

## Born Blind

Light was always a mystery to me. Words like “bright” and “dark”, “dazzling” and “shadow” meant nothing to me. Of course I knew the difference between day and night. I could feel the warmth of the sun on my skin. But I couldn’t understand the sun. People said it was the source of light, but they also said they couldn’t look at it. It was too bright. You could see by it, but you couldn’t look at it. That puzzled me.

You see I was born blind. Never in all my 20 years had I even one moment of vision. I have always had eyes. I have eyelids. They blink. Everything seemed normal. But my eyes just didn’t work. I couldn’t see.

But all that changed in a few minutes in one amazing day. As usual my little sister, Tabitha, took me to near the Temple gates, so that I could beg by the side of the street that led up to the Temple. That was all I could do. I couldn’t work. But a lot of people took pity on me. Especially when they heard I was born blind.

Although I couldn’t see, I had my other senses. And I could learn a lot about the world around me by touching and feeling and holding things. I could sense things by smell too. I knew when horses or donkeys or camels came along. I could even smell people. Roman soldiers smelt different from other people. Also, my

sense of hearing was very acute. I could sense when I was in a small place or a big spacious place just by the sound. I could hear people whispering even if there were a lot of other noises. As I sat by the side of road, I would often just listen and I learned a lot from snippets of conversation.

Something that interested me greatly was the information I managed to glean about a man called Jesus. And one thing in particular – he had given sight back to people who were blind. At least that was the story. And some people didn't believe it. Not everyone was in favour of him. There had recently been a great religious festival in the city. It was the Festival of Tents. People gathered from all over the world for a great celebration. They remembered the time of Moses when God had looked after our people when he led them out of Egypt and they had lived in tents in the desert. So people would make rough tents and huts on the roofs of houses and stay in them during the Festival.

Anyway, Jesus was there. He had come down from the North, from Galilee, and he caused quite a stir. I heard about one thing he did on the last great day of the Festival when, at the Temple, there was a great ceremonial pouring out of water that was drawn from the Pool of Siloam. This was in joyful memory of the way God provided for the people by giving them water

in the desert. Seemingly, just at this very time, Jesus stood in a prominent place in the Temple and shouted in a great voice, "If you are thirsty, come to me and drink! If you believe in me, rivers of living water will flow from within you!"

It doesn't take much imagination to realise that he was claiming very big things. He was claiming something greater than the great prophet Moses had done when he struck the rock and water had flowed out for the people. This caused quite a division of opinion. Some said he was the Great Prophet. Some said he was the Messiah. But others argued that the Messiah had to come from King David's town of Bethlehem, whereas Jesus came from Galilee.

There was even division among the leaders. They had sent Temple guards to arrest him, but they came back empty-handed saying, "No one ever spoke like this man!" And some of the leaders spoke up in his defence, but others were opposed, saying he was an imposter.

Then a little later I heard another thing he said that interested me even more. He said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't walk in the dark, but will have the light of life." Those words aroused a great longing within me. People told me that being blind was like being in the dark. When it was dark,

even people with good eyes couldn't see – they needed light. I wanted that light of life.

But not everyone did, seemingly. On one particular Seventh Day (our most holy day) two priests went hurrying past coming down from the Temple and I overheard part of their conversation. They said that Jesus had just made outrageous claims. He said we were all slaves to sin and only he could set us free. He even claimed he was God. He said, “Before Abraham existed, I am!” using the holiest name of God – “I am”.

I didn't have much time to think about all this, because soon after that, some others approached. What caught my attention was that one of them asked *that* question – the one I had heard so many times: “Why was this man born blind? Was it because his parents sinned, or because he sinned while still in the womb?” And they were asking it of some religious leader, because they called him “Teacher”. It was such a hurtful question. It made me feel like a religious problem, not like a person.

