

He Saw A Man

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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John 9:1

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.

There is one thing we all have in common. We all dread failure. None of us like it and we do all that we can to avoid it. It's innate to us to refuse the burden and the label of a loser, someone who is unsatisfactory, inadequate, and insufficient. Yet, so many of us wrestle with it. It's a common thought that seems to be like an old shadow we can't shirk. It's there. And as much as we try not to acknowledge it, we still know it. We feel so inadequate, so insufficient.

When it comes to serving the Lord, we feel it, perhaps, most pronounced. We have this feeling that we never live up to what Jesus expects. So, whether you experience the dread of failure or whether you feel quite successful, there will come a moment in your life where all your successes will be confronted. You will discover whether or not your successes have been built upon Christ, the Rock who lasts, or upon the flesh, which rots and disappears with time.

In our story, we see a man, who by all estimations was a failure. We don't know his name; all we know is he was born blind. We know nothing of his age or background. Why would I even dare to say this man was labeled by his man as a failure because of his ailment?

In the culture of our Lord, when this man was a child he would have suffered the shame of not being able to play with children. He would have to sit at the sidelines of their games, hearing them but not being able to participate. He couldn't navigate because he didn't have sight to do so. When he became a man, no longer under the care of his parents, he had to defend and support himself and what do we find him doing? We find him at the temple, living on the goodness of others, a beggar.

The temple was a good place to be a beggar because here are people coming to do their "worship." What better way to ease the guilt you might have accumulated for breaking some command, transgressing some way of God, to give something of your resources to someone who had none? It was a capital place to take advantage of people's guilt or sense of failure. This is the way he lived.

There were no aspirations or ambitions for something better. There was nothing better. He was born blind and he was a beggar and that was all he could ever hope for. But the Bible said Jesus saw him. What remarkable words. Words I want you to latch onto this morning and with all hope

believe in. Jesus saw this man, a failure by all estimations, a man who had nothing to live for, a man who could not do anything but beg and live on the mercies of others. But Jesus saw him. Jesus recognized him. Jesus acknowledged him. And He's here to acknowledge you.

All of the weight of your inadequacies, the feelings of failure, the sense of being insufficient: Jesus sees you. Jesus doesn't pass you by so He can pay attention to someone who is strong in the Lord and the power of His might, who seems to be walking close to God when you seem far away. No, Jesus sees you. He noticed this man, of all the people crowding around the temple, Jesus spied out this one and He paid attention to him. He's here to pay attention to you because He cares about you.

I would like to encourage us to pay attention to our lives.

I. What You Curse, You Ought to Bless

Let me deal with three things that often contribute to a sense of failure and inadequacy.

A. Infirmities.

Weakness. I'm talking about natural limitations as this man experienced. What was his natural limitation? He couldn't see. He was blind. That put him in a situation that was bound to make him feel as if he was totally insufficient and a failure.

I wonder what things you curse as infirmities, something physical that you see is limiting you from being able to do what you think you should do. What natural weakness do you have that you can't shake? Maybe you've had it most of your life or maybe it is something acquired of late. Maybe you're not as strong as you used to be and therefore you can't do everything you used to do. Oh, how you curse these things. You long for a better day, a stronger day, a healthier day.

How many of you here this morning has said, even this week, "If I only had the ability to do *that*, if only I could do *this*, things would be much different in my life"? And you curse this infirmity, this natural limitation.

Some of you curse your spiritual infirmity. You don't see it as something that makes you suitable to God but something that actually makes you unsuitable to Him. "My prayer life is so weak, if only I could pray like so-and-so . . ." "If I could understand the Bible better, but I'm so weak of mind I just can't seem to grasp the truths..."

What is it this morning that you would curse as a natural infirmity or weakness?

B. Inadequacies.

Inadequacies are the resources you lack. How many of you have cursed your financial lack? I imagine many of us have. How did you do it? You said something like this: "If I only had more money, I could do _____." Sometimes we say, "If I had more money I could be happier." These are inadequacies you see in your life and therefore we curse them. You feel that you are somehow hindered by these inadequacies.

