

Stubborn, Scared, Sgoinneill

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 May 2023

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Well, today we are going to continue the study that we've been doing through John's Gospel. John is one of four accounts we have of Jesus' life, all of which gives us an insight into the teaching that he gave, the conversations he had, the miracles that he performed, all leading up to the great events of his death and resurrection.

In our morning services, we've been working our way through John, kind of passage by passage, and today we've come to chapter 9. We're going to look at the whole events of this chapter that I can read for us, but let me just read verses 24 and 25 again as we begin.

So for the second time, the Pharisees 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's a sinner or not, I don't know.

One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. This is a fascinating chapter and I want us just to look through it together, focusing on three main parties that we read about.

We've got the man who is healed. We've got his parents and we've got the Pharisees. And we're going to look at each of these in turn, start with the Pharisees, then we'll look at the parents, then we'll look at the man, and we're going to do it under three headings, which are also our title.

[1 : 23] Stubborn, Scared, and Scunyel. The last word is a Gallic word, and if you're not familiar with it, don't worry, I will explain what it means when we get there. We're going to work through these one by one.

Before we do though, I just want to say a couple of things about the chapter as a whole that I think are important for us to recognize. First of all, as you read this whole chapter, one of the key things that John wants us to see is the powerful contrast that's been set before us between the blind man and the Pharisees.

So you've got this man who is born blind, and he actually ends up seeing by the end of the chapter. And he stands in sharp contrast to the Pharisees who are very, very confident in the fact that they are the experts they can see.

But by the time you get to the end of the chapter, what you discover is that spiritually speaking, they are the ones who are actually blind. And this is actually a pattern that you frequently see in the Gospels.

You've got the religious experts who everybody thinks are they the ones who know it all, and yet actually they are blind to what's right in front of them. And the people who are kind of on the fringes of society or who are kind of written off by the more religious elite, these are the ones who actually see.

[2 : 49] These are the ones whose eyes are opened. And it all reinforces something that Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11. This is just setting before us the principle of what we're seeing in John 9.

Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. Now, little children there doesn't just mean weak kids. It just means people who are not experts.

And the amazing reminder that this is giving us is it's highlighting the fact that the Gospel is not elitist. The Gospel is not elitist.

It's not for the kind of experts. It's not for the people whose lives are all squeaky clean. It's not for the people who know the Bible inside out, forwards and backwards. It's not for the people who we would sort of initially think, oh, they are religious experts.

[3 : 47] It is for them, but it's not just for them. It's for everyone. It is never elitist. So if you're ever coming to church and thinking, I don't know it all.

I don't understand it all. I am not an expert in any of this. In fact, if anything, I'm probably the most clueless person in the room. If you are here today feeling like that, then you're exactly the kind of person that Jesus is talking to.

You're exactly the kind of person that the Gospel is for. So that's just a crucial lesson that we have set before us here. There's a second crucial lesson that I also want to highlight just before we dig into the passage.

And that is in regard to a piece of crucial teaching that this passage gives us in relation to how we explain suffering.

When difficult things happen in life, when things go wrong, when we suffer or when other people around us suffer, when that happens, we instantly and instinctively want to find an explanation.

[4 : 51] You think, why is this happening to me? Why is this happening to them? And this passage gives us an example of something that humans do a lot in order to find that explanation.

The thing that we are very prone to do in trying to explain suffering is that we make up silly, simplistic, spiritual sums.

Silly, simplistic, spiritual sums. You see it right there in John 9, 1 and 2. Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples said to him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind.

Here is the silly sum that they make, man plus blindness equals sinner, either him or his parents. In other words, what they are saying is like, here is a guy whose life has gone to pot, there is something wrong, he is suffering, something is going bad, clearly he has done something or his parents have done something.

It is their fault and he is getting what he deserves. And this is that kind of very simple sum that gets made. And we might never make that kind of sum in relation to somebody who was blind or had another disability today.

