

## The blind will see, the deaf will hear

### Introduction

The Bible tells us that one day some men came to Jesus from John the Baptist. John had been preaching about the arrival of a Rescuer, a Deliverer, a Savior. John had preached that this Rescuer, and Deliverer, and Savior was Jesus. But now John was in prison, and as time went by and Jesus wasn't doing all that John had expected, he began to have doubts. So, we read in Matthew 11:

- Matthew 11:2–6 — When John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the lowly have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

It's an astonishing thing to see the authority with which Jesus speaks. If I ever truly speak with authority, it always derives from the authority of another – it's never my own. But Jesus *always* spoke from His own authority. So listen again to what Jesus said to John, and what He says to each one of us: “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.” ***How happy*** and ***how blessed*** is the man, the woman, the child, who doesn't stumble over Jesus – who does *not* doubt, but truly believes. The only thing of any value that I could ever do this morning is to help us all come face to face with the power and the authority of God's Word – so that by God's grace we might all be astonished, and so we might all truly believe.

### **I. John asked, “Are you *the one who is to come*, or shall we *look for another*?”**

You see, the birth of Jesus didn't come out of nowhere. In the Bible, the whole Old Testament (the first 39 books) is really all one big announcement of a coming Savior, a Rescuer, a Deliverer. So this explains John's question: Are you ***the one*** God has promised? Are you ***the one*** that the whole Old Testament announces? “Are you [really] the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” How does one answer a question like that? What kind of answer do you think would convince you?

### **II. Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the lowly have good news preached to them.”**

What is Jesus saying? “You should believe in me because I perform amazing miracles”? But aren't there false miracles and false signs and wonders? And even if these miracles really happened, why should they *prove* anything – except that Jesus could work miracles? Would such an answer convince ***you*** that Jesus ***is*** all that He claims to be?

So, then, what is Jesus saying? “You should believe in me because I’m doing lots of good and wonderful things”? But aren’t there many throughout the history of the world who have lived extraordinary lives of goodness and compassion?

What *is* Jesus saying? And how can He end His answer to John—and to all of us here today—with these words of such masterful authority, “And *blessed* is the one—the man, the woman, the child—who *is not* offended by me”? When I listen honestly to these words, I hear the “*blessing*” and my heart thrills. But contained within the blessing, there’s also a *warning*. Can you hear it for yourself? “*Blessed* is the one who *is not* offended by me [–who does not stumble over me.]” When we listen honestly to these words, our hearts should also tremble.

**III.** “Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: **the blind receive their sight... the lame walk... lepers are cleansed... the deaf hear... the dead are raised up... the lowly have good news preached to them.**’”

What a wonder these words are. There’s a beauty to them that we ought to feel, and to love. But what is this beauty? What really is the wonder of these words?

It’s important for us to understand that when Jesus spoke these words, they weren’t new words. They were already ancient. They had all been spoken before and written down in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. So, as Jesus points John (and all of us) to the miracles that He performed, He also points us to the Scriptures of the Old Testament – which all of miracles *fulfilled*. In other words, we cannot really, fully, understand the blind seeing and the deaf hearing, and the dead raised... *unless* we understand the Scriptures that these miracles *fulfill*.

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, and before any of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were written, there’s an account of how the prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord. Would you listen carefully with me to what Isaiah writes? Isaiah chapter 6:

**IV. Isaiah 6:8–12** — And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on **hearing**, but do not **understand**; keep on **seeing**, but do not **perceive**.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they **see with their eyes**, and **hear with their ears**, and **understand with their hearts**, and turn and be healed.” Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

It’s a depressing picture. It’s a sad, and a hopeless picture. I wonder if you would do something with me for a moment? Shut your eyes tight. And then plug your ears, and let’s just stay there for a few seconds. Don’t open your eyes yet. What would it be to live life both blind and deaf? OK, unplug your ears and open your eyes. Now let’s ask ourselves again, what would it be to live life both blind and deaf? But God compares this physical blindness and deafness to an even worse blindness and deafness of the heart.

The Old Testament tells the story of how God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and brought them to a special mountain, and gave them all of His good laws to obey. In His love and kindness, God told the people that His ways were the ways to life and blessing and joy while every other way led to death. Now the people could see with “these” eyes the glory of God on Mount Sinai, but because of their sinful hearts they couldn’t truly *perceive*. The people could hear with “these” ears the voice of the Lord from Mount Sinai speaking the Ten Commandments, but because of their sinful hearts they couldn’t truly *understand*. They saw, but they didn’t get it. They heard, but it never registered.

