

John 55 – Spiritual Blindness

08/10/2025

Scripture 1: (Isa. 6:1-13 ESV)

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Scripture 2: (Jn. 9:24-41 ESV)

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner."

He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."

He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"

Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

Sermon:

This story about the man born blind, is a beautiful example and demonstration of the LORD's Providence:

- by Jesus blessing the man through making him whole and giving him sight; and,
- by the LORD, initially, withholding the blessing of sight from the man at his birth.

The LORD gives and the LORD withholds according to His divine will and sovereign plan; according to His own good pleasure. Providence is something which is neither just nor unjust, yet it is a key component in the doctrine of God's grace. Both of these aspects of Providence remind us that God is the only one truly in control, as Job said "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*" (Job 1:21 ESV). This story reminds us that God is Sovereign over all things, in heaven above and on the earth below.

But, through his telling of this story, there is a particular point, made similarly by evidence scattered across the narratives of the other three Gospels', which John sought to make, contrasting this faithful, formerly blind man against the Pharisees and the other Jewish leaders. The Jews: the Pharisees, the Levites, and the Priests; together as a class, all experienced spiritual blindness. They were incapable of seeing and recognizing Jesus for Who He Is. They were rejecting the righteous light of God in preference for the world's wicked darkness. These men were so blind that this formerly blind man rebuked them for being unwilling to see what he could see clearly, "*You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.*". Although the Pharisees were willing to pass judgment against Jesus: slandering Him, and publicly condemning Him as a sinner; he reminds them that the LORD does not heed sinners, and He helps the righteous.

Next, the formerly blind man struck another blow against them, reminding them that "*Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.*". He argued that Jesus did something completely new by this miracle. While he surely did not understand it at the time, the miracle he received was Jesus' sixth Sign proving Him to be the LORD God. Then, he reminded these Jewish leaders that, "*If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.*", but, he was not suggesting that Jesus could do nothing at all. Instead, he affirmed that, if Jesus were associated with demons, then He could not do something new because 1st Century Judaism had a working knowledge of demonology and were practiced in the art of exorcisms.

Another time, the Pharisees accused Jesus of either being possessed or of having consorted with the devil, saying, "*It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.*" (Matt. 12:24 ESV) to which Jesus replied, "*Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they (the demons) will be your judges.*" (Matt. 12:25-27 ESV). Clearly, the Pharisees and Jews knew something about demons and

their capabilities. They understood that demons possessed power but, as great as it might be, it was limited and far less than the power of God. They knew that demons could not create, only destroy; that demons could only corrupt, pervert, or mimic the work of God {as Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8; Exodus 7:8-13)}. They could not do something new.

- A demonic wonder could not give a man born blind the ability to see.
- This miracle of Jesus could only happen through the mighty power of God.

Yet this formerly blind man had all of the evidence he needed to be convinced about Jesus being on God's side, except to know what exactly he should believe about who Jesus is. So, when Jesus told him that He is the Son of Man (John 9:35-37), the man received and believed that answer, and then declared, “*“Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.*”. But the Pharisees, when they were presented with the same evidence as this man, instead declared, “*We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.*”.

These Jews claimed to believe Moses, that Moses was who he said he was, a messenger from the LORD and the mediator of a divine covenant. But, although they said they believed Moses spoke true when he gave their ancestors God's prescriptive Word, “*You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.*” (Lev. 18:5 ESV), they also functionally denied and disbelieved Moses' words, when he also said “*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers-- it is to him you shall listen-- just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. **And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.***” (Deut. 18:15-19 ESV), speaking about the later and greater Prophet to come: Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

It was the recalcitrance of the Pharisees that prompted Jesus's response, “*For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.*”. But Jesus did not now say something new or different. Jesus had already proclaimed this same judgment earlier, in John chapter 3, when He told Nicodemus, “*And **this is the judgment:** the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*” (Jn. 3:19-21 ESV).

This is a matter of light versus darkness, of sight versus blindness.

