

Encounters with Jesus: Changed in an Instant

(John 9:1-16 & 24-25)

The story is told of a farmer and his wife in a dusty corner of Texas. They had eked out a meagre living for 30 years. One day an impeccably dressed man driving a fancy car came to their door. He told the farmer that he had good reason to believe there was a reservoir of oil underneath his property. If the farmer would allow the gentleman the right to drill, perhaps the farmer would become a wealthy man. The farmer stated emphatically he didn't want anyone messing up his property and asked the gentleman to leave.

The next year about the same time the gentleman returned with his nice clothes and another fancy car. The oilman pleaded with the farmer, and again the farmer said no. This same experience went on for the next eight years. During those eight years the farmer and his wife struggled to make ends meet. Nine years after the first visit from the oilman, the farmer came down with an illness that put him in the hospital and left them with a big hospital bill to pay. When the gentleman arrived to plead his case for oil, he spoke to the farmer's wife. Reluctantly, she gave permission to drill.

Within a week huge oil rigs were beginning the process of drilling for oil. The first day nothing happened. The second day brought only disappointment and dust. But on the third day, right about noon, black bubbly liquid began to squirt up in the air. The oilman had found "black gold," and the farmer and his wife were instantly millionaires. They had been sitting on a reservoir of wealth while they struggled to make a living.

It's easy to become stuck in a rut isn't it? People get stuck in ruts for different reasons. Maybe they think that what they have in life is as good as it gets. Worse, they may think what they've got or who they are is absolutely superb, whereas everyone else looks and can see something different. And like the occupants of the Texan farm, they will defend what they have until the last because they can't see the bigger picture. Despite the situation being spelt out to them, they were blind to the opportunities being presented to them. Even worse, through sickness, problems, disability or underachievement people can be in a position where they think there can never be a solution to their problems. It's as if they're blind to it.

I've mentioned the word blind has appeared twice already. In our reading this morning we come across the man born blind. He had no expectation that his life was going to be changed or could be changed. After all as it says in verse 32 *Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.* There was no expectation because it just didn't happen.

Until Jesus came along!

This guy was just sitting there minding his own business and this stranger comes along with his mates, have a conversation about him; then the leader rubs mud on his eyes and then sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam. (Actually Siloam means "sent" - this guy got sent there literally!) So there he is at the pool washing his eyes - "What did that man rub mud in his eyes for?" "What's that?" "It's light!" Wow I can see! Amazing! Astonishing! Can you imagine his reaction? It must have been amazing and bewildering all in one go? And what of the man who put mud on his eyes? Where was he?

And, for that matter, mud on his eyes? It wasn't the mud that made him see. It was just standard Jerusalem road dirt. But it meant that by the time he got back Jesus would have gone and he had never seen Him. Read down the chapter further and you'll find that he didn't have a clue who had healed him - he never saw him and you'll find out in a minute that in the hubbub he hadn't been listening too hard too. Not knowing it was Jesus would precipitate the amazing debate the Jewish leaders had afterwards because Jesus healed him on the Sabbath which we missed out in the reading.

But this morning, I want us though to look at this whole event from the perspective of this rather bewildered man! He's going round absolutely shocked because he's received his sight - and no-one can believe it's him! It wasn't just the shock of receiving something he'd just not expected - it was people's reaction to him? He'd been healed; why wasn't everybody amazed and pleased about it?

Encounters with Jesus change lives! I guess that's the nature of your Sunday morning series. As we meet Jesus we find that He can transform our lives if we are prepared to trust and obey Him. As we found with this man, trusting Jesus turned out to be carrying out a very simple act. He could have been outraged by this man rubbing mud and spit into his face – there he was, minding his own business and then – splat! He could have told Jesus to get lost. Instead, he went to the Pool of Siloam. In one sense it was necessary – he had mud all over his face! On the other hand, he had probably heard the conversation Jesus and His disciples were having. *Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the work 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."* And he responded - it was a simple act of faith. It didn't take much doing to get to Siloam and wash the mud off – he didn't even have much to lose. But the impact was huge.

So what can this story tell us about the transformation that comes from trusting Jesus and obeying Him? I've got 4 Us for you.

★ **Unexpected** - *God acts when we least expect it and in ways we least expect*

What are your expectations of Jesus this morning? What are your expectations of Him in your personal life? What are your expectations as a church? My experience just from living long enough as a believer is that our expectation of God not just often falls short of appreciating who He is - it usually falls short. I'm sure your children sing that well known chorus|:

My God is so BIG, so strong and so mighty - there's nothing that He cannot do.

maybe it should be for many Christians

My God is so small, so weak and so insignificant - that I must do His work for Him

And that's the way we often try to live or lives and try to run our churches. We limit Him to our experience, our knowledge, our way of doing things. We expect God to do things our way. To achieve our objectives.

Yet who is it we serve? Whose church is it? What's He like? My God is so BIG, so strong, so mighty. So if there's nothing He cannot do - then what are we doing? We're His people. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit? Why aren't we winning the world for Him? Why is the church in Britain declining and in such a dire state?

It's a question of expectation. I've been in Norfolk for two and a half years now. One of the things I noticed almost as soon as I arrived was the huge difference there was between the towns and the countryside. You are blessed here in Dereham. By and large, most larger towns in Norfolk boast one or two large churches - preaching centres, worship centres with thriving congregations. I couldn't get over the contrast with the smaller rural towns like Swaffham and villages. Here there's a real lack of expectation that God can and will do anything. Churches have declined and closed. Congregations are elderly and small. There's a real feeling that the glory of God has departed. Nothing much has happened in 50 years or whatever. So why should things change or be any different. Expectations are low.

