a point here. He's saying, *The Sabbath is one of those arrows that point to me. And you're missing it.*

And then He's going to say, *Look, when the blind receive their sight, that is literally a fulfillment of a promise in the Old Testament of what to look for in the Messiah. "He will give sight to the blind." That's an arrow that's pointing to me. Are you blind to that?* (There are a lot of plays on words here.) *Stop looking at the arrows and look where the arrows point.* That's the big point here.

Part 1: The Healing

John 9:1-2

As He went along, He saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

So, here we go, in verse 1 of chapter 9: "As Jesus went along, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"

So, we start with a crazy question by His disciples. And it's a very popular way of dealing with the problem of suffering back then and even today. It's very popular because it's easy to understand. There's no mystery in this answer. *For this person who has been born blind there must be a cause that I can understand. Either his parents sinned or he sinned.*

And so, that leaves you with two roads to live out the consequence of that thinking. One is a road to rage—raging anger. And another way to apply those choices would be crippling

guilt. If the only two choices are--*Who sinned, the parents or this child?*-- you can go to this road of raging anger. *Who sinned? The parents.* What can he do but be furious for his entire life. And when we are suffering or we see someone who we love suffering, it's pretty common for us to say, *I bet it's someone else's fault. I bet someone else is to blame for my injuries.* So, sometimes we blame a person, sometimes we blame a group of people, sometimes it's an election season, so we're going to blame a class of people. *It's those rich people—it's those poor people.* Sometimes we just blame God. *But it's not my fault; it's somebody else's, and that's how I'm going to fixate. I've got a target for my anger, so let the anger rage.* Let it rage.

The only other way you can respond to this, Jesus says, is this crushing guilt. *Or did the man sin?* When? He was born blind. *Well, maybe he sinned in his mother's womb.* I don't know how that works. Maybe God foresaw a future sin and said, *Well, we'll take care of this before he's even born.* Who cares? The point is, when you have this value system for the problem of suffering and you answer it simplistically, you have the other way of living with it, and that is that you turn the anger towards yourself—guilt. *I must be suffering because I've got this coming. I'm a bad person, it's my fault. Here we go ... I'm just living out the consequences.*

John 9:3,5

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life ... ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

And so, Jesus' answer is great, because He says, *It's not A, it's not B. There's something else here.* Look what He says in verse 3: “ ‘Neither the man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life ... While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ ”

He's talking about blindness here. The first part of what He's saying is that it's neither. That means it's neither A nor B. It's a false dilemma. You don't have to go with anger, you don't have to go with guilt. There's another option here. The Bible says that the way the world is that you see is not the way God planned it. The Bible clearly says that there's a fall that takes place in Genesis 3. And the fall has significant consequences. It has consequences in our own personal life and in our ability to relate to God. It has consequences in our relationships with one another.

It has consequences with nature; nature fell. The entire earth shook with that fall. And because of that fall, we can all suffer without a particular individual sin taking place. It's this general sin called "the fall." And the answer to the issues of anger is realizing that God is angry. He's angry at how things are working out. It's not the way He planned. It's not what He desired. And He's going to fix this.

Honestly, I think maturing and wisdom happens over time. When we get older, we start to fully appreciate the depth of the fall, all around, everywhere, because of all the suffering. And we realize we can't find someone to be angry with. We realize we can be angry with God about how things are.

And then, when it comes to guilt, there's no reason to feel guilt because we think God is punishing us. There's a passage in Romans that flat out declares that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So, the Christian should have confidence that God isn't punishing them, because He doesn't punish twice. The punishment has already been inflicted on Jesus the Christ. That's why He died. And He's not going to punish twice for something. There's a possibility that we're living out consequences to make us learn so that we can become like Christ. That's not punishment; that's discipline. And like a good and loving parent, He doesn't punish; He disciplines. There's a purpose to it.

But the point and the summary here is that the first thing Jesus says is that it's neither the man nor his parents that sinned. The answer to suffering is nuanced. It's complicated. It's sophisticated. Here it is: it's a mystery. It's mysterious. You're not going to find the answer in this life.

In this particular case, Jesus says, "No, it's neither; so that the work of God may be displayed." And when He says "So that ...", He's saying that there is intent that is not meaningless. It is purposeful. And in much of our suffering we can sometimes see that in our own lives eventually, but if not in this life, we'll see it in the next. In this story we'll actually see the "so that ..."

The point is that if we live a simplistic view of life of a life that's including a great deal of suffering, and all we have is this road to rage and anger or a road to crushing guilt, hear the words of Jesus when He says, "It's neither" and "It's so that ...". They're so that ... you will need to trust, have faith, in the good, good Father. There's a bigger plan, and you'll be happy when you see how it all fits together.