- Those who prefer the darkness, Christ imposes and effects a judgment of spiritual blindness upon all who refuse to believe. When a person's wickedness and sin blinds them to the truth of God, God “gives them over” to their sin and allows them to fall further and deeper into their sinfulness (Romans 1:18-2:2; 1:21-28). He effectively “closes their eyes” and “blinds them” by removing His providential restraint against sin from them, so that the reprobate may justly suffer the full consequence of their wickedness.
- Those who prefer the light, however, Christ calls out of the darkness and welcomes to Himself. His Holy Spirit opens their eyes and ears so that they may see His light, hear His Call, and respond by coming. Yet, as always, those who receive their sight do so only according to the grace of His sovereign will and mercy alone. Since we are each born into Adam, we are all born spiritually blind. Spiritual sight, like spiritual life, can only be given by a gracious, providential miracle of God, the blessed act of mercy which Christ has bestowed upon all His Elect.

But still, as spiritually blind as they were, the Pharisees were not entirely without understanding. They had some self-awareness because of their knowledge. They certainly understood Jesus well enough to recognize that He meant them. Similar to how a blind person standing in the noonday sun will understand that they are standing in the light, because of the heat, the Pharisees understood well enough to ask Jesus, *“Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?”*

Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”.

But, guilt for what? The guilt He now accuses them of, is guilt for the sin of disbelief: of not believing in Him as the Christ, as God the Son. They were guilty of trusting in their own understanding, rather than in Him, hoping to have a righteous standing before the Holy LORD. They were especially guilty of this sin because their sinful pride made them blind to it.

Jesus's response to the Pharisees may be interpreted and applied to describe several categories of people:

- The Pharisees claimed to have wisdom and understanding in theological hubris, and were justly declared guilty for their disbelief since, although they were blind (Matthew 23:16-31), they denied their blindness, claiming to have sight because they believed that they knew better. Therefore, they were without excuse (Romans 2:1).
- The ordinary Jewish believers of the 1st Century, those who believed and trusted in the LORD God with a simple and earnest faith were also spiritually blind but, they would be guiltless concerning faith in Jesus, until after He had revealed Himself to the world. Their earlier *pisteuo* in the LORD, Yahweh, would transfer as *pisteuo* in Jesus; as evidenced throughout the book of Acts when so many Jews came to faith in Christ or by the “hall of faith” described in Hebrews 11. They were ignorant of their blindness. They neither understood that they were blind nor did they claim to be otherwise.
- The Gentiles, which included everybody else, were utterly blind and lacked all hope. While they had the knowledge of God's existence that is revealed in nature, they were ignorant of who the LORD is *“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”* (Rom. 1:19-20 ESV). They lack His special revelation. So, although they also were without excuse, they were likewise, guiltless of this sin.
 - Yet, even lacking the revelation of God's moral law, they were still guilty and personally responsible for all of their sins, because *“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”* (Rom. 2:14-16 ESV).
 - We even have a legal principle, *juris ignorantia non excusat*, “Ignorance of the law is not excuse.”
 - The Gentiles were guilty for their own sins, and that was enough to condemn them. But, they were not guilty of this particular sin of disbelief since, *“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”* (Rom. 10:14 ESV).
- But, unfortunately, modern Judaism continues to share in the same sin and guiltiness of the Pharisees of whom they are the spiritual successors. {After the destruction of the Temple, the “Pharisee party” was the sect which gave rise to the modern system of Rabbinic Judaism.} Like their forebears two thousand

years ago, they are guilty and without excuse because they should know better, and because they still believe that they know better. Yet still, they continue to stubbornly refuse to believe in the truth of Christ.

- All the rest of the world, everyone who now rejects Christ and the free gift of God's grace that Jesus provides, are also guilty of the sin of disbelief. Like with the Pharisees, their sin of disbelief is aggravated (Romans 7:7-9) and more heinous in the LORD's eyes (WSC 83; WLC 150-151) because the Son of God, God the Son, the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros* is revealed and is being rejected by them.

But, to understand why men like the Pharisees: the so-called “Bible experts” and firm “*Sola Scriptura*”, “Biblical inerrancy”, and “Authority of Scripture” people; did not believe and could not accept Jesus as the Messiah, we need to look back to the era of the divided kingdoms and the end of King Uzziah's reign.

