

Date: June, 27, 2021

Series: *RBC Camp 2021 – Destination Dig*

Title: *Seeing is Believing*

Text: John 9

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For almost as long as the Bible has existed, there have been skeptics who have said it is nothing but a book of fables, stories about things that never really happened. But over the centuries, as archeologists have done their thing, they have dug up example after example of proof that the stories in Bible are true. In fact, no dig has ever disproved a Biblical account.

I want us to begin this morning by digging through history to show you what I mean. So, get out your mental spades!

- For decades many “scholars” said there was never a real King David, that he is a work of fiction like England’s King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

But in 1993 people digging at TEL DAN (by the way, a “tel” is basically a pile of rubble where ancient people once lived), the people digging at Tel DAN unearthed a stone slab from the ninth century B.C. proving King David was indeed a real person. The inscription on the slab was carved by an Aramean king who claimed to have defeated his two southern neighbors, the “*King of Israel*” and the “*King of the House of David*.” The stone, did not preserve the actual names of the kings involved in this war, but most scholars believe that the inscription refers to the defeat of Jehoram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah by Hazael of Damascus.

Let’s keep “digging.”

- The Old Testament books of Ezra and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles both report that Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed the exiled Jews in Babylon to return to Israel after he conquered Babylonia.

But historians doubted this. They couldn’t believe that a dictator like Cyrus the Great would allow his labor force to up and go home. Then archaeologists dug up a nine-inch clay cylinder from 539 B.C., that not only tells about Cyrus’ victory over Babylon, but his unexpected decision to allow Babylonia captives to return to their own ancestral homelands and rebuild their temples just like the Bible says.

I could dig up archaeological examples like these all day, but I don’t want you to get your Sunday clothes too dirty, so I’ll mention just one more.

- The ninth chapter of the Gospel of John tells about a time Jesus healed a man born blind.

It says that Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud, put it in the man’s eyes and said, “***Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.***” The man did and was healed. Up until 2004 Biblical critics said this healing was pure fiction because no such pool had ever been found. But that year workmen doing repairs on a large water pipe south of Jerusalem’s temple mount, discovered two ancient stone steps. Archaeologists were called in and after finding coins in the plaster around the steps dated back to the time of Jesus’ life and death, they say these steps undoubtedly led down to the Pool of Siloam, validating this account in John’s gospel.

I’ve dug up all these archaeological facts because for the next four days, the 80+ children who will be attending RBC Camp and their 50+ adult teachers and workers will do some digging of their own as they look into the life of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. I know they will “unearth” some amazing things this week---things that proved the truth of the Bible---prove that God can be trusted---that He keeps His Word.

One of the “digs” in their curriculum focuses on this miracle at the Pool of Siloam. But, they are skipping it because I’m covering it this morning---so in a sense, you are all part of this year’s RBC CAMP!

Sorry, you don’t get a T-shirt!

Okay, before we “dig into” our text, let me give you some of the context. This miracle took place shortly after the Feast of the Tabernacles in the early fall of 29A.D. Jesus and His followers were entering the temple area when they saw this man who had been blind from birth.

I thought of this blind man a couple days ago as we visited the Spy Museum with our grandkids. There was a sightless employee at one of the exhibits. Joel accidentally knocked a framed display off the wall, nothing broke and we put it back. But this employee heard what happened and called out to see if he could help. I mean, he obviously knew his assigned area and used his other senses to guide guests like us. I’m sure he enjoys being a part of the Spy Museum staff.

Well, in Jesus’ day there were no opportunities like this for sightless people. I mean, this blind man outside the temple entrance was doing the only thing blind people could do for a living back then: begging.

I’ve enlisted some of our RBC Camp children to read our text this morning.

Follow along now as they read the ninth chapter of John’s Gospel. Pay attention and I’m sure you’ll agree that whereas this man could not see—his mind worked perfectly. He was an amazingly intelligent individual who had obviously been listening to the teaching that went on inside God’s house. Take your Bibles and follow along as I read. Please, if able, stand in respect for God’s Word as our children read.

