

## ***This is All I Know***

*John 9: 24-41*

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Jesus was always getting himself into trouble. It's amazing how controversial doing good can be. Giving sight to a man who had never seen didn't just create rejoicing. It gave people the creeps. To give light to eyes that had never processed light was unheard of and therefore unnerving. Who is this man who could do such things? What does this powerful sign from God mean? If it is, indeed, from God. Now the man had been blind ever since birth, but once Jesus saw him, he did not want to delay even one more second to heal him. Of course it was a Sabbath. We already know how much controversy Jesus caused by healing the lame man on the Sabbath. Wouldn't you think he could wait a day? Jesus also made trouble for the man healed. His whole family was threatened with expulsion from the synagogue, which was worse than being kicked out of school, your club, your church and your business all at once. Jesus did such great things. But he was incendiary. Polarizing. Upheaving. We are drawn to him and scared of him, warmed by him and upset by him. Jesus cut beneath the surface and got right down to the heart of every person he encountered. And he still does.

Let's pick up the story with the second time the Pharisees questioned the man born blind who now could see. They spoke in a way meant to intimidate. "Give glory to God," they said. They meant, "Don't give any more credit to Jesus." Then they used the line that all authority figures like to use when they try to bully you. "*We know...*" We know what you've been up to. Authorities love to assert that they know more than you thought they knew and now they have the scoop on you. I can still remember the lecture from the chaperone on the eighth grade trip. She lined us all up. "*We know. We know you boys were in the girl's room last night...*" I can still remember freshman year and the RA in my face, "*I know what you did. You're in a lot of trouble*" All we did was seal a guy into his dorm room so he couldn't get out for a while. What's the big deal? But his accusation gave me the willies. I thought I was going to be expelled. So the Pharisees said to the newly seeing man, "*We know that this man Jesus is a sinner. Why don't you just agree with us and get yourself out of trouble?*"

Now I might have been tempted to do a little theology right here. "Well, sir, I want to give glory to God alone. And this Jesus is clearly God in the flesh, so I'm not going to call him a sinner. I'm going to give God glory by giving Jesus glory.

You see, Jesus and his Father are one.” Then, I might have said a bit more just to be a smarty pants. “That’s called the *hypostatic union*, you dufus!” Fortunately, the young man did not try to argue with the Pharisees on their own terms. He just spoke the truth of his experience with Jesus. He said, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” In other words, “I’ll leave the moral judgment to you. I’ll leave the technicalities of the law to you. All I can say is that my whole life I was blind. Then Jesus found me. Jesus healed me. Now I see. Me, the guy born blind, I’m looking at you and I see.”

There is something unassailable in such personal testimony. It cannot be argued with. I was blind but now I see. I was lost but now am found. The man went on to say, “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. But he opened my eyes.” These things don’t happen, and yet this did happen.

These days, atheist scientists don’t become Christians do they? Doesn’t science lead people away from needing a God explanation? Isn’t the very use of the word Intelligent Design something only flat earth fundamentalists believe in? But then last year there was this Asian graduate student in genetics who came to LSU. Pursuing his doctoral work, examining the microscopic intricacies of what makes us who we are, the young man could not escape the reality of God. He was raised to be an atheist. He was raised to be smart and to excel. Something had to give. Design was his conclusion. All this couldn’t be by chance. The scholar didn’t check his brain at the door. His brain lit up with the Reality of God. God sent him some Christians who told him the name of the Creator of this magnificence. They told him that this Creator actually came to the earth and gave his life so that we might live. Last fall this brilliant doctoral candidate was baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. He will tell you, “I was blind, but now I see.”

These days, secular journalists don’t ever fall in love with Jesus do they? It doesn’t fit the narrative of their profession. The oppressive church has to be overturned. Who would ever become part of it? That’s what Fox News reporter Kirsten Powers always thought. Young, sharp, beautiful and rising in her field, she had long ago given up valuing the time she spent in a church growing up. None of her friends believed. Believers were ridiculed. Her people were too smart for Christ. She said it this way:

Just seven years ago, if someone had told me that I'd be writing for *Christianity Today* magazine about how I came to believe in God, I would

have laughed out loud. If there was one thing in which I was completely secure, it was that I would never adhere to any religion—especially to evangelical Christianity, which I held in particular contempt.

Then, of all things, she started dating a Christian. And over her great reluctance she went to church with him. The worship crept her out. But the preaching of Tim Keller captivated her. There were actually more intelligent reasons to believe than to disbelieve. Her mental reservations were being stripped away. Then, as Kirsten reported in *Christianity Today*, she had a dream in which Jesus appeared to her. “Here I am,” he said. She was confused, thrilled, worried. What could this mean?

As the story goes, we see just how powerful testimony is. Kirsten knew Eric Metaxas, the best-selling author who spoke here about a year ago. Eric himself had come to Christ through a dream and through a man patient enough to tell him about the gospel. So Eric sent Kirsten to a Bible study. There she realized, like scales falling off her eyes, “It’s true. It’s all true.”<sup>i</sup> What she had so resolutely hated now filled her with indescribable joy. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.

These experiences aren’t limited to atheists or agnostics becoming Christians. They happen to us even as we belong to Christ. I was in my first few years of being a senior pastor. I was young—I even had hair as thick and lustrous as Derek’s, but mine was blonde! The church was growing and I felt pretty good about myself. I figured I could be a pastor and still be cool. After all, it was one of my friends who had been on MTV. He had conducted the wedding for Jon Bon Jovi’s band member, on a boat sailing around Manhattan. We were the sophisticated pastors, able to mingle in the world. We weren’t going to mess around with overly emotional religion, with fanatics, or even with what was being called praise music.