But the answer was totally different. Not just what he said, but the tone in which he said it. Although he was really disagreeing with the whole idea behind his followers' question, his tone was kindly; as if he was aware I was listening. But what he said was explosive. He said, “It's not that this man sinned, or his parents.

That is not the explanation of why he is blind!" Well this didn't sound like any religious teacher I had ever heard. They all endlessly debated such questions, but they all agreed that a person's suffering or illness or disability was caused directly by that person's sin or his family's sin. That only made the suffering ten times worse.

But I had no time to think too much about that, because he continued by saying there was an explanation. I had been born blind for a positive purpose. It was so that the works of God would be shown in me! Whoever this stranger was, my heart was warming to him already! But he didn't stop there. He said, "As long as it's day, we must do the works of the One who sent me. Night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

My heart gave a great leap. So this was none other than Jesus! Things began to fall into place. But then he did a strange thing. I heard him spit on the ground and then bend down and mix his saliva with the earth. The next thing I knew he was smearing this mixture on my eyes! At first I was rather taken aback. Most people consider spit to be offensive. But I thought if this gave me back my sight, what did it matter? But nothing happened. Instead Jesus told me I had to go to the Pool

of Siloam and wash my eyes. I wondered why I wasn't healed right away, but I thought, "I've got nothing to lose. If I walk down the few hundred yards to Siloam and wash, and nothing happens, well, I'm no worse off than before. I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. But somehow I felt something would happen.

Tabitha thanked Jesus and taking my hand led me down the street from the Triple Gate of the Temple into the lower city, the City of David, down to the Pool of Siloam. The Pool was fed from the Gihon spring in the Kidron Valley, outside the city wall, by an ingenious underground tunnel through the solid rock for nearly half a mile. The tunnel was created on the orders of King Hezekiah over 700 years ago, when the city was being threatened by the Assyrians.

We went as fast as I could go, but there were crowds around going to and from the Temple, so it took some time, but eventually we arrived at the Pool. It was quiet, because people weren't supposed to draw water or wash, because it was a religious day of rest. But because Jesus had told me to wash, I got Tabitha to lead me down to the water and I splashed water over my face and eyes. Immediately it was as if the water had taken on a new form. Instead of just feeling it on my face and eyes, it was as if I was tasting it with my eyes! I had a swirling stabbing sensation. It was as if I could

hear through my eyes. The splashing, dripping water took on a thousand new forms. I nearly fell with the overwhelming new sensations. I would have fallen, if it were not for Tabitha who stood beside me holding me tight. She said, "What's happening? Can you see?" and I whispered, "Take me home. Something is happening. I don't know what it is!" We had gone a little way and every time I opened my eyelids, it was as if a river rushed in roaring and burning. Then I had an idea. I stopped and turned to Tabitha. I held her face in my hands. Then I opened my eyes. And suddenly I began to understand. I had a new perception of the shape of her face, of her mouth, her cheeks, her eyes, her ears. I could see her face! I saw tears running down her cheeks. And I felt tears welling up in my eyes and her face swam away from me. I looked up and felt the blazing heat of the sun burn my eyes. So that's the sun, I thought, where all the light comes from.

That walk home was the most wonderful time of my life. I gradually was able to focus on various things, and as long as I shaded my eyes from the sun, I began to see clearly.

But as soon as I got home, trouble started. Of course my parents and those who loved me were delighted. They could hardly believe it. I had to show them time and again that I could walk round objects

unaided without bumping into them. But it was all so new and wonderful that I had to reassure myself things and people were real by touching them.

But others weren't so pleased. Some neighbours questioned if I was really the same person who used to beg at the Temple. I had to assure them I was. They questioned me on how I could now see. And I told them that a man called Jesus had made some mud and put it on my eyes and told me to go and wash in Siloam. When I washed, I said, I could see. They wanted to know where this Jesus was, but I couldn't tell them that.