Have you ever known what it is to be blind and deaf?—To hear, but not truly understand; to see, but not truly perceive? The Bible says that we were all at one time darkness (Eph. 5:8), both blind and deaf to the power and truth and beauty of God’s Word *because of our sin*. It’s a completely helpless and hopeless condition. Can you *feel* what that helplessness and hopelessness is deep down in your heart?

Think about the task that God gave to Isaiah: “Go, and *say* to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, *but do not understand*; keep on seeing, *but do not perceive*.’ *Make* the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and *blind* their eyes; *lest* they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” What is God saying?!? He’s simply telling Isaiah that because the people are **already** blind and deaf, the **more** Isaiah preaches to them, the **more** their blindness will increase; the **more** Isaiah preaches to them, the **more** deaf will their ears become – *until* it results, ultimately, in their own death and destruction. Can you see the righteous judgment of God in the face of our own sinfulness? Shouldn’t we tremble right now at just the thought that the same things might be said of us as we listen even now to the preaching of God’s Word? When we think on these things, how can we not feel like crying out with the Apostle Paul:

➤ Romans 7:24 — [Oh!] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me[!!!] from this body of death?

Throughout the rest of Isaiah’s ministry, this theme of the deaf and the blind became a major theme in his preaching. He even used this theme to try to wake the people up – to try to *open* their eyes, and *unstop* their ears. Isaiah chapter 42:

**V. Isaiah 42:18–25 (cf. 43:8) — Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but my servant [Israel], or deaf as my messenger [Israel] whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD [Israel]? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. [And then the prophet explains:] The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness’ sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted; they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say, “Restore!” Who among you will give ear to this, will attend and listen for the time to come? Who gave up Jacob to the looter, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey? So he poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle; it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand; it burned him up, but he did not take it to heart.**

This *horrible* blindness and deafness of the people of Israel because of their sin is a vivid picture of the blindness and deafness of us all because of our sin. And it's only in a picture like this that we can see what our true helplessness and hopelessness really is. Please know that I don't simply preach to you without first being preached to myself. I think of the words to a song we sing here at Living Word, and I know that these words were a completely accurate description of me: "I was blinded by my sin, had no ears to hear Your voice, did not know Your love within, had no taste for heaven's joys."

- Romans 7:24 — [Oh!] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver *me*[!!!] from this body of death?

### **Isn't *this* what *Christmas* is *all* about?**

Remember what Isaiah asked after the Lord assigned him his hopeless task: "How long, O Lord?" And remember what the Lord answered: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land." Well, all this came about some one hundred years after Isaiah died. But *before* Isaiah died, God allowed Isaiah to look even further into the future—past the judgment and the death and the destruction of his people—to something new, something miraculous, something wonderful. God gave to Isaiah a message of hope, just when all seemed most hopeless. Isaiah chapter 29 starts out with "more of the same" – more bad news.

**VI. Isaiah 29:9–12** — Astonish yourselves and be astonished; blind yourselves and be blind! Be drunk, but not with wine; stagger, but not with strong drink! For **the LORD has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes... and covered your heads... And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed." And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot read."**

The people were incapable of seeing or hearing the **truth** of God's Word. Can *you* and *I* identify with this? We were, all of us, both blind and deaf. And then...! **And THEN**(!!!) – there's *this*, just a few verses later, in Isaiah 29:

**VII. Isaiah 29:17–20** — Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? **In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.** The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the [lowly] among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

**Isaiah 30:20–21** — Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but **your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you**, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

**Isaiah 32:3–4** — **Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who**

**hear will give attention. The heart of the hasty will understand and know, and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.**

Oh, to be able to see! Oh, to be able to hear! – To perceive and to understand the power and beauty—the *truth* and *authority*—of God’s Word! Oh, to have my tongue loosed to speak distinctly and clearly of the goodness and the glory of the Lord!