I had contempt for believers who were too ardent in their faith. Wit and cynicism could blunt the edges of the Bible’s sharp teachings and thereby keep me safe from the God’s claims on me. I never realized how my heart had closed to the Jesus who had called me to himself. I had not realized how muted and wan my love for him had become. I went to the Promise Keepers Clergy Conference in Atlanta only because a friend dragged me there. I didn’t want to be identified with the goofy pastors who wore huge smiles and carried around even huger Bibles. I didn’t want to sing that music. But then God did a work in me. Through the

preaching of the Word and through the power of song that was so open-hearted and earnest, I cracked. Christ reclaimed my heart.

The worship leader that week was Pastor Joseph Garlington. This guy was a believer. I mean a *believer*. He was the kind of man who laid down his life for Christ by laying it down for others. I could not argue with his commitment. I could not argue with his joy. By the third day, just seeing Pastor Joe come to the podium made tears come to my eyes. He was leading me back to life. Joe had us return to one song several times that week. It was Graham Kendrick's song "Knowing You." Based on Philippians 3, it says,

All I once held dear, built my life upon,  
All this world reveres and wars to own,  
All I once thought gain, I have counted loss,  
Spent and worthless now compared to this.

Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you.  
There is no greater thing.  
You're my all, you're the best,  
You're my joy, my righteousness.  
And I love you Lord.

How long had it been since I had prayed so openly? Had long since I had told Jesus I loved him? How long since my pride had been stripped and I could speak so passionately? Sophistication, always being the guy in the know, the smart guy, the witty guy—all that was spent and worthless now compared to this. This now is all I know. I was lost in myself and you came and got me. Jesus, you're my all, you're the best, and I love you, Lord.

The man in our story got pushed hard by the authorities. They wanted him to denounce Jesus. But how could he turn on the man who had given him sight? Jesus had touched him in his core. Backed against the wall, he couldn't explain it all, but he could bear witness. "One thing I do know." Do you ever wonder what you would say if backed into a corner? Suppose someone said, "Look, we know you've been involved in this Christianity stuff. We know it's bigoted, constricting, unscientific, a tool of the power hungry and the controllers. Come on now, denounce it." How would you reply? You can't very well defend every person who named the name of Christ and did terrible things. You may not know how to build a reasoned defense of the faith. But what would you say that comes out of

your core? What would you say that begins with this sentence, “One thing I do know?”

In our Presbyterian way of doing church, the congregation elects its officers. But the leaders of the church, the elders, have to examine the new officers concerning their faith. It’s one of my favorite meetings of the year because we actually talk about what matters most to us. Each new officer has answered a question about Jesus that has 2 key parts: 1) According to Scripture, who is Jesus Christ? 2) Who is Jesus Christ to you? It is required that church leaders know the real Jesus, the Jesus revealed to us in an accurate reading of Scripture. We have a heritage of knowledge to learn and pass on. I love to hear that our leaders know the truth. But even more I love to hear them say what Jesus means to them personally.

They say things like this: He’s my life. He saved me. He brought me home. He gives me meaning. He shows me the way to live. He’s my Lord. He’s my Savior. He’s the God of the universe who cares about even the least of these. He’s the Shepherd who leads me. He’s living water. He’s the breath of life in me. He’s my Jesus.

So here’s the news today: that love for Jesus is within you. It’s the innermost truth of your being. You do love him. You do believe in him. You do want his life to flow within your life.

It’s just that we get separated from that love sometimes:

- We get fearful that our hearts will be slammed if we trust him too totally.
- We fear we will become weird or awkward if we love him too openly.
- We get wounded and retreat into ourselves.
- We get so busy that we forget to tend this relationship.
- We get so tired we just don’t find the energy to go to him.
- We assume the love but forget the conversation of prayer.
- We get cut off from him when we disobey and don’t want to admit it.
- We’re doing something we don’t want to give up. We’re avoiding truth.
- Or we’re just trying to make it on our own. Trying to do it in our own strength.

It happens. It just does. We get clogged from loving him. But we don’t have to stay there. We can clear a channel from how things are right now to that deep place in us where our first love resides. We can remember our testimony. I don’t know much, and the longer I live the less I actually know about anything, *but one thing I*

*do know*. I can't control life. I have little power to save the people I love. I can't fix the world. I'm helpless most of the time, *but one thing I do know*. What is it? What is that one thing about Jesus you know in your bones?

The man born blind said, "Never in the history of the world has anyone opened the eyes of the blind." I get that. No one else in the world can take away the guilt, the guilt not only of our bone-headed mistakes but the stain of our willful evil. No one else in the world can give the hope of eternal life in the midst of all this dying. No one else can light up life with a purpose that may cost us our lives but fills us with joy and love all the way. One thing I know. I was blind but now I see. I was lost but now am found. I was drunk but now I'm sober. I was empty but now I'm fed. I was discarded but now I'm loved. I was betrayed but now I trust. I was far away but now I'm home.

So how would you tell it? What's the one thing about Jesus that you know in your bones? Can you write it? Can you remember to speak to Jesus about it? Can you share it with others? It's really why we're here. To gather around the miracle of Christ's work in each of our lives. To sing it and say it together in many ways, "Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing." All three of those testimonies I shared involved the miraculous work of Jesus Christ, but his work was coupled with the work of ordinary people, believers willing to share and to show the way to Jesus. So how will you tell it?

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<sup>i</sup> *Christianity Today*, November 2013, Vol. 57, No. 9, Pg 104, "The God I Can't Write Off"