John 9:1-41

**1 - As He [Jesus] went along, He saw a man blind from birth.**

**2 - His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”**

**3 - “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.**

**4 - As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him Who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work.**

**5 - While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”**

**6 - After saying this, He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes.**

**7 - “Go,” He told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.**

**8 - His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?”**

**9 - Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”**

**10 - “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.**

**11 - He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So, I went and washed, and then I could see.”**

**12 - “Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said.**

**13 - They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind.**

**14 - Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath.**

**15 - Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”**

**16 - Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So, they were divided.**

**17 - Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about Him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.”**

**18 - They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents.**

**19 - “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”**

**20 - “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind.**

**21 - But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.”**

**22 - His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders—who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.**

**23 - That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”**

**24 - A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this Man is a sinner."**

**25 - He replied, "Whether He is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"**

**26 - Then they asked him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?"**

**27 - He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become His disciples too?"**

**28 - Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this Fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses!**

**29 - We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this Fellow, we don't even know where He comes from."**

**30 - The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where He comes from, yet He opened my eyes.**

**31 - We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.**

**32 - Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.**

**33 - If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."**

**34 - To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.**

**35 - Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when He found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"**

**36 - "Who is He, Sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in Him."**

**37 - Jesus said, "You have now seen Him; in fact, He is the One speaking with you."**

**38 - Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped Him.**

**39 - Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."**

**40 - Some Pharisees who were with Him heard Him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"**

**41 - Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.**

Thank you kids! Okay, everyone keep your Bibles and Bible apps open as I share the truths I "uncovered" this past week as I dug through the Scriptures.

Here's the first truth I want you to note.

### **1.) Some of the greatest discoveries are ABOVE ground.**

The discovery I'm referring to is this blind beggar, a man who was not hard to find. No digging required! I mean, he was right there every day. But only Jesus noticed him---even those religious leaders who passed by him literally every day as they went in and out of the temple didn't see him. I mean, day after day, month after month, year after year, he had sat in this same place begging as people walked by---most of whom were too busy to even turn in his direction.

He was in essence invisible and this poor individual was used to that. He EXPECTED people to overlook him because he had spent his entire life being ignored.

- He was blind—and people found that depressing.
- He was a beggar—and people would find that demanding.
- He was in their minds, a product of sin—which meant they would find him disgusting.

No doubt mothers would walk by with their children and say things like: *"Don't look at him; don't listen to him; don't pay any attention to him. He is sinful. He wants something, and he doesn't deserve it."*

So, it really was out of the ordinary for Jesus to stop and look at this poor man whom everyone else ignored. And when He looked, our Lord DISCOVERED more than a blind beggar. He SAW the hurt and disappointment of a lonely man who lived in dependence and anonymity. Jesus SAW the hopelessness of a life lived in endless night that would never know dawn. And as we'll see, Jesus discovered an incredibly intelligent, bold individual---an amazing "find" as people go.

Jesus was always doing this, always discovering things and people that others missed.

- He SAW a widow, whom no one else would have given a second glance, and observed that her faith was so great she gave everything she had to God.
- He SAW amazing little children one day that adults in the crowd were trying to make disappear.

- He SAW the disciples' doubt and fear on a stormy boat ride.
- He NOTICED when James and John argued about who was to be the greatest disciple.

I imagine there were times when Jesus' disciples wished He didn't SEE so much.

And as He was walking along on this particular day, Jesus SAW this blind man. He stooped down in front of him, spat on the ground, made a "poultice" of sorts out of the dirt and placed it on the man's eyes and told him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man did as instructed, and instantly he could see!

Raise your hand if you want me to tell you why Jesus used dirt and spittle.

I don't know why!

I mean Jesus could have healed him with only a word and we don't know why He didn't. I'm thinking our Lord took this extra time required to do it this way to give this man something he had never had before—undivided attention. And you know ATTENTION is a precious thing. We all crave it and will do almost anything to get it. It's why we can't avoid talking into a live microphone. It's why social media platforms like *Facebook* and *Instagram* are so successful. It's why teens dye their hair and get tattoos and wear their generation's version of weird clothes.