What about education? How many of you complain and gripe about your inadequate education? Maybe you didn't finish high school, maybe you didn't have the opportunity to go to college and get a better degree and with no degree you don't have a better position in your job and without a better position in your job you feel you don't have a better position in life. You see it as an inadequacy and you often lament not being able to go to college and now you look on your life as somehow inferior to the man or woman who did.

We heard someone testify yesterday at the men's breakfast that they couldn't understand how they, someone who didn't get to go to college, was doing better than some who had graduated from college. They couldn't accept or understand that. Do you feel that way? Do you see it as a curse rather than a blessing?

What other kinds of inadequacies are there in life?

There's the inadequacy of personality. You say, "If I was just more outgoing. If I was like so-and-so, life would be different and I could be a better servant of the Lord. If I had a more charismatic temperament then I could be more useful, but God can't use me in this weakened, shy, reserved condition. If I had a different temperament or personality then..."

What kind of inadequacy do you feel today is holding you back that is creating in you a sense of failure?

C. Iniquities.

Don't we curse our sins? Don't we lament them, grieve over them, wish we'd never done them? Yes, we do. There are fleshly, carnal tendencies that we all wrestle with and we think, "If I could just be free of this lust, if I could just be free of this lust, if I could just be free of this spirit of anger... I can't get ahead in this world because I'm given to anger. If I could just control my anger... but I never have been able to, so I guess I never will."

"I want to be free of this spirit of immorality and lust, but I feel like a prisoner and I can't find any freedom. I've tried. I've promised God. I've wept. But I keep falling back into this sin."

And you curse your iniquities. Beloved, I believe that from this story, from this one verse, "He saw a man, who was born blind from birth," that you ought not to curse these things but to bless them.

You ought not to curse your infirmities, your inadequacies, your lack of this and that. You ought not to curse your weaknesses or even your iniquities. I am not upholding your sin or wanting you to bless your sin, but I am wanting you to see what your sin does. It does many terrible things but there is one thing that's profitable, if you're willing to look, and that is this—it exposes who you really are.

That, my friend, is a blessed thing. You will never find Christ until you first find who you really are. Until you see your desperate need of Him, you will never look to Christ. That's why we still yet struggle with these things. My friend, no, you're not perfect. I know you're not perfect, you know you're not perfect. But it's your imperfections that are a source of God's strength in your life. This is the way you need to begin to look at it.

You need to bless this. You don't need to support your fleshly, carnal tendencies, no. You don't bless your temptations and your giving in to them. But you need to recognize, this is who you are. I am a sinner who needs grace. I am a man who cannot stand apart from the miraculous goodness of God. I need Him. I desperately need Him. My sins remind me of my need of Him. In that sense, we bless them. We do not cherish our sins but we let them preach to us. What do they preach? "Without Me, you can do nothing."

This poor man, he was blind and a beggar. He had no hope. But that was the very thing that caused Jesus to notice him. Once again, of all the hundreds of peoples that day, it was this one blind man that He touched and healed. No other person was healed that day around the temple.

What was it about this one man that drew the attention of Jesus? It was his inadequacies. The very thing he cursed was the very reason God took notice of him. The very thing you say has hindered you all of these years, that's handcuffed you, that's hobbled you, that's kept you from being "all you could be," is the very thing God has allowed to tell you that you need Him. You can't live without Him. This is the very thing you ought to be glad of and boast in God. God has allowed this to prove to you once and for all that apart from Him you are a failure but with Him you cannot fail.

With Him, you must succeed and you will.

II. What You Bless, You Ought to Curse

The very things you think are your strong points; your strengths, talents, abilities, all of these things are actually, most often, the very things that hinder us. Let's talk about this for a minute.

A. Our Abilities, Assets, and Affluence Work Against Us.

A couple weeks ago I was in Canada ministering to a specific ethnic group. One of the things they told me was that years ago they remember when Christianity was heavily persecuted in their home country and the people had very little income and wealth. They were fervent in prayer and zealous in their love for Christ.

But now, this particular country is experiencing economic boom. Financial prosperity is spreading to all the provinces where even common people are enjoying more wealth and income. They said, "Here's what we've noticed. Our people need God because, with their increase of material goods, their fervor to pray has diminished and their love and zeal has also waned."