I expect that we are all familiar with Isaiah's vision of the LORD in the Temple, “*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*”, and his commission as a prophet, “*And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."*”. But oftentimes, we choose to end the story there, and fail to understand exactly what it was that Isaiah was actually being commissioned to do.

The LORD specifically charged Isaiah to, “*Go, and say to this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive." Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*”. Usually, prophets of the LORD were commissioned for the purpose of calling Israel to repentance. They were divinely commanded to warn people to stop their sinful, wicked ways and obey the commandments of God instead. Most of the prophets had hope that their efforts would see positive fruit:

- Jonah expected that if he went to Nineveh, as he was commanded, then the Assyrians would repent and the LORD would relent and not destroy them (Jonah 4:2).
- Elijah expected that the prophets of Ba'al would end up being destroyed by the Israelites when they saw proof that the LORD is God alone (1 Kings 18:17-40).
- Micah expected that the people of Judah would return to the LORD with faithfulness and receive all the blessings that he prophesied (Micah 7).

Yet Isaiah {like Jeremiah after him (Jeremiah 7:27)} was warned by God, beforehand, that Israel would not actually heed his words or believe him. Many in Israel would not trust in the LORD or His promises. Yet, their failure and inability to believe would not entirely be because of their own hardness of heart, but because the truth that Isaiah was to proclaim would be intentionally obscured. It would be Isaiah's responsibility to obscure it and protect it from those who will not enter the heavenly Kingdom. This prototype of preaching was later echoed by Jesus through His parables.

“Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?”

And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” (Matt. 13:10-13 ESV)

Therefore, again the LORD providentially gives this wisdom and understanding to some, while He providentially withholds it from others.

So, by using this narrative, John teaches us about this dichotomy of the reprobate and the elect, the blind and the seeing, the darkness and the light, so that we Christians, may be encouraged to more easily believe in and trust Jesus Christ with a simple faith, rather than reject Him in disbelief because we have blinded ourselves with our own wisdom and understanding: the *“wisdom of the wise”*.

The prophet Isaiah is undoubtedly the most significant prophet for New Testament theology, especially in relation to the foretold Messiah. Isaiah is quoted or alluded to around sixty-five times by the New Testament writers¹, a quotation source second only to the Psalms. Isaiah provides the framework for understanding Jesus Christ as the suffering Servant of the LORD (Isaiah 52:13-53:12); as the one who would suffer in His people's place. Yet the Pharisees could not understand it. {The Sadducees could almost be excused, but they not only failed to understand it, they rejected Isaiah (along with all of the other prophetic writings, the *navim*) as authoritative, inspired Scripture.}

Men like the Pharisees, who studied Scripture diligently: memorizing it for them to reference and quote later; hoping that they would gain wisdom and life from it (John 5:39-40); did not understand the divine mystery (Colossians 1:27) because they were more concerned with the worldly, *“wisdom of the wise”* (Isaiah 29:14, 1 Corinthians 1:19-25) than they were with the righteous, *“foolishness”* of God.

They were blinded to the simplicity of God's eternal plan by their theological hubris. They used the LORD's promise of an everlasting Davidic Kingdom given to David in 2 Samuel 7, as the lens to define their hoped for Messiah, following along similar lines to the ancient Judges. But, their focus and view was too low. It was earthly rather than heavenly. They looked for a temporal Kingdom, a temporal deliverance from oppression, a temporal freedom from bondage, and a pleasant temporal life. They should have been looking for the Kingdom of Heaven instead, a spiritual deliverance from the oppression of Satan, freedom from spiritual bondage to our sin, and an eternal life in a blessed Paradise (Genesis 2:8 [Hebrew: *eden* may also be translated as “paradise”], Luke 23:43, Revelation 2:7). They were spiritually blind and justly condemned as the very people Isaiah was sent to (Matthew 13:14-15).

But, even charged with such a hard task, Isaiah also asked the LORD for hope. Asking God, *“How long, O Lord?”*

And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled."”

