

## INTRO:

This week I came across a set of quotes from a number of famous atheists throughout history/ always good to listen to the perspective of others. But read this/first from Friedrich Nietzsche. He said, “*Faith is not wanting to know what’s true.*” Of course, I disagree, BUT I do commend his emphasis on truth. And then this from Voltaire, “*England has 42 religions, but only...2 sauces.*” Love that! Cuz what he’s saying is, “*who cares about truth/religion if it doesn’t impact your daily life/British food...still bland!*” And as I read those it kinda crystallized for me this tension we seem to be wrestling with these days, which is between, you might say, what’s right and what works - truth and experience. And of course, we all tend to lean to one side or the other. Within our culture right now we seem to be leaning toward experience, where sadly, we’re not so much concerned if something is actually true and intellectually credible, just whether or not it meets our needs. ***Have you felt this?*** Where “what’s right” feels ***contentious-to***/even at odds with “what works?”

Today we come to a passage in John - one you probably know if for no other reason than some of it’s words are actually cited in the hymn Amazing Grace. And my understanding is, you can’t live in Southie if you HAVEN’T heard Amazing Grace on bagpipes, at least once. But just this is a very famous passage IN WHICH we get the 6th of 7 miraculous signs Jesus does IN John. This one, Jesus - again on the Sabbath - healing a man who was born blind. BUT instead of there being celebration FOR this man after he’s healed, there’s actually a ton of INTERROGATION. From his neighbors, his parents, and ultimately the Pharisees...And what it’s ALL gonna show you, because remember: for John these signs are emblematic of what God is really like - that’s why He calls em “signs.” So what it’s gonna show ABOUT Jesus, is that with Him and really ONLY with Him are truth and experience NOT ***contentious*** but actually quite ***complementary!*** And in BEING complimentary, there’s some specific applications for you.

## PASSAGE READING:

So if you would, let’s stand for the reading of God’s word... **(PAUSE RECORD)**...**(START RECORD)**

## TEXT:<sup>1</sup>

So we all know what a placebo effect is ***right?*** Yeah, in short, it’s when, for one reason or another, you’re lulled into believing that something is making you well when IN-FACT it’s not actually dealing with the issue...When you approach life EITHER saying “*well, it’s true, who cares if it works*” OR “*as long as it’s true for me...*” - meaning with either a fundamentalist or relativist perspective - you risk falling prey to a kind of spiritual placebo effect, in which you can easily think you’re good spiritually/good with God, when in fact you might not be...And as I mentioned, what this story you just heard read, shows us is that: In Jesus, you find truth and experience are not ***contentious***, but ***complementary***. That when you come to Jesus as the truth

<sup>1</sup> Works consulted:

- “Who Is This Jesus?” - May 1, 1994 - John 9; Luke 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians - Timothy J. Keller, *Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (NYC: Redeemer Church, 2013).  
 - “The Man Born Blind: Seeing Jesus - Feb. 23, 2014 - John 9:1-7,35-38 - “The Man Born Blind,” *Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014-2015* (NYC: Redeemer Church, 2014)  
 - Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King! With Study Guide*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 136.

and the source of all truth; that's not devoid of deep, personal experience. But TOO, your ability to enjoy deep personal experience, can't be separated from seeing Jesus AS the truth!

Cuz look **First** at the fact of Him being **True**: Throughout this whole account, John highlights this. For example, you see in **v.5**, Jesus says, *"As long as I'm in the world, I'm the light OF the world."* And you remember, He said that same thing back in **ch.8** during the feast of booths/that "festival of light." "Light" of course, being Jesus' metaphor for ultimate truth - Jesus as the One who, like light, not only shines forth what's true, but also exposes what's false. So Jesus is AGAIN claiming to be the source of all truth, such that REALLY, His healing of this "blind man" is simply an affirmation OF that. So you got JESUS attesting to His truthfulness.