All right, here we go. We have enough background. The first part is the healing. Jesus sees this man born blind and He's asked the question, He answers it and says, *Watch this ... so that the glory of God may be revealed.* He spits and then makes clay out of the dirt. And then He puts the clay on that man's eyes. And He says, *You need to get down to the Pool of Siloam and wash that out; then you'll be healed.* And he does. He washes his eyes and he sees for the very first time in his life. I mean, Yay! It's the happiest day in his life! Everyone is happy for him.

Defending the Healing

No. No, it's not. We can't get ahead of ourselves, because the next section is about defending the healing. Now we're going to watch a video, and we can't ... if you're watching at home, we can't televise the video, or whoever is in charge of the internet will cut our feed off if we play certain videos, but not other videos. That's for another day. But we're going to watch it, because I thought it'd be easier to watch than it would be to watch me stumble through trying to read it. But also, it's better looking.

But here's what to listen for so you can appreciate what's going on. The Pharisees are upset because Jesus has worked on the Sabbath. You can't spit on the Sabbath. (That's not in the Bible, but according to them.) And you certainly can't make clay ... un-uh ... and you can't have that guy walk down to the pool. Nope. So, that's why they're upset. Look again, I'll remind you ... look at the power they're yielding. Look at the fear that people have in front of these men. Because these men can banish them. They can kick them out and excommunicate them from their community and from their access to God. Look how much they know and look how certain they are. They are experts in arrows. They are blind, they are living in the dark, because they don't know where the arrows point. Ironic? I guess. Let's play the video.

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Video: The Life of Jesus, #24: Pharisees Interrogate the Blind Man
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHiSLVfBBXg>

Narrator: Then they took to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. The day that Jesus made the mud and cured him of his blindness was a Sabbath. *[Guards bring the man into*

the temple before a table of about ten Pharisees.] The Pharisees then asked the man again how he had received his sight.

Formerly blind man: He put some mud on my eyes. I washed my face. And now I can see.

Head Pharisee: The man who did this cannot be from God. He does not obey the Sabbath law. How could a man who is a sinner perform such miracles as these?

Narrator: Then there was division among them.

Head Pharisee: You say he cured you of your blindness. Well ... what do you say about him?

Formerly blind man: He is a prophet.

[Some Pharisees are a little shocked. They confer.]

Narrator: The Jewish authorities, however, were not willing to believe that he had been blind and could now see until they called his parents.

[Parents are escorted into the synagogue and come before the Pharisee leaders.]

Head Pharisee: Is this your son? *[The father nods.]* You say that he was born blind. How is it then that he can now see?

Father: We know that he is our son and we know that he was born blind. But we don't know how it is that he is now able to see, nor do we know who cured him of his blindness.

Mother: Ask him. He is old enough, and he can answer for himself.

[The Pharisees confer and one of them takes notes.]

Narrator: His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, who had already agreed that anyone who said he believed that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. That is why his parents said, "He is old enough. Ask him." A second time they called back the man who had been born blind.

Head Pharisee: Promise before God that you will tell the truth. *[The parents look towards their son.]* We know that this man who cured you is a sinner.

Formerly blind man: I do not know if he is a sinner or not. One thing I do know: I was blind and now I see. *[He looks at his parents kindly, and the father smiles at him.]*

Head Pharisee: What did he do to you? How did he cure you of your blindness?

Formerly blind man: *[Clearly exasperated]* I have already told you and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Maybe you too would like to be his disciples.

[Murmuring from the Pharisees.]

Narrator: They insulted him and said ...

Head Pharisee: You are that fellow's disciple. But we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses. As for that fellow, however, we do not even know where he comes from.

Formerly blind man: What a strange thing that is. You do not know where he comes from, but he cured me of my blindness. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He does listen to people who respect Him and do what He wants them to do. Since the beginning of the world nobody has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a person born blind. Unless this man came from God he would not be able to do a thing.

[Indignant muttering from the Pharisees.]

Head Pharisee: *[Slowly rising from his seat in seething rage]* You were born and brought up in sin! And you are trying to teach us?

Narrator: **And** they expelled him from the synagogue.

[Formerly blind man is walking on a crowded city street. There are sheep baaing Jesus walks up behind the man.]

Narrator: When Jesus heard what had happened, He found the man.

Jesus: Do you believe in the Son of Man?

[Several of the Pharisees are listening.]

Formerly blind man: Tell me who He is, sir, so that I can believe in Him.

Jesus: You have already seen Him. And He is the one who is talking with you now.

Formerly blind man: *[Falls to his knees before Jesus.]* I believe, Lord.

Narrator: And he knelt down before Jesus.

Jesus: I came to this world to judge, so that the blind should see, and those who see should become blind.

Narrator: Some Pharisees who were there with Him heard Him say this and asked Him

...

Pharisee: Surely you don't mean that we are blind too?

