

## **The Rev. Charlie Holt**

When I was in college at University of Florida, I had to take a class my freshman year called Exceptional People and the point of the class was to expose young adults, young people, to the idea that not everybody is, has, everything, you know, normal or whatever that might be, whatever normal is. And so one of the things that I had to do was go and spend time with the person who was born blind.

And the point of the class was to teach you that some people who we call, we might say they have birth defects or they're, have, a limitation of some kind. It's not it's not that they're limited, but they actually are just different. They are exceptional people. That was the idea of the class. And so I got to spend some time with this man, who was who was blind from birth.

And I got to take him around the city of Gainesville. And I would go out on walks with them and talk to him and learned a lot about his life. But one of the things that really impressed me about that experience, and this was a very important learning from the class. I obviously I don't remember all the classes that I took at the University of Florida, but I remember this one.

Is that, people who are deficient in one of the senses, like eyesight, actually have the other senses heightened. And this this guy could tell just almost like a sixth sense that where you were and his proximity, just by his hearing and other qualities, he picked up on things that I didn't see in the environment around us and, and was in a sense, paying greater attention to the world around him than I was paying attention to as a college student.

It was a good lesson for me to learn about the power of sight and not having sight. There was, a famous, hymn writer. Her name is Fanny Crosby, and she was born blind. She had lost her eyesight at age eight, not born blind, but lost. I said as an early age, as a child. And she was incredibly gifted with what you might call spiritual sight.

She went over to one of her friends, house one day who was a person who could play the piano, and the Lord had given her friend a tune. She plunked it out on the piano. Dun dun dun dun dun

dun dun dun dun dun. And she said, Fanny, do you, I know you write hymns, but is there any words that are coming to you as I, as I play the tune?

Dun dun dun dun dun dun dun. And Fanny Crosby says what the Lord is, is showing me blessed assurance. Jesus is mine. And. And all of a sudden this, these words of a hymn flooded into her mind. And the two of them, one playing the piano, the other one spitting out the spiritual words. Created one of the most famous hymns that we know.

Blessed assurance. This is, part of what the gospel is trying to get across to us is, is that we have to, have heightened spiritual eyes. This is one of the main points of the Gospel of John, is that this world is not the way it's supposed to be. And when we think of things from a worldly perspective, we actually will get it wrong.

You remember earlier in the season of lent, we heard the story of Nicodemus, who was coming to Jesus by night and asking Jesus about his teaching. And Jesus tells him, Nicodemus, you must be born again in order for you to have life. You need to have a spiritual rebirth. And Nicodemus is thinking worldly. He says, do I enter back into my mother's womb?

Why are you vague? Jesus says, you know you need to be born of the spirit. Then we heard last week about the woman at the well, and she is thirsty for water and for love from human relationship. And Jesus says, you need to have spiritual water, living water, the water that I can give you. You need something that that this world cannot give you, that only I can give you.

And now we come to this idea of light and we need to have spiritual light, insight into who Jesus is as the light of the world and have our blindness. And he's talking about physical blindness here, but he's really talking about spiritual blindness, which another word for that is ignorance and arrogance. Jesus comes across a man who is born blind, and he is asked by his disciples, who sinned?

Was it his parents that sinned? Or was this man that sinned? And this? This is an illustration of our, philosophical blindness. There's something about human beings that wants to solve the equations and problems of this world with our logic, and we never fully see all the things that

are taking place. And even though we think that we know this is our arrogance, that we think we know the answer, we think we know the right philosophy or the way to frame something.

What Jesus is getting across to his disciples with this lesson is you think you see, but you don't really see. And he says, I am the light of the world. One of the great I am. Statements of the Gospel of John. Jesus over and over again says of himself, I am the good Shepherd. I am the gate through which you must enter.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. He says, I am the light of the world. When. When my kids were little, one of the children's ministers used to do what was called sword drills. You're familiar with that? It was trying. It was a way to teach kids the Bible. And the teacher would yell out, Turn to John, chapter eight there, verse 12 or whatever.

And the kids would flip through it as fast as they could. And it was great to teach them where things were in the Bible. But one of the wonderful memories of that was my son Chase, when it came to John chapter eight, verses 12, where Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Chase jumped up into the air and did this little, this little light of mine. And the teacher always reminded me about how Chase was the jumper in the sword drill. But we, we need to, have that kind of zeal within us when it comes to knowing what the sources of knowledge and understanding and light.

And this is the point that Jesus is because you don't see. So he takes some mud and he spits in it, and he rubs it around and puts it on this man's eyes. And he says to go wash in the pool of Siloam. And the man washes the mud off his eyes, and all of a sudden now he can see how Jesus said, this didn't have to do anything with sin.

The whole point of this is to demonstrate my glory, so that the works of God might be displayed. This is the point so that people will come to know that I am the light of the world. Now that's the first, first step. Now the second step is that now that this man has been healed, he now becomes a living testimony to the light of the world.

And very similar to what happened with the Samaritan woman after she really came to understand that Jesus was the source of living water and the Messiah, she gave her life to him. And then she went and told everybody that she knew about him. So now here is this man has to grow in his testimony of the truth about Jesus.

And it starts off kind of slow. He is there's a lot of skepticism for this guy that's a little different than the Samaritan woman story, where she goes into the village and everybody's excited about what she has to say. And sometimes being a witness in a testimony is like that, where you, you go out and you share the message of Jesus, and people actually want to hear what you have to say.