[6 : 17] But we still make these kind of sums ourselves as we try to explain things that have gone wrong. So maybe a job hasn't worked out, maybe we had plans for something and they have not come together, maybe we have attempted a project and it wasn't very successful, maybe somebody around us has not met our expectations in terms of their Christian walk or whatever it may be.

And we put things together into very simple but what really are very silly sums. So I am going to give you some examples. You might have church member, they haven't been to the prayer meeting for a while, therefore they are backslidden.

That is the kind of sum you can just jump to conclusion with. Here is some more. This service is coming up. I am not doing great in my Christian walk equals I should stay at home.

I have got a new job plus it is not going very well. Equals I have done the wrong thing. I have disobeyed God, He is punishing me. I have invited someone to church plus they have said no equals God can't use me, I am not going to do it again.

Here is three more examples. Our church tries to reach out over the course of a year plus no one is converted equals God is not with us, God is not happy with us.

[7 : 36] Or a church is different from us plus they are getting new members and new people coming equals they are better than us. Or last of all another Christian gets the job or the husband or wife that you wanted plus you feel gutted equals God must prefer them to me.

We make these kind of sums all the time and we are doing it to try and explain why things have gone wrong. But the result of that is that we use these sums to judge either other people or to be honest more often ourselves.

We add something up to conclude that we have just stuffed up or we are just not worth it or whatever. We use these things to judge others or to judge ourselves.

Two crucial things to say. One, nothing is ever that simple. And that is the big problem with these kind of sums.

They are just trying to reduce someone's life and someone's experience into a three part sum. Nothing is ever that simple and that is what makes these sums so silly.

[8 : 53] To take for example the church that is different from us. You pick a church maybe it is on the mainland or somewhere it is different from us. Here is what that sum really looks like for that church.

It has grown in recent years. It is involved in outreach. It has maybe got financial challenges. It has a strong history. Maybe it has got some unhelpful traditions. Maybe it has some really good traditions.

Maybe some people are very friendly. Maybe some people are very not friendly. Maybe some members have fallen out. Maybe some people their gossip too much. Some people are very hospitable. Maybe some people like their minister. Maybe some people are not so keen.

All that plus a million more things adds up to what? Only God knows the whole story. And that is true of everything. Whether it is a church, an individual, whatever it may be.

Nothing is that simple. Do not make silly sums. Second crucial thing to say is this. Grace does not make sums.

[9 : 54] So grace is the word we used to describe God's outpouring of love and blessing on people who do not deserve it. Grace is undeserved love.

And grace does not make sums. There is one word to describe all these kind of sums that we may go do this, this plus this plus this equals that. There is one big theological word that describes it all.

It is the word legalism. And that is the idea that if we do stuff, if we do certain things, it will all add up to determine whether or not God likes us.

So if you do this or don't do this, if this happens or if this doesn't happen, it will all add up and that will tell you whether or not God likes you. That is legalism. It is not the gospel.

It is heresy. Because grace does not do sums. I am going to show you the sum for my life and for your life.

[10 : 50] I have made bad choices. Plus, I have been selfish and jealous of others. Plus I have cared too much about what other people think of me. Plus I have tried hard in life but some things have not worked out.

Plus I have struggled with temptation. Plus there are loads of things I do not know or understand. Plus I have made mistakes that I deeply regret. Plus I am scared that I will make more mistakes. Plus sometimes I am lazy and I have not done the things I should have done.

Plus I am proud and arrogant at times. Plus I have judged people who are different from me. Plus I have hurt other people with my behaviour. All these things add up to the conclusion that God says, I still love you.

That is the arithmetic of grace. Because none of us come before God saying, I have got everything sorted and it all adds up so therefore you can love me. God loves us in spite of all our failings because grace does not do sums.

And all of that is just a demonstration of the incredible, beautiful work of God and it is a massive reminder to us all not to make these kind of sums about ourselves or about other people, not to judge others or ourselves, not to use these silly, simplistic spiritual sums.

[12 : 05] John 9 is a fantastic chapter for just booting that nonsense out the window forever. That was the things I wanted to say to start with.