We all yearn for the ATTENTION of others. We all have this inborn need to be noticed, recognized!

We all need others to turn their faces our way and see US—SEE what we are going through. The attention of others is a precious thing to everyone. No wonder we say that we don't just "give" our attention. We "pay" it, as if it were currency of some sort. It is a valuable thing to know that someone notices—really SEES—what we are going through in life. It hurts to be "invisible" like this blind man.

Is there an invisible person in your life? Is there someone God is calling you to DISCOVER?

- A child or spouse you've been too busy for?
- A friend you've taken for granted?
- A neighbor who is hurting?
- A panhandler you pass every day?

You know, the discovery I like best as I "dig through" this particular healing is the way it reminds us that God pays attention to us. Nothing we go through is hidden from His omniscient gaze. When the Psalmist exclaimed, "**O Lord, You have searched me and KNOW me...**" he was rejoicing in the knowledge that God cares about even the smallest details of our lives.

He NOTICES US!

This is why the writers of Scripture speak so often of God's FACE. For example, Numbers 6 records that familiar priestly blessing that God Himself taught the Hebrew people. Remember how it goes? "**The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His FACE to shine upon you. The Lord turn His FACE toward you and give you peace!**"

To "**turn your face**" toward someone is to give that person your whole-hearted, undivided attention. It is not the casual listening of someone whose thoughts are elsewhere. No, it's the same thing as saying: "*I have nothing else to do, nowhere I'd rather be. I am fully devoted to being with you.*" Well, this is the kind of attention God LAVISHES on us.

And notice, God not only turns His face toward us. When He does, His face "**SHINES.**" This word, "**SHINES**" conveys an image of delight. It is the face of a proud parent beaming while his child runs in a track meet, or says her AWANA memory verse, or reads Scripture in worship, or walks across the stage to receive that diploma. This is how our loving Heavenly Father looks at us!

Everything about you is NOTICED by God.

So, can you imagine how wonderful that “invisible” blind man felt that day as the SON of God stopped, noticed him, and PAID HIM ATTENTION?!!! I think being healed was secondary. In any case, digging into this chapter of the New Testament helps us see that some of the greatest miracles in life are in plain view.

Here’s a second truth found in an “excavation” of this story.

## 2.) You can be BLIND and not know it.

I mean there are several sighted people in this story who were oblivious to what was going on.

### A. The first were Jesus’ own disciples. John tells us that when Jesus noticed this man, it forced him and the rest of the disciples to stop and see him as well.

When they did, they asked Jesus a question: **“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”**

Now this is a strange question. I mean, some sicknesses are caused by willful sin and even today babies are born deformed or suffering in some way due their parent’s sin of drug or alcohol abuse. Why would the disciples have thought this man CAUSED his OWN blindness as a fetus?

They asked this odd question because in those days there was a belief that it was possible to be born guilty of a specific sin. For example, if the mother-to-be worshiped in a heathen temple, the unborn child was judged to be guilty of idolatry as well. People actually thought it was possible for a fetus to willfully sin.

Plus, back then people believed in a cause-and-effect relationship between suffering and sin which also led them to believe that wherever there was suffering, sin was involved. Somehow it made people feel better if they could think that a suffering person deserved his suffering.

And we tend to be like this even today. As I said a couple weeks back, when we see that a person is suffering because of their own sinful actions, we feel less of an obligation to help them. Many go so far as to cease to PAY ATTENTION to them. We close our eyes to them and their needs because we assume their suffering is their fault.

So, understand, these disciples saw this man, but they did not see what Jesus SAW. Instead of a blind man, they saw the object of an interesting theological discussion.