And we love that kind of thing. Kind of like preaching to the church and preaching to the choir. Everybody loves to hear the gospel, right? We love it. We want to hear the word. We want to have it speak into our hearts in our lives. So I get a great I have a great job of testifying here, but there are other places that you can go and bear witness where your testimony is met with skepticism.

One is a college campus. I when I first became a Christian on the campus of the University of Florida, I remember going out and, everybody I would run into, I wanted to tell them about Jesus. I was a maniac on a mission. I had found the light, and I wanted to tell about it, and I was I remember talking to this one fellow who was a bit of a skeptic, and he said, well, if you really believe this, you'd go and stand out there in the middle of that crowd over there, and you'd tell them all about Jesus and I said, that's true.

But here's the thing. I would point out is that I'm actually telling you about Jesus. And he said, that's a good point. That's our job is to be a witness and to testify to the light. We're not the light, but we point to the light. We tell about the light. And here this man is met with some skepticism.

At first. It's the, the neighbors that saw him as a man born blind. And the people that saw him begging. And they said, this kind of looks like the guy that was born blind, but I don't know. I mean, he can see now, how could this be? And some of the people said, no, it's the guy.

And he's standing right there as they're talking about him. And he raises his hand. He says, guys, you're talking about me. I am the guy. So a lot of humor in this gospel, actually. And he they said, well, what happened? And here he begins the testimony says the man named Jesus. He took some mud and spit in it, and he put it on my eyes.

And now I see. So then he moves to the more skeptical people, the Pharisees. And it's almost like the, the more skeptical of the people that he's interacting with, the more his testimony begins to solidify in his heart and in his. And he's finding his voice. He's finding his authority to proclaim the grace and the message of Jesus.

It's like it's a testing through fire where it's being refined over time. And so when he's interviewed by the Pharisees, they ask him and he tells him the story again, and they debate back and forth, who is this man? And they finally go, well, who do you say that he is? And now he's a little bolder. He says, he's a prophet.

And then by the end of the interactions in the story, and we won't go through the whole story again, it was it's a long reading, but by the time he gets to the end, where he's really being challenged by the Pharisees and they say, tell us what happened again. And he says, I already told you, but you didn't listen.

Now he's found his bravery and his courage, and he says, you didn't listen, and I'll let me, I'm trying to go from memory, but I can't let me let me get it back.

Because you want to hear it again. You also want to become his disciples. And they said to him, you're his disciple. They replied to him, we, are not disciples. We are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses. But as for this man meaning Jesus, we don't know where he comes from. And the man answered, this is this is the boldest moment, is that this is an amazing thing.

You don't know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but anyone who's a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

And there, there, animosity. Their darkness in their heart reaches its pinnacle. At this moment. You were born utterly in sin, and you would teach us. And they cast him out.

Here this man starts as just a man born blind. And by the end of the story, he's literally a teacher about Jesus. That wonderful.

That's the power of the light of the world, that once you see the light and you understand who the light of the world is, it's not a thing. It's a person. You see the source, you see the light, and your eyes are opened, and all of the sudden some inner strength can well up from within you, that not only do you become a testimony to Jesus, but you can literally become a teacher to even the greatest skeptic of all.

And the Lord will give you the words to speak. In that moment, Jesus, heard that he had been cast out and asked him whether he believed in the Son of Man and the Lord. The man says, who is he? I want to believe in him. Jesus says, you've seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.

And he says, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped Jesus in that moment. And Jesus challenges him. He says, for judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind. And they're the skeptics overhearing the conversation, ever judging Jesus. And they say, are we blind? And that question is really the convicting question of the passage.

It's the one that we ought to be asking ourselves. Actually, am I someone who is so arrogant in my thinking, so self-assured in my understanding of things, that I actually am blind? That was the problem of the Pharisees is that they were they were judgmental. They were skeptical. They were. They were self-assured. They think. They thought they knew it all.

And for that reason, they were they were blind. They had no sight at all. And here is a man who is humble. He's broken. He's judged by society as being at the bottom. And yet somehow he is a teachable spirit, humble, and is given incredible sight to see the Lord and Savior of the world, the light of the world.

Jesus answered them, if you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say we see your guilt remains.

The great testimony of this, of the man is I was blind, but now I see, John Newton. He was a slave trader, captain of a slave ship. And he was a person who knew of his own sin. And when it came to the things of God, was really hard hearted and stubborn and had really messed up.

He'd treated people with such indignity as being a captain of a slave ship. But the Lord revealed himself to John Newton and got a hold of his faith in his life. And he was converted, and he repented and gave his life to the Lord. And he renounced, the slavery that he had been involved in and became actually a Christian pastor, even a monk.

And he wrote one of the most famous hymns based on this passage, amazing Grace. We sang it, just a few minutes ago, but that line comes from this passage. He says I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was what blind? But now I see. He's not talking about physical eyesight, is he? He's talking about the fact that he just didn't see things right.

He didn't get it, but the Lord humbled him. Sometimes we call that being warped upside the head by a spiritual two by four. And that's what John Newton needed, was a wake up call from Jesus. He needed the light of Jesus to shine and his dark life and dark heart. He was blind, but now he sees.