Let's just go through our headings one by one fairly briefly. We are going to start with stubborn and this is describing the Pharisees or maybe more accurately a section of the Pharisees that were not going to accept the reality of this miracle.

And if you look at the passage more closely you will see in verse 16 there was division among the Pharisees. Some were like, well maybe he is the real deal and others were like, no absolutely not. We are focusing on those who are like, no way.

They are determined not to accept that Jesus did this miracle, determined not to accept that he is the Messiah, God's chosen King.

In it all, they are stubborn. And the reason that they are stubborn is very, very simple. They start with a conclusion.

[13 : 12] You see this again and again and again. They start with a conclusion. Verses 13 to 16, the man has been brought to them. He tells them that Jesus has healed them but they have started with a conclusion.

They have got the conclusion that he is not keeping the Sabbath. This man is not from God, you can see it right there, but he does not keep the Sabbath. That is their conclusion. What the guy says makes no difference.

Exactly the same thing happens in verses 17. They start to think, well maybe he was not even born blind anyway because this miracle cannot have happened. And so they are starting with a conclusion.

Jesus cannot be from God, therefore this man cannot have been born blind. So they go and get his parents but then they do discover that he was born blind. And so they interrogate him again and they say, okay, well tell us what really happened because it obviously wasn't a miracle.

Tell us what really happened. And they said to him, we know that this man is a sinner. So you need to tell us what really happened because we know that your original story is not true.

[14 : 12] They are starting with a conclusion again and again and again. They are stubbornly refusing to accept anything that doesn't fit that conclusion.

And it all culminates with the end where they just say to the guy, you are just an absolute piece of dirt. And they throw him out. And so the Pharisees start with a conclusion and that conclusion shapes everything that they think in terms of what's been placed in front of them.

Now you look at that and you discover it and you think, how can they be so stubborn and foolish? But the scary thing is we do this all the time.

And we do it in many, many areas of life where we start with a conclusion. Great example is football. I approach every Karlawee game, every Aberdeen game and every Arsenal game with a conclusion we should win.

That's my conclusion. We should win. And that's why if a referee does a terrible decision against my team, absolute disgrace. You're furious.

[15 : 27] If a terrible decision is in favour of your team, it's just football. Just got to accept these things. Because my conclusion is shaping what's happened. We all do that, don't we? It's like one set of rules when it's going in our favour and another set of rules when it goes against us.

People do it in politics. They pick their party. I'm going to vote for that party no matter what. It doesn't matter what they're promising in terms of their policies. People do it with those who are different from us.

This is more serious. That happens in loads of different ways in life. It can be in terms of race. It can be in terms of nationality, in terms of sexuality, in terms of religion, even in terms of denomination.

We see people that are different from us and we start with the conclusion that they are a threat. And we think, I'm on edge with this person.

Humanity's done that so many times. We can frequently judge other people because we start with a conclusion and then we just stubbornly refuse to accept anything that might contradict it.

[16 : 29] But we don't just do this to judge others. This is really a point I want to highlight more because I think it's probably more likely to be the issue for all of us. We so often start with a conclusion and we use that to judge ourselves.

And this can have a massive impact on our relationship with Jesus. No matter where you stand before Jesus, whether you are a committed follower of Jesus, not sure or that you're not there yet at all, we can start with conclusions and we use them to judge ourselves.

Here are some examples. I'm not good enough. So many people start with that conclusion. When it comes to being a Christian, when it comes to following Jesus, when it comes to being part of a church, I am not good enough.

And that's the conclusion they start with and everything they hear is filtered through that conclusion. You can also start with the opposite conclusion where people will say, I'm okay as I am.

And that's the idea that, well, you know, this is kind of nice, it's good, but it's not that serious since it's not that serious, it's not that big a deal.

[17 : 44] I don't really need to kind of make any commitment to Jesus. It'll be fine in the end. And you can start with that conclusion, but it's the conclusion that prevents you from ever actually taking seriously what the Gospel is saying and it prevents you from ever actually following Jesus in the way that he calls us to.

Other conclusions are becoming a Christian will spoil my life. That's the conclusion that stamps not yet over any thoughts about whether or not you're going to follow Jesus.