And let’s stop for a moment to make sure we understand Jesus’ answer to their theological question. Look at verse 3. Jesus said, **“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”** It sounds like God caused this man to endure years of blindness so that one day Jesus would heal him and bring glory to His Father. But that’s not a proper translation. You see, in New Testament Greek there are no punctuation marks and the people who put the commas and periods in THIS verse for us English readers got it wrong. This verse should read, **“Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this [just] happened. [New sentence] So that the work of God should be displayed in His life I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day.”** So, Jesus was not saying that God caused this man’s blindness. He was simply saying that healing him would display the power of God for all to see.

In any case, the disciples COULD see. Their eyes functioned at peak efficiency but their attempt to justify the way they ignored this man blinded them to what Jesus saw. And they were not the only sighted—but blind people—that day.

### B. The Pharisees were blind as well. They were blinded by their own sense of self-righteousness.

Think about it. God did a miracle that day! A man who had been born blind was given his sight!

But, all these religious leaders could see was that someone had broken their precious man-made Sabbath laws. And Jesus broke their man-made rules in two ways:

**First of all, He made clay.** It was forbidden by the Pharisees to do any mixing or kneading on the Sabbath.

**And then second, He healed on the Sabbath.** According to the Pharisee's rules, you could receive medical attention on the Sabbath only if your life was in actual danger and even then, it could only be for the purpose of keeping you from dying, not for improving your condition. That had to wait until AFTER the Sabbath.

The underlying philosophy of all these man-made rules was that by paying close attention to the law and providing all the right sacrifices it was possible to be a sinless person. In this way, they actually encouraged self-righteousness.

The purpose of God's loving laws was to show us our sin, our need of Him. The Pharisees had devised a complex religious system where it was possible to be above God's law and really not need Him anymore. The Sabbath was supposed to bless mankind. It was supposed to bring man closer to God but with their burdensome rules it actually pushed them away from Him.

In his book, *Hustling God*, M. Craig Barnes tells the story of a wedding that started as a disaster, but took a nice turn about halfway through. The day the blessed event was to occur dawned stormy, with wind and rain pounding against the church windows. The rain was so bad that some of the main streets had to be closed due to flooding, which meant that some of the out-of-town guests were hopelessly lost on side streets and never made it to the ceremony.

Also, for some strange reason, about half the candles on the candelabras would not light. The flowers didn't arrive, so the church's wedding hostess put together something from the previous week's sanctuary flowers, which had a lovely brown tint around the edges. Then the real flowers showed up 15 minutes into the ceremony but undaunted the florist marched down the center aisle and arranged them right in front of the bride, groom, and soggy guests. The couple had worked so hard to get this ceremony just right but in spite of all their efforts their unforgettable day had become, well unforgettable. Of course, there are usually a few tears at weddings but at this particular wedding they weren't tears of happiness. Barnes writes, *"I made a few adjustments to my homily and talked about how fitting it was to have an imperfect wedding for what was always going to be an imperfect marriage, just like every marriage. I pointed out that all of the resolve to get unimportant things just right was about to mess up the important thing, namely, weaving two lives into one flesh. I gave it my best shot, but still I couldn't talk the couple into seeing what was really important. I could still see the anger and hurt in their eyes. But the moment they turned and faced each other, to say their vows, everything changed for them. The groom's eyes watered up with tears of joy as, for the first time on that day of mishap after mishap, he really SAW his beautiful bride. All of his frustration melted away, as he finally beheld the joy of his life. That got her crying, which made me cry as well."*

This couple almost missed the blessing of their marriage because they were so concerned with getting the ceremony right. And these Pharisees had missed the blessing of a weekly Sabbath-union with God because they were so pre-occupied with getting the letter of the law right. So, these Pharisees looked at this formerly blind man, but they did not see a reason to rejoice. They saw only a threat to a religious system that propped up their own sense of spiritual superiority. They were too busy attending to their own status to pay attention to God Himself, Who was at work in their midst. They could see---but they were BLIND. And, of all people they should have seen something ELSE in this healing. They should have seen that Jesus was the Messiah because their own prophets had clearly foretold that the Messiah would do miracles like this. Isaiah 35:5-6 said when the Messiah came ***"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."*** But these "experts" in Jewish law, Jewish prophecies, were blind to this.