It happens so often. The very things we pursue and love and bless, the strong points, the good things, are very much shackles and bonds, chains. The very thing we consider an asset, we think it's helping us, our talents and abilities, the very gifts God has given you, are often our nemesis, our enemy, the things that hold us back. Even spiritual gifts can be a curse, not a blessing.

So many churches are divided and fighting and squabbling because people gifted in certain ways demand that everyone be gifted in the same way and it creates division. Other people flaunt and exalt themselves because they have a particular gift and it's the *better* gift, you see.

Have you ever noticed that? Whatever gifts you possess you think they're better than the gifts of someone else. These are things that can be used by the enemy to work against us and keep us from Christ.

Where do I get this? It's not in our text but it's in the last part of this chapter. After Jesus healed this man, the religious leaders, the spiritual "mature," came to Him. They had just excommunicated the blind man from the synagogue. They kicked him out.

And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."

The word *judgment* here is not mean doling out punishment or pain. It's a word that simply means verdict or discerning decision. Jesus is saying, "I've come to discern and make a verdict between those who are righteous and those who are not righteous. Those who don't see, do see, and those who claim to see, will not see." Hearing that, we look at verse 40.

"Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains." (John 9:39-41)

He said, "You see all of your assets, abilities, and affluence, and you think this means you are blessed by God, when the truth is you are lost in your sins and self-righteousness. God considers you as blind spiritually as this man was physically."

How many of us have been following Jesus just long enough to be able to say "amen" to the fact that success has been more than often the tripwire that has caused you to stumble.

Blessings have often hardened our hearts rather than softened them. God's goodness, instead of leading us to humility and repentance, often causes us to vaunt ourselves up on spiritual pride, just like these Pharisees.

Do you remember King Saul in the Old Testament? Saul was so insecure, he thought he was so inadequate, that when it was time for him to be presented to the people of Israel and for the prophet Samuel to anoint him as king, he was hiding. Hiding because he saw himself as so inadequate, such a failure, so little in estimation and value. But once he was made king and God began to bless and gave him some successes, what happened to him? He was lifted up in his own heart and his own estimation and value of himself that he disobeyed God. Notice what Samuel says to him in 1 Samuel 15:17.

“So Samuel said, “When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel?” (1 Samuel 15:17)

You’ve all heard of the great and righteous King Uzziah. He was a godly king and yet the Bible says of him,

“But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.” (2 Chronicles 26:16)

What happened when he was strong and his heart was lifted up? It was to his destruction. The Bible warns us over and over and this is not just an Old Testament principle. What did Jesus say to the church at Laodecia?

Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. (Revelation 3:17)

Our assets, our abilities, our successes, blind us to the truth of who we are. They hinder us from seeing that we are just as needy as the day He saved us.

Saul’s armor never works. All the blessings that God gives you, are never meant to make you think you are sufficient. I know the argument, “But God gave them to me. My wealth is God’s. He gave it to me. My intelligence, God gave it to me. The spiritual gifts, He gave them to me. How can you argue against these things when they’re given by God?”

My point is not that they’re not good. My point is that if you’re not careful in your heart you will abuse them and see them as signs of your own value. You will see them as markers of your own spiritual significance and they will lead to your downfall. That’s the point here. There’s only three things that can lead us to Jesus and keep you there. What are they? Inabilities, infirmities, and failures.

B. Our Inabilities, Infirmities, and Failures that Lead Us to Christ.

Every one of us would like to stand up here this day and just talk about all the blessings and successes we’ve experienced this week and some have, but many of us could not do that. Why?

Because the only thing we could brag and boast in is how we've messed up this week. How we've dropped the ball again. How we've failed once more.

We've come here today lamenting these facts. I understand. We ought to mourn our sins, grieve over them, and turn from them. But you will never turn from your sins, inadequacies, and weaknesses until you come to the point to believe that there's no remedy for your sins and your inadequacies expect Christ. You'll never turn from them and turn to Christ and that's what repentance is.

Repentance is rethinking your thinking about who you are and what you're able to do. It's these things that will lead us to Christ.