But also notice you've got the uniqueness of Jesus' MESSAGE attesting to His truthfulness. Cuz you see in **vv.2-4**, Jesus reiterates that He's the "light of the world" ON THE HEALS OF being asked by His disciples, *"whether it was THIS man's sin or his parent's that brought about his blindness."* **You see that?** So the disciples are clearly operating off of a specific spiritual assumption. And if you look down in **v.34** you see it's the SAME assumption off of which the Pharisees were operating too, given that they deem this man to have been *"born in utter sin."* ... **What's the spiritual assumption that essentially everyone is holding to?** Karma or more generally works-righteousness. That IF there's a God, He's playing a game of tit-for-tat with people, whereby if you do good/good comes to you. But if you do bad - even bad in the womb or bad through your parents - then it was assumed bad would come to you. That's Karma **right?**/ that's works righteousness... You understand, in every religion/really every philosophy in the history of the world/with the exception of Christianity, that's what you get! You get a teacher, a guru, a founder, who BASICALLY says, *"here's how to live. Here's what goodness and morality look like. And if you follow these tenants, principals, practices, pillars, THEN you'll be blessed/you'll find happiness, even be saved."* Even in Christianity, the ASSUMPTION/wrongly so, is that Jesus was simply a great moral teacher. And that if we would only heed his advice, we'd be able to establish better lives. But as C.S. Lewis says, *"to be sure, it's true, if we took Christ's advice we should soon be living in a happier world."* BUT *"we don't even have to go as far as Christ. If we did all that Plato, Aristotle or Confucius told us, we should get on a great deal better than we do."* The problem is, he says, *"We don't!"* We've never followed the advice of the great teachers. So as Lewis says, *"what makes us think we're gonna begin now? Why are we more likely to follow Jesus than any other teacher? Because He was the BEST? That actually makes it even LESS likely that we'll follow Him. Since if we can't take the elementary lessons, why do we think we're gonna take the advanced ones?"*<sup>2</sup> **The point** is: We need something more than religious/karmic/moral advice, and what makes JESUS' message so unique is that it isn't ABOUT karma, morality, achievement or betterment being the way. Rather, it's about... Grace! That's why you see, Jesus flatly rebukes the disciples for their karmic thinking. Not to mention heals and pursues this blind man basically outta nowhere. Cuz **vv.2,6** say that *"as Jesus passed by He sees this man."* And we get no indication that there's a lot of conversation. Jesus just picks up some mud, spits on it, touches the guy's eyes, and he's healed. And as **v.35** shows, after the

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<sup>2</sup> Quotes loosely paraphrased from C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*

newly healed man is excommunicated JESUS seeks him out. It's ALL grace, such that what John wants you to see is that the fundamental message of Christ, which is in effect enacted here with this healing - is one of TOTAL grace! That JUST like this blind man, you too are offered healing, forgiveness, salvation not AFTER you decide to worship Jesus, but BEFORE! Grace! And it's that grace which makes Jesus' Message/the Gospel so unique, and in that way truthful!

BUT then finally, it's not just Jesus' message or even His testimony about Himself; it's also the response of the blind man that, I think, shows something of the truthfulness of Christ here. Cuz to be completely frank, Jesus healing this guy, cost this guy... a TON! As commentator Bruce Milne says, *"Perhaps the implications of... 'seeing' were not uniformly positive. Begging was, after all, a fairly lucrative source of income, and this man certainly comes across in the story as a person of considerable initiative and likely therefore to 've done well IN his begging."* So there's the literal cost of, perhaps, a significant loss of income now that he's no longer blind and begging. BUT there's also the obvious relational costs. You see in **vv.8-9** that he kinda becomes the "trending topic" among his neighbors **right?** And not really in the best way. They're kinda questioning him/lookin' at him sideways. I've never been trending or TRENDY for that matter, so I can't really relate, except to say, I CAN imagine there might be a decent amount of feeling vulnerable, exposed, perhaps even fearful with everyone now looking at him differently. And not just his neighbors but his parents and the Pharisees too, BOTH of whom, you see, reject him in different ways. The Pharisees in particular literally have him excommunicated from synagogue worship. Which, understand, in a fiercely religious culture, that was an EXTREMELY serious penalty. It meant, as Milne says, *"a far-reaching reduction of social as well as religious life and, in their eyes, forfeiture of standing with God."* Think about that! The church-hurt of that!... And YET, this guy not only seems ok with it; he's defiant and bold AGAINST it. You see in **vv.13-34** - when being questioned by the Pharisees - he just straight-up tells em how it is: **V.15** says, *"Jesus put mud on my eyes, I washed, (now) I see."* Then in **v.17**, calls Jesus *"a prophet,"* which he HAD to know would infuriate the religious establishment. And then finally, in **v.27**, even gets sarcastic. Says, *"Look, I told you (what happened)/you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You wanna become his disciples too?"* In other words, this guy's willingness/even eagerness to follow Jesus at great cost SHOWS something of the truthfulness OF Jesus.