C. And so, by the way, were this poor man's parents!

They were summoned to testify that this was their son and that he had indeed been born blind. But they were so afraid of losing their position in the religious establishment that they too seemed blind to the blessing that their boy had received.

But, we need to be careful in our haste to criticize all these blind people, for we too can be blind without knowing it. We can become so blinded by our self-righteousness that we don't SEE our own sin and need for God's forgiving presence. Or, in our haste to point out the sins of others, we forget our need to regularly confess our own shortcomings. We become blind to the fact that even though people sin and suffer because of it, they still need our compassion. I mean, just because you are a follower of God doesn't mean you are immune to spiritual blindness.

Listen to Isaiah 42:18-20: ***"Hear, you deaf; look, you blind and see! Who is blind—but My servant—and deaf like the messenger I sent? Who is blind like the one committed to Me?"***

Due to our sinful nature, we have to work at seeing the way God sees. Otherwise we will miss out on joining Him in His work.

Here's a third thing that can be uncovered by digging into this Scripture.

### **3.) The greatest things in life are not SEEN with your eyes.**

The true miracle of this story is that this man not only had his physical eyes opened. His spiritual eyes were opened as well. He saw the most important thing in life. He saw Who Jesus was. After his clever discussion with the Pharisees—in which he came out on top, they did what his parents feared they would do to them. The Pharisees cast this formerly blind man out of the temple. When Jesus heard he had been cast out He went and found him.

I like how Chrysostom puts it. He says, *"The Jews cast him out of the temple, and the Lord of the temple found him."*

Well, when this man met His healer He saw the most precious "sight" in life. He saw—realized—that He was the Christ of God and put his faith in Him. And his SPIRITUAL healing is by far the greatest healing of the two, for this is the healing that lasts, long after our physical eyes close in death. Being blind is a horrible thing, but being infected by sin---separated from God---destined to be that way for all time---that is INFINITELY worse. Let me put it like this. When it comes to the sin-sickness that plagues us all, healing from physical blindness is like putting a Band-Aid on a chainsaw wound.

This week I read about a Nascar driver Sam Schmidt. Sam was in a horrible accident while on the Nascar track 21 years ago that resulted in him being paralyzed from the neck down, same injury as Christopher Reeve. For the past 21 years he's been confined to a wheel chair. That's the way his children always knew him. But Schmidt was determined to dance at his daughter's wedding, so he put his Nascar engineers to work and they custom built a exoskeleton that enabled him not only to walk, but to dance with his little girl at the wedding.

I confess, I cried as I read the story. Let me share an excerpt:

*"At the wedding reception the DJ announces, 'Now for the father-daughter dance.' The song starts playing: 'Daddy Dance With Me.' Since she was two years old, Boehrer has wanted that so badly. But her dad Sam Schmidt couldn't dance. He couldn't walk. But as the song plays, Sam appears in the door---standing. Boehrer's hand goes to her mouth. She starts crying. Everyone in the reception hall starts crying. There are cheers, gasps and wonder.*

*For the first time since 2000, when a crash paralyzed Schmidt from the neck down, he dances with his daughter — with the aid of an exoskeleton. 'I always dreamed this day would come,' said Boehrer. 'So, for this one dance, it was incredible just to be his daughter, and for him just to be my dad. For us to get to have the daddy-daughter dance that every little girl dreams of. For me to actually look up at him, to hold his hands and just dance.'" Schmidt said, 'It was the best day in the last 21 years---PERIOD.'* Schmidt didn't walk Boehrer down the aisle because it was an outdoor wedding and the ground was too uneven for the exoskeleton. He used a wheelchair for that---so the dance was an amazing---shocking surprise for his little girl.

As amazing as this "HEALING" was, as moving, it is nothing compared to the healing an individual experiences when they accept the cure for sin that only Jesus offers. You see, when you experience spiritual healing, you experience eternity.

And when you experience eternity, that means every physical ailment is taken care of because even if that ailment leads to your death---Jesus has taken care of that.

LET'S PRAY