It was the man's blindness that attracted Christ to him. Today, what attracts Christ to you is not just His love for you, which is immense whether you were perfect or not, but what gravitates the Spirit of God to you is your neediness. The Bible says that God's eyes are roaming to and fro on the earth on behalf of the hearts that aren't perfect but are loyal to Him. He looks for those who stick to Him. What causes that stickiness is one thing—your absolute need of Him. Your absolute need of His love, His mercy, His strength and power and grace, your absolute need of His activity in your life.

Paul says God loved him enough to make sure he always remembered how weak he was. How did God do that for the Apostle Paul? He gave him a thorn in his flesh.

“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.” (2 Corinthians 12:7)

Did you hear what he said? Why was he given a messenger of Satan to buffet him? Why was he given this weakness? It was because of the surpassing greatness of God revealing truth to him.

A few moments ago, I said something most of you didn't want to believe and couldn't wrap your mind around. Can you see it now? Can you see that the blessings of God are the source of some of your greatest temptations? The more God blesses you, the more tempted you are to be conceited and lifted up in pride and self-sufficiency.

You think the more you become strong in the Lord the less you have to deal with this problem, but here's the Apostle Paul. Some of us, if not most, would say out of all the followers of God, Paul had to be one of the most devout. The more he saw, the more he understood, the more Paul knew he was more likely to shipwreck. So God gave him a constant reminder of how weak and needy he was.

The man's blindness was not a curse, it was the source to Jesus. It was the gateway to Christ. So are all of the things that hurt your heart the most. All of the pain, all of the struggle, all of the doubts about yourself, the inadequacies, the fear of people's approval, the rejection and the

sense of failure, are gateways to Jesus. They are paved ways to Christ and His strength. He, who will never reject you, who will never cast you aside. These things in your life are God's blessed reminder of your great need of Him, protecting you from shipwreck.

Thank God for these things. Embrace them.

On Wednesday night I did a quick rehearsal of how God worked in those 11 disciples. Yes, there were 12, but we remember Judas. When Jesus enrolled those 11 men in the school of faith, His number one object was to set them up for failure. That's how God works. That's not how the educational system works here. We don't set out students up to fail, we want them to succeed. Why do we do that? Because the more they succeed the more confident they will become.

God works just the opposite. He doesn't want you becoming confident in yourself, in your strengths, and giftedness. He sets these men up for constant failure. One day He says, "Let's go to the other side," so they get in the boat, a storm comes, and He goes fast to sleep. They wake Him up straightaway. "Master, don't You care that we perish?" They bail water as fast as they could but it was coming in quicker than they could bail it. Jesus said, "O, ye of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Failed.

Jesus had multitudes following Him. At one point there were 5,000, not counting women and children. Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "You feed them." Philip said, "What's 200 denarii for so many?"

Failed again.

He tells them to get into a boat while He goes up on a mountain to pray. About three in the morning, He comes walking on the water to meet them and they start screaming like girls. Finally, He says, "It's Me, don't be afraid." And Peter says, "Lord, if it's You, bid me to come." Sure enough, Jesus said, "Come on," and what happens? Peter gets out of the boat. One foot is in the wave and the other in doubt. He begins to sink and Jesus reaches out and says, "O, you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Failed again.

The men were constantly arguing about who is the greatest among them. Peter gets complimented by Him when he answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but My Father which is in heaven."

Then Jesus starts talking about His death and what does Peter do? Grabs the Lord. Grabs Him by the arm and scolds Him. He said, "Don't talk like this anymore. This is nonsense. Quit talking

like this.” So Jesus had to say, “Get behind Me, Satan. For you do not care about the things of God but the things of men.”

Failed again.

Jesus goes up to the mount of transfiguration, takes Peter, James, and John, and leaves the other nine at the foot of the mountain. When Jesus returns the next day, He finds the nine involved in a big argument with the Pharisees. Here’s this dad with a demon possessed little boy, and all he wants is his boy to be healed. Jesus says, “What’s going on here?” The man said, “I brought my son to Your disciples to cast out the demon but they could not.”

Failed again.