To **see** with our eyes and **perceive** with our hearts is a gracious gift of God. To **hear** with our ears and **understand** with our hearts is a wondrous **miracle** that only God can perform. But this is just what God promised His people that **He would** do. And if the result of Israel’s blindness and deafness was death and destruction, then what do you think will be the end result of God’s people finally seeing and hearing? Isaiah chapter 35:

**VIII. Isaiah 35:1–10** — The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. **He will come and save you.**” **[In that day] the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy...** The ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Notice that now it’s not just the blind seeing and the deaf hearing, but the lame leaping and the mute singing. In the end, what is a man or a woman who is blind, *and* deaf, *and* lame, *and* mute? He is a corpse, dead *in his sins*, without any ability or will to respond to the things of God. What, then, is it when the man or the woman who was blind and deaf and lame and mute now **sees(!)** and **hears(!)** and **leaps(!)** and **sings for joy**? It’s nothing less than the miracle of being brought from **death to life**. And this is just the message that Isaiah preached to the people of God:

➤ Isaiah 26:19 — Your dead **shall live**; their bodies **shall rise**. *You* who dwell in the dust, **awake and sing for joy!**

I would ask a simple question this morning: Are you blind *or seeing*, deaf *or hearing*, mute *or singing*, lame *or leaping*, dead *or alive*?

Only, how is it that the dead *could* ever live? How is it that *I*, who was dead in my sins, could ever truly see, or hear, or sing and leap for joy at the goodness and the glory of God? Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, God spoke of the one that He would send into this world:

**IX. Isaiah 42:1–9 (cf. 9:1-3)** — **Behold my servant**, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights... I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; **I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who**

**sit in darkness...** Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

What would this coming Savior do? He would deliver the people from their own blindness; He would be a light shining in the darkness – a light shining so brightly as to cause even the blind to see. He would be a voice breaking into the silence of our deaf ears – a voice speaking so powerfully and with such authority as to cause even the deaf to hear.

Imagine the joy with which Isaiah must have announced **this** message. Imagine the thrill of speaking these words – even as we experience the thrill of listening to them:

“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. **He will come and save you.**” [In that day] **the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy...**”

And so we know *it all happened* – just as the Lord had said it would.

**X. Luke 2:1–14** — In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

### Conclusion

**Jesus** was born and came into this world as a light into our darkness (cf. Luke 2:25-32) – a light that shone so brightly that the eyes of all God’s people are ultimately opened, and **now** we see. **Jesus** came into this world as the powerful word of God into our silence – a word spoken so powerfully that the ears of all God’s people are ultimately unstopped, and **now** we hear.

What is it that blinds our eyes and stops up our ears? It’s our sin. It’s my self-seeking, and my pride, and my rebellion against God’s holy law. But remember John the Baptist? Listen to what he said when he first saw Jesus coming toward him:

➤ John 1:29 — “**Behold**, the Lamb of God, who **takes away** the sin of the world!”

Behold! Look! **See!** Jesus grew up, living the perfectly obedient and righteous life that you and I could never live. And then Jesus died on a Roman instrument of execution in the place of sinners like you and me – so that we might be **cleansed... washed... forgiven**. He bore the wrath and the judgment of God for all the blindness and deafness of sinners like us so that *we* might see and hear and understand and believe in Him unto *eternal life*. (cf. Acts 26:15-18) Are you able to cry out with me this morning: “[Oh!] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver *me*[!!!] from this body of death?” And are you able to see this morning that **Christmas** is the awesome, glorious, wonderful, beautiful answer to *this* all-important question? Remember where we started this morning:

- Matthew 11:2–6 — John... sent word by his disciples and said to [Jesus], “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” **And Jesus answered them**, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: **the blind receive their sight and the lame walk**, lepers are cleansed and **the deaf hear**, and **the dead are raised up**, and the lowly have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

The miracles of Jesus were never intended to prove anything *just* by their power, or *just* by their goodness. They were simply meant to prove that Jesus *was, indeed*, the one God’s people had been waiting for – **the one** that Isaiah had seen and foretold seven centuries before. And now Jesus still says to all of us here, even as he said to John: “*Blessed* is the one who is not offended by me.” In other words, “*Blessed* is the one who **sees**, and **hears**, and **understands**, and who **leaps** and **sings** for joy” (cf. Mat. 13:16)

This morning, are you blind *or seeing*, deaf *or hearing*, mute *or singing*, lame *or leaping*, dead *or alive*? Sadly, there will always be the blind, and the deaf, and the mute, and the lame. (cf. Acts 28:23-27; Mat. 13:10-15) But by God’s wholly undeserved grace, this Christmas may that person not be me, and not be you.

**“Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see!” (Isa. 42:18) “You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” (Isa. 26:19) Do not disbelieve, but believe.” (Jn. 20:27)**

When the baby Jesus was brought by his parents into the temple, a man named Simeon took him into his arms and prayed, quoting the words of Isaiah:

- Luke 2:29–32 — “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, **a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.**”

Here is the joy of Christmas. Here is the power and glory of Christmas. Let’s sing and celebrate this morning the birth of our Savior! Let us not be mute, but instead sing for joy!