Jesus: If you were blind, then you would not be guilty. But since you claim that you can see, this means that you are still guilty.

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There it was. That's word for word. Jesus is just doing what Jesus does. He's showing that the arrows all point to Him, the fulfillment of the messianic promise that the blind will receive their sight.

I'd love for somebody to write a paper on what the blind man's day was like, right? This was the first day he's ever seen anything in his whole life. Let's just pretend that that's the first time he's ever seen his parents.

Mom, is that you?

Yeah ... ask him. He's old enough.

Yeah, thanks, Mom.

But look at the focus of the Pharisees. They're not blind, but they're living in darkness. That's the whole point. And they were absolutely certain about things they knew. And the things they knew were wrong. The man was not sinful and that's why he was blind; Jesus did not violate the Sabbath. And Jesus was not a sinner. And they are not disciples of Moses.

John 9:28-29

Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

Here's their litany here in verse 28: "Then they hurled insults at him and said, 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.'"

Experts in arrows, blind to what they point to. They know what the Bible says; they don't know what the Bible means. It still happens today.

There's an application for us. You may have heard someone say, and you might have said it yourself, "Boy, if I saw a miracle like back in the Jesus days, I would absolutely believe. Yeah, show me a miracle and I'll convert."

Well, there are plenty of stories where people have encounters with Jesus, and that's not what happens. Something else is at stake: their power, their wealth, their fame. And they hold onto that more than truth.

Miracles do not necessarily lead to faith any more than reason leads to conversions or surrender. You can have a thousand different answers to a thousand different questions, and a person is still not convinced. And maybe there's another reason why.

The blind man sees the light. And he said, *Well, this is remarkable*. "You don't know where he comes from, and He opened my eyes. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."

And so, they replied, "You are steeped in sin at birth." There it is. Again, there's only one way, or two ways, out of this. "How dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

The Evolution of Faith

Look at the evolution, by the way ... it's almost like last week. Look at the evolution of this encounter with Jesus. It happens again. It's incremental. He starts off by just naming Him as Jesus, and then he calls Him a prophet. And then he'll say He's the Christ, and then ultimately, he says, "You are from God."

So, in our own lives, let's just keep in mind that when we're loving and sharing with the people who God has brought into our lives—friends and family and neighbors—to do good works in Jesus Christ—it's a process. It's the long game. And a lot of prayer is required. See what happens over time. *Yeah, Jesus may be a prophet ...* See what happens.

Part 3: All Alone, But with Spiritual and Physical Vision

John 9:35-39

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when He found him, He said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

³⁶ “Who is He, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in Him.”

³⁷ Jesus said, “You have now seen Him; in fact, He is the one speaking with you.”

³⁸ Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped Him.

³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

Here’s how it ends. He’s all alone. The miracle, the explanation of the miracle, and part three, he’s all alone, but he is loving that first sunrise. “And Jesus heard that he had been thrown out, and He found him and said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’

“‘Who is He, sire? Tell me, that I might believe in Him.’

“‘You have now seen Him. In fact, He is the one speaking to you.’

“‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him.

“And then Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.’”

Three Truths from This Encounter with Jesus

Can I give you three truths of this encounter with Jesus?

The first truth is this: that following Christ comes with persecution. As soon as this happens, that’s how he’s baptized into being a follower of Christ. The truth will set you free, and the truth will get you into trouble. Even his parents: “He’s old enough to speak ...” Have you heard this from your parents? *Oh, I hope he gets over this phase.* Yeah. It especially hurts from family members that want to distance themselves from your faith.

But Jesus said it--let me just say that—I can see.

Well, uh ... that's illegal. Or, You're kind of weird now. You're different than before. And that's why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those when you are insulted and you are persecuted, when all kind of evil is brought upon you because of my sake: one, you'll be rewarded in heaven for that, and two, you're going to be in great company. They did that to the prophets and the saints. They've always been doing that." You have to learn how to stand alone.

One of the last classes I took for my doctorate was—oh, what a privilege—was taught by a very humble and brilliant, but also legendary pioneer of the evangelical faith. His name was Dr. Vernon Grounds. He was the mentor to the mentors. And we had kind of an informal get-to-know-you time at the beginning, and he wanted everyone to go around and tell what they felt like their life verse was, and maybe a story to explain why that was their verse.

Now he's in his late eighties during this class, and so, when it was his turn (he went last), he was talking not necessarily about the life verse he wanted, but reflecting backwards and saying, "This is the life verse I have. I've been given this verse by God. It's not the one I wanted."

And then he started telling about his pioneering days, when he was in graduate school and was defending the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and was all but kicked out of the programs at Rutgers that he was involved in. And he said, "And I walked out of that room alone."