And I have met a lot of not yetters in my life. They're like, yeah, I know I need to become a Christian. I know that this is really important. Not yet. Why are you saying not yet? Because you're starting with the conclusion that it's going to be rubbish and that you think, oh, I need to get the good part of life out of the way first and then I'll sort things out.

Not through. Absolutely not through. But people do that. And I think that's the conclusion I'm not ready to become a member of the church. That's the conclusion that kind of that just plagues people who on the inside are believers.

They absolutely are believers, even though they don't know everything and they can't really explain it very well and they feel they feel like they don't have all the answers. And I think but yet I do love the Lord.

[18 : 59] I do believe even though I don't understand everything, but I could not become a member because I'm not ready. So you start with that conclusion and it just pours water on any of those times when you think, yes, actually, you know what, I really would love to just be a committed member of the church.

A final example is this isn't going to work. There's a conclusion that people start with very often, especially in terms of church work.

You know, you think, let's do this. Let's reach out. Let's have this event. Let's try that. Let's start this. Let's do this. It's not going to work. And that just leaves a church passive.

And we're just thinking, well, what's the point in inviting a neighbor? What's the point in praying hard for conversions? What's the point in hoping for revival? It's just not going to work.

It is so easy to think like this, to stubbornly hold onto a conclusion and for that conclusion to shape how we interpret everything that's going on around us. Now, we look at this and we think, okay, I am holding these conclusions.

[20 : 08] And we're all holding these conclusions. And we think, okay, I'm holding these conclusions. Do you know what? That's not true. You are not holding these conclusions. These conclusions are holding you. They are trapping you and gripping you and stopping you from following Jesus and thriving.

And that applies to all of us. Whatever stage we're at, a silly conclusion can stop us from seeing what's right in front of us.

That's through the Pharisees. It can happen to us as well. And we need to make sure we don't do it, that we don't start with the wrong conclusions. And so what conclusion do you need?

What conclusion do you need to start with? Well, there's loads that we could say, but if you want a conclusion that you can start with and that you can live with and that will absolutely be a brilliant blessing in your life, then start with the conclusion that Jesus has in verse 3.

[21 : 15] They see this man born blind. The Pharisees are jumping to their silly sum conclusion that he's a sinner or his parents are a sinner. And it's all their fault. Jesus says, no, no, no, this is the conclusion that you need to start with.

This guy is an opportunity for the works of God to be displayed in him. And whether you're a Christian already or whether you become one, in all the situations we face, that's the conclusion you've got to start with.

That this, whatever situation you're facing, this is an opportunity for the incredible work of God to be displayed in you. So if you're sitting here today and you think, I don't feel good enough, that's an opportunity for the work of God to be displayed in you as he takes you every step of the way.

Because that's the only way that Christians follow the path of discipleship with Jesus helping them every step of the way. You feel perfectly okay. You think, well, I don't think I really need Jesus.

That's an opportunity for God to open your eyes, to see the seriousness of sin and to see the incredible generosity and healing power of the gospel. You think to yourself, I'm not ready yet?

[22 : 23] Or you think it's going to spoil my life? That's an opportunity for God to show you that he will do all the work in you that is needed. And if you think, you know, this is not going to work, that is an opportunity for God to blow our minds with everything that he is capable of.

Whatever we're doing, whether it's Christians, whether it's someone seeking, whether it's someone who's stepping out in the first steps of discipleship, may God grant that we always start with that conclusion that this week is an opportunity for God to display his mighty works among us.

Second word, heading is scared. And that's referring to the man's parents. We read about them in 18 to 21. The Jews didn't believe that he'd been blind and received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight.

And they said, is this your son who you say was born blind? How then does he now see? His parents answered, we know that this son is, this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes.

Ask him, he's of age, he'll speak for himself. Now that doesn't sound too bad to start with. He feel like they're just saying, well, we don't really notice. But what you discover in the next verses is a really helpful explanation that comes in the brackets and the parenthesis from John that tells us why they said this and the answers there.