Cuz ya know, one of the great validations of Christ, is that countless people throughout history - like this man/certainly the Apostles after him - have been willing to suffer a tremendous amount of persecution/many even martyrdom, for the sake of believing in and following Jesus! Now I don't know about you, but I'm not doing that when I KNOW something's a lie. People don't suffer and die for lies. They suffer and die when they've become convinced to their core about the truthfulness OF Jesus! You have to consider that along with both Jesus' testimony about Himself, and also the uniqueness of His Gospel message!

But **Second**, you have to consider that while Jesus might true; He's not true in an esoteric sense. He's true in a PERSONAL/IMPACTFUL sense. That's what the inclusion of all these details are trying to show you. Details like Jesus passing by/even in some ways seeking this guy out; touching his eyes to heal him; certainly the fact that Jesus sought this man out after the fact...

Even the way Jesus speaks to this man's heart by asking if "*he believes in the Son of man.*" Those are all personal encounter kinds of details. Cuz you understand, Jesus doesn't interact with you from a distance/with lectures in a classroom. He interacts with you personally/wants to have a PERSONAL relationship with you. And that's BECAUSE with Jesus truth and experience aren't *contentious*; they're *complementary*.

Cuz see Friends, ultimately the Gospel isn't truth OR experience; it's both! On the one hand, it's the truth that JUST LIKE this man, who was blind from birth, we too are naturally spiritually blind beyond our ability to fix ourselves. That's why at the end, in **vv.39-41** there, Jesus says that those, like the Pharisees, who THINK they see - which is to say, you think you're good-to-go, perhaps because of your IQ, beauty, your successes, or even just how hard you work in life - according to Jesus, you're actually blind. - That as hard as it may sound - especially to those of us in a city like Boston - in many respects, the MORE brilliant, successful, and advantaged you are, the more at a DISadvantage you'll be when it comes to the Gospel. And vice versa. Cuz those Jesus says, who KNOW they're blind - those who know you can never get it together enough to please God; never clean up your life enough to deserve His forgiveness and love - that's actually the sign that you SEE the truth of the Gospel. You SEE the reality that/*listen*: the people who are saved by Jesus aren't necessarily the good ones, but rather the ones who admit they're bad and need a savior. While the people who are lost aren't necessarily the bad ones, but simply the proud ones. THAT'S the truth of the Gospel! That forgiveness, salvation, spiritual growth, LIFE is offered to you solely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. That's the truth.

And you say, "*yeah I believe that/I believe Jesus died on the Cross for me.*" Great. **Let me ask you:** Do you REJOICE in that?...Like this man, do you WORSHIP BECAUSE of that. Cuz of course, a lot of people agree that we need salvation/even that we're deeply blind and need Jesus' help. But simply assenting to that is not the same as that coming home and becoming beautiful to you. The Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards put it perfectly. He said, "*There's a difference between having an opinion, that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace.* (Just like), he said, *there's a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness.*" Likewise, you can have a rational judgment about the truth of the Gospel, BUT unless you have a sense of it's sweetness, because God's grace and unmerited love has come home to you; then it's just that: It's just truth without experience when BOTH **truth AND experience have to collide, lest you fall prey to a kind of spiritual placebo effect!**

SO a couple **Applications** for you: **First**, since truth and experience are *complementary*, ya have to PERSONALLY pursue and hold-to the TRUTH of Christ found in the Gospel, even if and WHEN it costs you. So **on the one hand**, that means if you're here this morning - and maybe you're new to the idea of not just letting Jesus occupy the center of your life, but really DELIGHTING to have Him occupy the center of every ASPECT of your life - cuz of course that's worship - but up til now you've kinda just been circling AROUND that idea. Maybe thought about it, but not really investigated it. Or maybe you've been connected here, but you're kinda in-and-out unless it's just absolutely convenient for you, **let me encourage you:** You have

