

Try something with me. Close your eyes. With your eyes closed do you think you could make it out to your car? Have you studied where you are in the sanctuary close enough to know what ways to turn and how to get out? Your eyes have only been closed for a few seconds but if you truly had to find your way out without your sight you might already be starting to panic. Okay, you can open your eyes.

Thankfully you don't have to try. While it might seem like a foolish exercise to someone with perfectly good eyesight, for others blindness makes getting around each day difficult. Even more people live spiritually blind. For them the information they receive about religion from other people, reading books, or from Facebook posts all seems like foolishness. They're blind to what it all means. They can't make sense of it or don't want to. Everything they hear about Jesus is foolishness because they're blind.

In the first lesson we have the description of an event that changed the course of Christianity and eventually the course of our lives as well. That's not overstating it either. A man who was blind was given his sight, but this was no physically blind man, at least not at first. His was a spiritual blindness, just like each one of us was born with. But like us, this man experienced a change...

The Light removes blindness
Blindness to the truth about Jesus
Blindness to the mission from Jesus

Trey Johnson was convinced all his basketball team needed to do to win was put the ball in play and dribble out the last couple seconds of the clock. They would win their opening round game in the class 3A playoffs. He was convinced when he caught the ball with no defenders around him going towards the basket that scoring would be icing on the cake. Except Trey forgot which basket was his. He was convinced what he was doing was right, but his teammates, coaches, and fans all couldn't believe it. Trey scored in the wrong basket. Those two points as the buzzer sounded gave the opposing team the victory.

Saul was convinced he was doing God's work. Christians were destroying what Jews had worked for centuries to build. Saul knew God had laws that had to be followed. These people came along with thoughts that they could be freely forgiven without trying to be good. These Christians followed one man who claimed to be God. But that couldn't be true. No human could be God. There was only one God, and he was no man. Blind with rage Saul traveled to Damascus to continue his reign of terror and persecution. Any Christian who perverted religion by saying Jesus had actually risen from the dead would be arrested and stopped. Saul just knew he was doing the right thing.

But Saul was blind to the truth about Jesus. So God stopped him. **"As Saul neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"** It was a heavenly light brighter than the noon sun that blinded Saul and stopped him. It also made him wonder. Why was the voice of the divine asking "Why do you persecute me?" Saul wasn't persecuting God, he was helping God. Could it be true that what he was doing was actually harming God in some way? Wasn't God pleased with him hunting down Christians? So Saul asked, **"Who are you, Lord?"** The answer he received changed his life and yours.

Saul knew many of the same things about Jesus' life and work that you do. Yet like Saul, we can be blind to the truth about Jesus. And like Saul we would rather stay blind to some of those truths because it gives us the ability to do what we want to do. Dismiss the claims about Jesus being God when talking with those who think he's nothing but a great teacher. Deny that Jesus has given us any good rules to keep us from sin when sin seems so fun. Simply don't believe because then we can do anything with anyone at anytime because we're blind to the truth about Jesus in our sinfulness. **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."** How crushing that law must have felt to Saul? When you dismiss, deny, or simply not believe, you sin against Jesus. Personally, individually, and hurtfully you injure the very one God sent to save.

Jesus wasn't just crushing Saul with those words. He was lifting him up. The Light was removing the blindness for Saul. The Light removes your blindness too. The Light pierces into our hearts and cleans up all the sin it finds there from our past. The Light clears up sin so we see clearly with eyes of faith our Savior Jesus. We know him like Saul knew him as the one crucified on the cross. But now we see Jesus as dying for our sins. We know he hung on the cross like Saul did, one man dying for many. But now we know those many are us. Jesus overwhelms us not with force or power, but with love and a gospel message. Your blindness is removed by the gospel of Christ's death for your sins and his resurrection as proof.

No longer spiritually blind, we no longer avoid everything God wants us to do. With spiritual blindness removed by Christ and the truth about Jesus clear to us now we ask "What must I do now?" Live your life for Christ knowing he is alive and demands nothing from you for forgiveness. Your religious thinking is wrapped up in pleasing God and living for him. The Lord has turned you around and he alone is the one fit to take you into the future under his grace.

Surprisingly stories of medical science helping people have sight after living for years without often turn out poorly. The person struggles. They don't understand the thousands of colors, shapes, and figures in the world. They get anxious and worried. They can't tell faces and have no idea what expressions mean. Blindness forced them to get comfortable living a certain way. Spiritual blindness gets comfortable too. But Jesus comes and removes the blindness to the truth, then he removes the blindness regarding the mission.

Can't blame Ananias for initially being scared. Saul had a murderous history, I wouldn't want to go and talk with him either. **"Lord, Ananias answered, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. But the Lord said to Ananias, Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."** Saul had already been changed by the Light. Ananias was led to recognize the mission included Saul, not went on without him.

It's one thing to be a believer; we've confessed that this morning. It's another to know the mission of Christ. In that we might be tempted to claim blindness. If I don't know the mission, I can't be held accountable for it. If I don't participate in discussions or open forums then I won't have to participate in any of the work. That's for someone else, not me. I'm too busy, too inadequate, too shy, too whatever it takes to not do it. We certainly want faith for an hour on Sunday, maybe with our families, but we don't want any mission beyond that. Our sinful tendencies try to keep us blind to the mission so we don't have to do the mission.

Jesus, the Light, removes the blindness towards the mission he gives. This is a mission you participate in because you can't know Jesus and not participate. It's a privilege because Jesus chose you before you could ever choose Jesus. That name of Jesus is the saving name that bought us from our sins. He took away our sinful blindness through the crucifixion and resurrection, both true events that did happen and have lasting effects today. We have been transformed by God's grace to be messengers of mercy.

With our blindness to the mission gone we go about the work of the mission. We are messengers of mercy with a message about Jesus to share. And share we must. We can participate in the discussion; have opinions, care about the work we do as a congregation. We can come and let our voices be heard. We can participate financially, in prayer, with volunteering, or coordination. We might also suffer for sharing Jesus' name. But it's part of the mission. Saul experienced it and he went on to become the greatest missionary of all time. Saul is Paul, the great New Testament missionary to the non-Jews. That means us. This conversion of Saul had an impact on you being a Christian today. Now you are a part of that mission from Jesus.

We sort of expect blind people to have trouble living. They adapt. People born with the blindness of sin like you, me, and Saul have problems with faith. It seems foolish. But God sent the Light, he sent Jesus to live, die, and rise again. Jesus removed the blindness so we know the truth about his life. Jesus removed the blindness so we know his mission. The Light, Jesus Christ, shines into our hearts and removes the blindness.