Then some officious people said this should all be reported to the Authorities, so I was taken before some of the religious leaders, and they asked how I had received my sight. I told them exactly what had happened: Jesus put mud on my eyes, I washed and then I could see. They didn't seem satisfied with that. Then there was a disagreement among them. Some said that Jesus couldn't be from God because he had broken the Sabbath by mixing up mud and then telling me to wash. Others said that Jesus couldn't be a sinful man, because he was doing miracles.

They asked me for my opinion of Jesus. After all it was my eyes he had opened. I had been thinking about this quite a bit. "A man called Jesus" didn't seem quite

adequate somehow. He was more than a mere man. I knew that the great men of the past who had performed miracles, people like Moses and Elijah, were called prophets, although none of them had healed a man who was born blind, but I said, "He is a prophet."

They didn't think much of that, and from what they said they were casting doubt on whether I had been blind at all. They then called my parents and asked them if I was their son who was born blind, and if that was so, how was it that I could now see?

My parents said there were two things they were certain of. First, I was their son. Second, I was born blind. But they couldn't tell how I could now see or who healed me. My Dad then said, "Why don't you ask *him*. He is of age. He can speak for himself." At that time they were afraid to say anything about Jesus, because the Authorities had decided that if anyone said Jesus was the Messiah, they would kick them out of the local religious community.

They then questioned me again, much more aggressively. They charged me to tell the truth. They said "Give God the glory. We know this Jesus is a sinner!" I said, "Well, I don't know anything about that. But there's one thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Then they changed tack again. Obviously the facts were rather uncomfortable. So they started back on technical questions about what exactly Jesus had done to me. How was he supposed to have cured me? I got rather exasperated at this point and answered that I had told them about all that already. Why were they asking again? Did they too want to become followers of Jesus? It was only when I said that, that I realised that's what I wanted to be – a follower of Jesus.

At this they became abusive. "You're a disciple of this fellow. We are Moses' disciples. We know all about how God spoke through Moses. As for this fellow, we don't even know where he's from!"

I began to see things very clearly at this point. I said, "Well that's amazing! Here's a man who has done something no one has ever heard of since time began – giving sight to someone born blind. And you don't know anything about him – even where he's from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners. He listens to God-fearing people who obey him. If Jesus wasn't from God, he could do nothing."

They were furious with me. "You are a total sinner from birth! And you're trying to teach us!" And they threw me out – not just out of the meeting, but out of the religious community altogether.

I felt rather dazed. What was to happen to me now? I would now be treated just like a pagan Roman or someone disreputable like a tax collector or a prostitute. Would my friends and family all turn against me? I felt rather alone, although I knew I had done the right thing. I couldn't have said anything else.

It was just then that Jesus found me. I saw this man approaching, but of course I didn't recognise him. I had never seen him before. It was only when he spoke, I recognised his voice – the same kindly but authoritative tone. I wanted to thank him, but he had a question for me. He asked, "Do you have faith in the Son of Man?"

I wasn't sure what he meant. I knew the prophet Ezekiel had been called "son of man", but I also knew that Daniel spoke of a much more glorious Person, The Son of Man, who was with God in the clouds of heaven and whose kingdom was an everlasting kingdom. So I said, "Who do you mean? Tell me so I can have faith in him."

Jesus said, "You're seeing him! He's the one talking to you now."

I fell down on my knees and worshipped him, and I said, "Lord, I have faith in you." I knew Jesus was more than a mere man.

Then he said a strange thing. He said that he had come into the world for judgement – to make the blind

see and the sighted blind. I didn't know what he meant, but some religious leaders who overheard took it on the nose. They understood. They said, "You're not implying that we are blind, are you?"

Jesus said, "If you realised you were blind, you would not still be guilty of sin. It's because you claim that you can see, that you remain guilty."

I thank Jesus that he cured my blindness and made me see – not only physically, but spiritually. It's not just that I can see the light of the sun, but I can see the light of the Son of Man, who is the light of the world.

*Read John 9*