On the very night He is to be betrayed, He takes a towel around them and washes their feet. What does Peter say? “No way, You’re not washing my feet.” Jesus said, “If I don’t wash your feet, you have no part in Me.” “Well, Lord, just start at the top and work Your way down. I’ll have a bath, then, please.”

Failed again.

After that, do you know what happened? After that display of humility and servanthood, they once again started arguing about who was the greatest. How could you have argued in arrogance and pride after Jesus had so humbled Himself?

Failed again.

Before the arrest, Jesus was in the Garden trying to teach the men that He was going back to the Father, when one of them, Philip, stood up. “Would You show us the Father?” Jesus said, “Philip, have I been with you so long and you still don’t know? If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.”

Failed again.

He tells Simon Peter, “Peter, all of these are going to forsake Me.” Peter proudly replies, “I’m not. I’ll go to prison for You. I’ll even die for You.” Jesus said, “No, you won’t. In fact, you’re going to deny Me three times.” “Oh no, not me, Lord.” What happened? Jesus separated Himself, taking Peter, James, and John with Him and says to them, “You watch with Me. Pray with Me for one hour, because you’re going to fall into temptation, but if you pray you can resist it.” So when Jesus comes back, what does He see? He finds them asleep.

Failed again.

Jesus said, “Can’t you just pray with Me? This is the greatest trial of My life. Can’t you just pray with Me for one hour? That’s all I’m asking for.” He comes back a second time and they’re asleep.

Failed again.

When they arrested Jesus, what happened to those men? What did they do? Did they form a barricade around the Lord? No, they ran to the hills. They tucked their tails and ran as fast as they could. Before that night was over, Peter had denied Him three times.

Failed again.

Did you know that when Jesus was resurrected those men still didn't believe it? They still refused to believe it. Thomas said, "Unless I see the nail prints and put my hand into His side, I won't believe." Jesus appears eight days later and what does He say to Thomas? "Reach out your hand, put your hand in here. Don't be unbelieving, Thomas."

Failed again.

Peter is so miserable, he's so condemned that he wants to go back to fishing. Jesus has to make a special breakfast just for Peter to rescue him out of unbelief and condemnation.

Failed again.

Even on the way to the Mount of Ascension, do you realize the Bible says that on the way some of those 11 men still doubted?

Failed again.

What was Jesus doing? He was bringing them to the awareness of who they really were and what they could do without Him and that's failure every time.

That's what He does with you, that's what He does with me. We don't like it. We refuse it. Satan comes along and says, "No, no, it's just you can't serve God the way He wants you to serve Him. You're an absolute faith. You can't pray, you can't study, you can't read, you can't talk with God or walk with God. This is the way it's going to be." What he deceives you into believing is that you aren't even in Jesus' school of faith, when, in fact, your failures prove you are.

Jesus has you in the front row of His classroom. For every course, every test, He wants you to make an F. He wants you to make an F until you finally realize that you can't do anything but make Fs and say, "Lord Jesus, I need You."

That's the route that God takes His people. That's why, when I read about this poor blind man and read, "He saw a man," it resonated in my soul, "He sees me too." He sees me in all of my inadequacies, my shortcomings. He knows every problem that I have, even the ones He's about to expose and it's okay. It's alright. I'm in His school. He's the Master Teacher and He's going to help me.

To pass His class in the school of faith you have to fail. You have to fail in order to begin to trust. The only way to get an A in Jesus' class is to trust and obey. You will never do that until you have been wrung out of self like an old washcloth. That's what He's doing. He's wringing you out until you can confess, "Oh God, there's no hope for me except you. I'll never be able to accomplish anything, my faith will never rise above a mustard seed, but You said Your strength is made perfect in my weakness. I believe You, Lord. I believe you and I'm clinging to You with all I have."

What happens then? The activity of God begins to flourish. The fruit of the Lord begins to be produced in your life. What you are now cursing you ought to bless and cling to for dear life. That's God hemming you in so that all you have is Jesus. As long as you have you and Jesus, you're not resting in the vine. When it's just Jesus, you're resting.

He saw a man. He sees you and He sees me. Want to be helped today? Don't come trying to be something to Jesus. That will not impress Him. Be like this poor man, having no claim, having no value, but just trusting. Amen.