I do not think that was the answer Isaiah hoped for. It sounds final and complete, as if until not even a remnant would remain, as if it described a terminal end. But the Holy Spirit did not leave Isaiah to despair, He also gave him a promise to hope in, telling him that *“The holy seed is its stump.”* Elsewhere, this “stump” is called *“the root of Jesse”* (Isaiah 11:10, Romans 15:12) and the *“branch”* (Isaiah 4:2, 11:1, 60:21) in Isaiah's prophecy, and we know (with the benefit of the Holy Spirit, faith, and hindsight) that it is Jesus Christ. {Considering the prophecy of “How long?”, our hindsight would also suggest it was fulfilled through the Babylonian exile, as the initial removal, and the later burning as the Jewish War of 70 AD and the finality of the Bar Kochba revolt of 132-135 AD, which terminated national Israel as a Jewish State (theocracy). Now, all that remains is the “remnant” (Isaiah 37:31-32) of Israel, the Church; the faithful Israel of Christ (Romans 11).}

Therefore, humanity's broad spectrum, spiritual blindness is a judgment of God against our obstinate, stubborn disbelief and against our refusal to repent and turn to Christ in faith. Those who refuse to believe are given over, by God, to their sin and an ever descending spiral into depravity.

¹<https://www.simplybible.com/f591-isaiah-in-new-testament.htm>

- The wicked reprobate suffer the loving justice of His divine wrath in the ever deepening darkness of their sin, which they prefer to love.
- The elect enjoy the blessing of God's light through His gracious mercy and love and we rightly respond by giving Christ our thanksgiving, praise, honor, and all of the glory.

Lastly, this miracle of Jesus granting eyesight to a man, blind from birth, is the sixth Sign used by John to demonstrate who Jesus is as the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*. Similar to the first Sign of the wedding wine, this wonder demonstrates Christ's power as our Creator and Provider through the gifting of sight where it had never been. But differently, through Him giving the man sight, Jesus was shown bringing Him out of the darkness into the light, proving Himself as the *Phos*, the “*light of the world*”, as He had earlier declared in John 8:12.

Furthermore, John also uses the narrative of this miracle to physically demonstrate: that our salvation, that our regeneration by the Holy Spirit, that our justification before the judgment seat of God, and that the forgiveness of our sin; are each monergistic, unmerited, and merciful works of God. We are reminded that we can do nothing except receive what the LORD provides us and therefore, be grateful for His grace and mercy.

However, this story is also a cautionary tale and a word of warning for many of us (and I would certainly include myself in this category). Elsewhere, the Apostle Paul tells us that “*knowledge puffs up*” while “*love builds up*.” (1 Cor. 8:1 ESV). He cautions Christians against becoming self-righteous and self-assured with the knowledge we learn, or in the understandings that we achieve.

There are many parallels that may be drawn between the example John gives of the Pharisees and such so-called “ivory tower” Christians; those of us who spend most, or all, of our time in the study of Scripture and theology while neglecting the other necessities of the Christian faith and life, prayer and service, mercy and love. We must be intentionally and purposefully mindful of our own selves to avoid that. Failing to do so, we risk resting upon the strength of our understanding rather than resting on our faith in Jesus Christ. Otherwise, we risk becoming prideful and “puffed up” in the security of our knowledge and risk hearing Jesus declare, “*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*” (Matt. 7:23 ESV).

Pastors, Elders, and Teachers must always remember that we study Scripture not just to know Scripture better, but to better know the One who is revealed in Scripture, Jesus Christ, and to better understand the depth of our need for Him and what He has done for us. We study so that, out of the understanding and knowledge we gain, we may better share Jesus with others: our congregation, our friends, our family, and the world. Our study is not for our own gain, but is intended for your good benefit. However, the studying of the Pharisees was also intended for the same purpose.

Let us pray for one another's faith. Let us pray that we would each enjoy a simple, child-like, and absolute trust in Jesus alone.

Let us pray for our shared wisdom and understanding, that we might better help one another by keeping us grounded and focused on the things which are most important.

Let us pray that we might not walk back into darkness, through good intention or motivation, that the Holy Spirit would continue to always preserve us all in His light.

Let us pray that we each, and that we as a congregation, remain forever grateful to Christ for Him blessing us with spiritual sight. Let us always respond to Jesus with the same trust, obedience, joy, and praise as this man who had been born blind yet was made whole by the *Phos*, the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*, God the Son, the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

AMEN