to pursue this even if it costs you convenience, time, comfort, shuffling your family's schedule, anything. Cuz frankly, you can't risk missing it. I've shared this illustration with you before, but it's like if you get a letter from the IRS stating that you owe \$500k in back taxes. And you think to yourself, "*That can't be true. I don't even make \$50k.*" And it may NOT be true. **But you know what?** Ya better know for sure. Ya better at least take the time to investigate - be here to learn and reflect each week; be connected with others, like in a Missional Family, who are investigating it too. Because if there's a chance the Gospel's true and you miss it. Or it's true and you never experience it, cuz you fail to appropriate it; it'll cost you more than inconvenience.

But then **on the other hand**, it means that if you're here this morning - and maybe you HAVE investigated it/you've come to the conclusion that the truth about Jesus really is, as He says, "*the Son of Man...come into the world, so that those who don't see may see, and those who see may become blind.*" You believe that and so like this man, you're all the time asking, like he does there in **v.36**, "*how do I believe you Jesus*" - believe you for my marriage, my singleness, in my job, with my finances, kids, my sexuality, politics, all of it!...If that's you, **can I encourage you:** HOLD ONTO THAT! Make a commitment, for example, to be here each week to be encouraged TO hold onto that. COMMIT to life within a Missional Family so that you have people around you who can remind you OF that. Join us for prayer on Fridays and Sundays to ask God to help you WITH that. If you're married, work with your spouse to carve out some time to be able to personally and consistently study God's Word. If you're single, get with other young singles in the church and do that together! I know we've got a number of what we call DNA Groups - groups of 3 guys or 3 gals who meet to Discuss, Nurture and Apply what they're learning from the Scriptures! Whatever it is though, HOLD ONTO THE GOSPEL! Because here's the thing: Jesus never promises life is gonna be smooth. It wasn't for this blind man. He lost a ton! Rather, what Jesus promises, is as He says in **John 16:33**, "*In the world/so long as you're alive - you WILL have tribulation. But take heart; He has overcome the world.*" HOLD ON TO JESUS and CONTINUE holding onto Him, not because He immediately meets all your needs, but because He's true. And in BEING true, He'll meet all your needs.

And maybe you're thinking, "*Yes, I wanna hold on to Him, but how do I know if I am? Cuz life just feels so up-and-down.*" Very simple: You're like the blind man, which is to say, two things: **One**, you're growing in delight for Christ. Cuz you see: in **v.11**, the man initially identified with Jesus by simply calling Him "*Jesus.*" But then in **v.17** he moves to call Him "*a prophet.*" Then in **v.30**, he says, He's not just a prophet, He's the One who "*opened my eyes.*" In other words, "*He's MY prophet.*" Then in **v.33**, he says "*He's from God.*" To FINALLY in **v.38**, he "*worships!*"... You know you're holding onto Jesus/the Gospel when - even though it's costly and filled with ups and down and steps forward and steps back - you're nevertheless learning to trust and rest in Christ for every area of your life.

But then **Two** and perhaps more importantly, you know you're holding onto Jesus...when you understand that it's really not ABOUT you holding onto Jesus, but about Jesus holding onto you! After all, this man didn't seek out Jesus to be healed; Jesus sought Him out. He didn't do anything to get Jesus TO heal Him; Jesus did everything. He didn't even search for Jesus after

the fact; Jesus searched for Him. All this man did was believe and worship... Which incidentally, MIGHT be why you're experiencing some form of hardship or suffering today - because as Jesus says in v.3 of THIS man's suffering, it was "*so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*" **And what's the work of God? John 6:29**, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*" THAT is what Jesus produced in this man out of his suffering. And I believe it's what He wants to produce in you too... So HOLD ON! When hardship comes - when you feel blind and beaten: maybe stuck in your circumstances like this man who was blind from birth. Or even blind and disobedient cuz some sin has rooted in on you - DON'T QUIT! Rather, let that "blindness" cause you to ONCE AGAIN come to grips with the fact that: No matter how blind you/or ANYONE is, the light of the world is both fully able and fully willing to break through in the most personal of ways. He's holding you! Cuz with Jesus truth and experience/ what's right and what works, aren't *contentious; they're complementary*... And perfectly so!...  
**Let's Pray:**