And if that weren't the end of his story, he goes on. And he's working at a denominational seminary that his family had been a part of—a denomination that goes back generations. And he's working there, and things have changed for the seminary. And he is holding tight to what we would call orthodoxy and the accuracy of the Bible. And in his defense, he was asked to leave. And he said, "And I walked out of that building all alone."

He told two other stories where he had two other experiences of being interrogated. And he said, "I walked out of that building alone."

So, he said, in conclusion, "I found myself with no family supporting me, and it was hard to find friends that were encouraging me to hold to orthodoxy and the reliability of the Bible." So, he said, "So, this is the verse that God gave me that I didn't want." It's in John 21. Peter has just heard from Jesus himself that he is going to die as a martyr. And Peter says, "Well, what about John?" And Jesus says, "Never mind John, Peter. You follow me."

And Dr. Vernon Grounds said, "That's my verse. *Never mind anyone else, Vernon. You follow me.*"

There's a trail that's especially harsh, and Jesus will lead you to that trail. And that trail is narrow. There's no room for two. It will just be two, no matter how close you are in a marriage or a friendship, the deepest, darkest trail has only room for one. And you'll have to walk on that trail. Never mind anyone else. You follow Jesus. That's what this blind man has come to learn.

The second principle we see in this is that if you suffer well, you become a shepherd.

This man will be different than other people, in that he knows that there's another way out besides rage and guilt; that there's a third way, and it's neither. It's that God has a purpose in the suffering. But now he will hear other people wrestling with guilt and anger, and he'll be able to be the person who leads them on that solitary road, that trail, that's only wide enough for one, but he can lead them through it. He'll hear their soul speak, and he'll work them away from guilt. There's no condemnation. And he'll pacify their anger and say that God is angry too, so you don't have to be angry with Him. And he'll help them with this quiet peace. He'll love them with a quiet peace with a shepherd's heart. That's what happens with the refining fire in the life of a believer.

The third thing that happens that I want to draw attention to is how dangerous this man is. Did you see that? That's really what I want to bring today. This man is dangerous. He has nothing to lose. Look at the powerful men he stands before and how he bows his shoulders back with the attitude, *What are you going to do to me? What can you do? You can't touch me.*

There's a saying—if you don't know it, you should know it: Never mess with a man who has nothing to lose. You get in a little skirmish in the parking lot and you realize that the guy you're facing off with is thinking, *Jail? Three meals a day? Bed? That would be awesome.* Don't mess with that person. Never mess with someone who has nothing to lose.

And these powerful men have just figured that out. *We're going to throw him out of the synagogue.*

I was never allowed in the synagogue.

You'll never be employed. (Have you ever heard this? You'll never work in this town!)

I never have. What are you going to do?

We're going to look down at you with shame for the rest of your life.

That's all I've ever known. These things you threaten me with, I'm not afraid of. That's all I've ever known. Here's the difference between yesterday and today. All that stuff that you're

threatening me with, I don't care. Today I have two things that I didn't have yesterday. I have my vision. And I have a Savior.

And now he's dangerous. And they know it. He is truly dangerous.

I hope that you see in this man's sight how dangerous you can become. If you have an encounter like this with Jesus, you might find yourself all alone on that narrow trail that everyone needs to walk. Truth will set you free, and the truth will get you into trouble. But even when you're alone on that trail, it's a well-worn trail. There are seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal or kissed that idol. You just haven't met them yet.

And then, on that trail you can find yourself being a shepherd to the men and women behind you. You can lead them through that dark cavern. And in that—this is the part I would love Grace to grasp—you can see how dangerous you've become when you come to understand that no one in this life can take anything away from you that Christ has given you. The things that you fear could be lost are only temporal. And even—you're putting a face to it—friends, family, loved ones—you'll see them later. That's a temporary issue as well.

So, the punchline of this whole storyline is to open our eyes and to see the light of the world, and see what the light of the world can do to our souls—not just illuminate our spirits and help us see. Help us see what? Help us see not to fear that little road of suffering; to see that we can become shepherds and to see that we are dangerous. That's what an encounter with Jesus can possibly end up doing in our own lives. Let's pray that it does, huh?

Lord, what a life this man lived. His whole life he has been blind, from birth. And it was only a prop, an illustration to be used by You. And he's just fine with that. He lived his whole life waiting for You to show the world that it's neither, and so that. And he just wanted to play a part in Your grand kingdom, Your revelation of who You are and what Your plan is.

Lord, I'd ask that we would find ourselves drawn to that; not fear, persecution, and isolation, but realize that we're in great company with prophets and saints of old and new; that we might care for one another with a deeper understanding and loving compassion.

Lord, I'd ask that this church would find their courage in what it means to be absolutely without condemnation, and that Your promises are true, that You would never leave us or forsake us. We can't lose anything that You haven't given us. Let's be a dangerous church. Make us a dangerous church. In Jesus' name. Amen.