[23 : 53] They said these things because they were afraid of what the Jews might think. And in particular, they're afraid that they're going to get chucked into the synagogue.

You've got to remember that that would have been a hugely social controversy. He would have been talking about them. And so you have these parents who are kind of distancing themselves from their son who was born blind.

And it's all because they're scared. They're scared about how the Jews will react. Now right there is one of the biggest issues that we face in our churches and in our communities on the Isle of Leos.

We're afraid of fear of people being scared of what people think, being scared of what people will say.

And we all have to think about it because it affects all of us. Whether we're Christians or not Christians or not sure if we're Christians, it affects us all. It affects us as a congregation.

[24 : 59] We can be crippled with fear of what other people will think of us, what other churches think of us, what other people will say about us. As individual Christians we feel that we have to put on this front whereby we always just look perfect and we seem fine because we're terrified of anyone discovering our weaknesses.

As the quiet secret believer of whom I know there are some in here. You don't want to profess faith because you don't want people to talk about you. As the person who's seeking Jesus and who knows there's something missing in my life and I need, I need this.

I need hope and peace in the face of death. I need that thing that's missing in my heart. At the same time you're haunted by the fear of how your family or your friends or your colleagues are going to react.

All of us are affected by this and it's especially through when you live in a rural area because everybody knows everybody. I want to ask you two questions under this heading of scared.

Who's opinion are you scared of? Who's opinion are you scared of? Now I'm asking all of us that question. I asked myself that question.

[26 : 09] Are we scared of people we work with? Are we scared of people we don't know particularly well but who we know might talk about us? Are we scared of people in our families?

Are we scared of people that we really look up to and we're worried that they might not like us so much? Who are you scared of? I am certain that every single one of us can think of a person whose opinion we are nervous about.

As you think of that person or as you think of these people I have a second question for you. Why are you allowing that person to have so much power over you?

Why should that person have so much power over you? Whoever it is, why?

And the key point is this, that power, that respect, that fear that we constantly give to other people's opinions is actually something that we should only ever give to God.

[27 : 28] Look at verse 22 again. It says they did it because they feared the Jews. They feared the Jews. I look at my own life and I can think of so many times where you can finish that sentence.

They did it because they feared the, because they feared the. In my life it's been classmates, it's been friends, it's been football teammates, it's been colleagues, it's been peers, it's been popular people, it's been people who have been senior to me and I said certain things or didn't say certain things or did certain things or didn't do certain things because I feared the classmates or I feared the colleagues or I feared the whoever.

And every time I've done that I have given them a place in my life that should only ever be given to God. And I wanted to be the case that you can look at my life and look at the things that I do and the things that I don't do, the things that I say and the things that I don't say and you say he did that because he feared God.

Because his is the opinion that matters. Now that doesn't mean that we're terrified of God. And the Bible says fear of God, it doesn't mean being terrified of God. And neither does this mean not caring less, that we couldn't care less what other people think and feel.

We absolutely do care about what other people think and feel in the right way. What it means is that we put God first, that we care about his opinion more than any other and we do not let fear of people stop us from listening to Jesus and to his call to follow him this week and for the rest of our lives.

[29 : 13] Time is marching on, we're nearly done. Third heading, skonyal. Now some of you know what skonyal means, some of you are thinking I don't know what skonyal means. Skonyal is a Gaelic word.

I think that originally maybe, I was looking it up in the dictionary, I think it kind of maybe originally means like tidy and neat kind of maybe in a sixth sense. But the way it's used, we use it to refer to something like brilliant, excellent.

In one dictionary it said cool and so a child paints a nice picture or you get the peaks finished or you get an awesome new door at the front of your church and you say hasshinskonyal.

That is cool. So skonyal means just awesome, brilliant, very cool. And I chose that word because when you look at this man, you see something that is just skonyal.

It is brilliant what happens to him. And it applies in two ways. First of all, it applies because he can see spiritually. And I don't want us ever to lose sight of the fact that here you have a man who was born blind.

