

LESSON 289

LIGHT AND LIFE

Related Scripture: John 9:18-34

KEY VERSE: "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—John 8:12.

Lesson Scripture: John 9:1-7, 35-41

Introduction:

Natural light differs from darkness only to those who have natural eyes able to see. Likewise spiritual light is meaningful only to those who have spiritual eyes or spiritual understanding (Eph. 1:18) able to discern spiritual things. (I Cor. 2:14.)

However, one great difference here among the fallen descendants of Adam is that natural vision is normal, while spiritual vision is abnormal. That is, most men are able to see natural light through natural eyes, but only the born again, a tiny minority of mankind, are gifted with spiritual vision.

Consequently the persons born in natural blindness are generally convinced by the overwhelming testimony of those who can see that there is such a thing as natural sight—something they have never experienced. But the spiritually blind seem to themselves to be normal; they are surrounded by others as blind as themselves. Those who claim spiritual vision are the ones who seem abnormal, speaking of things that seem strange and improbable to most men.

In view of these facts, it is not at all surprising that, unlike the naturally blind, the spiritually blind are unaware of their destitute condition, and commonly refuse to believe that there is or even to consider that there may be such a thing as spiritual light and spiritual sight. Only the grace of God, only the power of His word and His Spirit, can make effective and convincing the weak and scattered testimony of a small minority of believers amid the general darkness or blindness of this world.

Our lesson this week records the miraculous healing of a case of natural blindness. It illustrates the much greater miracle that God works every time He brings a lost soul from the darkness of sin to the light of the gospel. For an outline we note:

1. Blindness, John 9:1-3
 - a. Congenital condition, 1
 - b. Common confusion, 2
 - c. Concise correction, 3
2. Beneficence, John 9:4-7
 - a. Work in the world, 4, 5
 - b. Working a wonder, 6, 7
3. Belief, John 9:35-38
 - a. Question of faith, 35
 - b. Quintessence of faith, 36, 37
 - c. Quickness of faith, 38
4. Belligerence, John 9:39-41
 - a. World and reverses, 39
 - b. Words and refusal, 40
 - c. Wickedness remaining, 41

Notes on the Printed Text:

Blindness, John 9:1-3.

As already stated, natural blindness can illustrate for us the more pitiable condition of spiritual blindness. We may further note that natural blindness is a handicap only in this present world; but spiritual blindness, if not cured by the grace of God, means darkness and misery for eternity.

Congenital Condition, 1.

"Blind from birth" describes the spiritual condition of us all. There is no such thing as an innocent baby: "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." (Ps. 58:3.) Men do not become sinners because of unfortunate environment, nor can any amount of education or culture make them anything but educated and cultured sinners. We were born with a sinful nature, and only a miracle of divine grace can restore us to the image of our Creator.

Common Confusion, 2.

While it is true in a general sense that all the afflictions and woes of men are a consequence of sin, it does not by any means follow that every particular affliction is a direct consequence of some particular sin. Apparently the disciples of Jesus shared the common confusion of thought on this point. Their supposition that the man might have sinned before he was born was as erroneous as their supposition that his blindness might be the result of some sin by his parents.

Concise Correction, 3.

Jesus corrected their speculations with a few words. This man's blindness was not a result of any particular sin, either by him or by his parents: God had permitted it to provide the occasion for the miracle that was soon to be manifested.

Beneficence, John 9:4-7.

To the eye of faith, all creation manifests the goodness and glory of the Creator. Yet this evidence is sadly marred and obscured by the effects of sin. Only in the life and ministry of Jesus can we behold the glory of divine beneficence without any taint or distortion of human sin or failure.

Work in the World, 4, 5.

Man's lifetime in this world is short; so it was with the Son of Man. Let us learn from Him the limitations of time: there will not always be a tomorrow, so far as this life is concerned. When life's short day is ended, our work here will be ended too. Jesus is the true Light, the Source of all light; we are only light bearers, light reflectors. If we are to reflect the light from above in the darkness of this world, we must do it while we are here.

Working a Wonder, 6, 7.

Perhaps some of us need to learn from the example of Jesus to avoid stereotyped patterns of procedure. It seems that He was able to work wonders without dependence on any uniform formulas or rituals. We may be sure that the means used were always appropriate to the individual case.

Belief, John 9:35-38.

Faith that availed for physical healing was not sufficient for spiritual life. The man born blind, perhaps because of his strong desire for natural sight, had believed in the healing power of a stranger enough to obey orders; and because that Stranger was Jesus, his faithful obedience obtained the sight which he longed for. But he had a much greater need for spiritual sight, and for this he needed a spiritual faith.

Question of Faith, 35.

Verses omitted from the lesson text tell us something of the man's gratitude and courage in testimony to the extent of his knowledge and experience. But a natural belief in the existence of God is not enough; a natural faith in the greatness and goodness of a miracle-working man is not enough; saving faith in a spiritual sense must come to rest in the very Son of God. The vital question of faith is not what or how much we believe; but whether we believe in the Son of God, the Jesus Christ of the Bible.

Quintessence of Faith, 36, 37.

"How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Ro. 10:14.) This man was privileged to hear from Jesus Himself the identity of the Son of God, but whether we hear it from Him or from someone else testifying the word of God concerning Him, the quintessence of saving faith is to get acquainted with Jesus; or, as the Bible puts it, to receive Him. (Jn. 1:12.)

Quickness of Faith, 38.

To a heart touched by divine grace, faith can come in a flash. "Trying to believe" is an insult to God. When we get our thinking untwisted, we can see how ridiculous it is to doubt the word of the God that cannot lie. (Titus 1:2.) As this man demonstrated, to believe Jesus is to worship Him.

Belligerence, John 9:39-41.

If sinners will not come to Jesus, it is because of their natural belligerence against all that is good and true and holy. As Jesus Himself put it, "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (Jn. 3:19.)

World and Reverses, 39.

A world turned away from its Creator, a world in which even the religious reject the revelation of God, needs to be reversed under divine judgment. In the redemptive work of Christ, preliminary to eternal judgment, sinners who acknowledge their spiritual blindness are given spiritual sight; while the self-righteous, who pride themselves on their religious vision, will be abandoned to the blindness of outer darkness.

Words and Refusal, 40.

Hearing the truth does not help those who will not believe it. (He. 4:2.) The Pharisees understood the words of Jesus well enough to know that He was rebuking them; their question, "Are we blind also?" was rhetorical.

Wickedness Remaining, 41.

Complete blindness of understanding and conscience, such as that of infants and idiots, has no moral responsibility. The Pharisees, however, though spiritually blind, had sufficient understanding to be morally responsible, even boasting of their religious discernment. Therefore, since they would not repent, their sin remained.

Key Verse:

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—John 8:12.

Given some understanding of light as a symbol of spiritual life and of darkness as a symbol of spiritual death, the verse does not seem too difficult to understand. For true believers the important question is, How closely are we following Him? The closer we stay to Jesus, the brighter the light in which we walk, the happier the life we live.