[30 : 21] I want you to imagine that you were his parents. Imagine the day he was born. You have this son born and you see this precious life and you think he's safe, he's safely born. And you see this safe as well, remembering that this is 2000 years ago when birth was a hugely risky thing.

You think, oh my child is safe, I've got a son. And then you realise, I don't know if it's after a few hours or after a few days or after a few weeks, you realise there's something wrong with his eyes.

You can't see. And there's like a darkness and an emptiness in his eyes.

And you realise this boy is going to grow up, he's not going to be able to play, he's not going to be able to work, he's not going to be able to live independently, he's not going to be able to see a sunset or a flower.

He is going to be on the margins of society. And in fact in people's eyes everyone's going to think he's a sinner or we're sinners because he's blind.

[31 : 21] Jesus comes along, spits on the ground, makes some mud, puts it in his eyes, says go to the pool of Solomon wash and the man comes back seeing.

And that is just so cool. Imagine just being there. Imagine knowing this guy. Imagine being the guy, the joy, the wonder, the amazement of that moment for this man and for everyone who witnessed this miracle.

You read this chapter, you think about it. You imagine being there and you say, Hashan skanya, it is so cool. But it's not just cool because he can see physically.

What's really cool is that he can see spiritually. And that's really the key point that I want us just to wrap up with as we finish. That's the key point that we're seeing here.

All of Jesus' physical miracles are pointing us to spiritual realities. And as you see in this chapter, we're being told that Jesus has come to open our eyes.

[32 : 26] He's come to show us the truth. He's come to reveal God, just like we were saying to the kids earlier on. He has come so that we can see. As he says himself, he's the light of the world.

He brings light so that we can see things we could not see before. And the really scannual thing about this man's spiritual sight is that it's all so beautifully simple.

And that's the point I want to drive home to you as we finish. It is all so simple. They come and they say, what happened? He says, he put mud on my eyes.

I washed and I can see. They interrogate him later on and he says, I don't know if he's a sinner or not. The one thing I do know, though I was blind, now I see.

And when he meets Jesus at the end after being chunked out by the religious leaders, Jesus says, do you believe? He says, Lord, I believe. And it's all so simple.

[33 : 26] And that simplicity is just scannual. It's just so cool because the guy understands how the gospel works. He recognizes that Jesus is the one who does everything.

He doesn't contribute anything. He just listens to Jesus' voice and follows what he says. It's all so beautifully simple. The guy doesn't try to answer every complicated question.

He doesn't try to explain how Jesus did it. He doesn't care what people think of him. He just has this beautiful, simple testimony. I was blind. Now I see Jesus is Lord and I'm a believer.

It is just so beautifully simple. And it's such an important thing for us to remember. The gospel is beautifully simple.

And don't ever think that it isn't. Please don't think that it's this monumentally complicated thing that you have to understand all of it before you become a Christian, that you have to be an expert in this, that, and the next thing before you can follow Jesus.

[34 : 29] You don't, none of that's true. It's just simple. It's such a beautiful, simple thing. I want to finish with an illustration about my mother's garden.

My mother's garden is absolutely stunning. I know I'm biased, but I would say that my mother's garden is the most beautiful and spectacular garden in the whole island. It is amazing.

And you could go into that garden and you could think, it's so complicated because it's incredible. The colors, the different parts, oh, it's amazing. I can't really describe it.

You could go in and you could think, oh, it's so complicated. But do you know what? It's actually all very, very simple. My mother's garden is seeds, soil, warmth, water, and the dedication of a loving gardener.

It's all it is. And it produces something amazing. The gospel is the same. It's the most spectacular thing that we can ever think about, but it's actually very simple.

[35 : 33] Jesus has come to save us. He's come to save you. And He's done that because He loves you. He actually loves you.

And He's calling us all to trust and follow Him. That's all He asks of us. We trust Him and we follow Him this week and for the rest of our lives. And that life of discipleship as we follow Jesus and as we are a family together in church is so, so scunny.

And if you cannot see that, then you have to pray this one prayer today. Lord, open my eyes.

Lord, open my eyes. Amen.