Blessed is he who expects nothing – he will never be disappointed!

Before you think you are more fortunate, there is always the danger of low expectancy of Jesus in larger churches too. I was part of a large church back in London and the biggest problem there was that many thought we had made it and never considered that Jesus wanted us for greater things, for unexpected things. It was the blindness of complacency.

The blind man thought that this was live because he could literally see nothing different. And on to this scene comes Jesus! He's the Saviour that makes the difference. We are part of the church of God. We're part of His church in Dereham or in Swaffham. Let's open our minds and our hearts to the God of the unexpected. He's a God who is big, strong, mighty and He there's nothing He can't do. What does He want to do in my life? What does He want to do in this church fellowship? I'll tell you one thing, it's far bigger and more unexpected than any of you have ever thought up.

What does He want to do in Norfolk? I believe God is moving in a new way ion our county. Let's

look for the works of the God of the unexpected. Expect the unexpected when Jesus turns up.

★ **Unimaginable** *Jesus changed the man's life beyond his wildest dreams.*

And what did this unexpected visit from Jesus do? Jesus changed this man's life. Jesus changes people's lives. That's what an encounter with Jesus brings.

Now, it's not unusual today to hear about how some amazing operation has resulted in the restoration of someone's sight. The wonders of modern technology and all that. But when Jesus healed this man, something incredible happened and it's over the nature of the miracle.

People who receive their sight who became blind during their lives always see things again properly, but people who are born blind often have problem seeing things if their sight is restored. Seeing isn't just having eyes but the processing of data from our eyes by our brain. That system develops in our childhood and is fixed in our teenage years. An adult acquiring sight after that actually finds it difficult to see. They see things but often can't make sense of them. Because their body is tuned to touch and hearing.

This man didn't have the problem. He knew where he was and what he was doing straight away. This miracle went well beyond what they knew and understood then and what we know and understood now. It was impossible – but there he was – a man born blind with perfect vision!

The man had no expectation of the nature of the change. Yet in an instant Jesus had changed his life. It was astounding. Can you imagine his emotions - stunned -happy, joyous, astonished. Jesus changes people and changes situations in impossible ways. You've all heard of Speakers' Corner in London. It's where all the people with strange ideas come to pronounce them. **Once a Communist was talking to a crowd about the virtues of Communism. A tramp shuffled past. The speaker noticed him. "Communism" he declared, "will put a new suit of clothes on that man!". "So what?" a Christian shouted from the crowd - Jesus Christ will put a new man in that suit of clothes.**

Jesus wants to transform us in ways that are unimaginable. Rather than seeing the problems we see the possibilities. He's a Saviour who can turn the impossible into the possible. Perhaps you are weighed down with problems with health, financial, relationships – let's start imagining a Saviour who can change the impossible into the possible; the problems into the possibilities; the One who can turn the negatives into positives in our lives. He did it in the life of this blind man and He wants us to do it in our lives.

I believe too that He wants to do it in the lives of our churches in Norfolk. As well as seeing a lot of depressed churches and Christians in Norfolk, I have also met a lot who have a real expectancy that God is doing something new in Norfolk and that He want us to realise that His power to work in people's lives goes well beyond our imagination. You're hosting First Friday here on Friday. We've been involved with it in Swaffham since it went local last year and I know a few of your folks have been involved with it. The originators of First Friday are Living Water and I know many of you support that event. Now it's an opportunity to get together with other like minded-churches in Mid-Norfolk – or more precisely, fellow believers – to pray that God will pour out His Spirit on Norfolk in this unexpected and unimaginable way. If you've not come, do come and start coming to the venues in future months too. God is doing a new thing – let's see Him do impossible things here in Dereham and here in Norfolk.

★ **Unappreciated** *People will always try to knock God's blessings.*

So here's this man who has been miraculously healed? Rather than people rejoicing with him, he was the object of hard questions and criticism. Who from? From the religious leaders! You thought they would recognise a work of God. But they were so tied up with their own priorities. Because Jesus didn't do things the way they did, then it didn't suit them. You would have thought that they would have been pleased that the man had received his sight. What a wonderful thing to happen! Not on your life! They were angry - they interrogated the man and finally threw him out of the temple. They didn't want to respond to his statement "Once I was blind but now I can see". They couldn't recognise the work of God, not because they couldn't but they wouldn't.

The sad truth is that the most obstructive people to the unexpected and the unimagined work of God are HIS OWN PEOPLE. In fact we have 2000 years of being unable and unwilling to accept something that isn't quite the way WE'VE done things. It's why splits occur in churches and

continue to do so. In our business to do things our way, or the "Baptist" way, or the "scriptural" way, we never stop to say "where's God in this". And the astonishing thing is, God isn't picky about who He will pour out His Spirit and pour out His blessings on. He's looking for people who are blind and trust in Him to receive their sight. And the biggest hindrance are those who are blind but think they have perfect vision.

So if we look at our country of Norfolk, or our local town and we see how the church of God has contracted and we see how few people confess the name of Christ – about 5% in towns and about 3% in the countryside but we see a God who is so big, strong and mighty, then who are the ones with their eyes closed to the God who wants to bring blessing in unimagined ways – it's you and it's me. We're not the blind man receiving the blessing – we're the Pharisees who question something amazing is even of God when it plainly is. Jesus wants us to be a people who see Him moving in unexpected and unimagined ways and calls us to follow Him.

★ **Unconditional** *The man thought Jesus was worth worshipping.*

9:35 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 worshipped him.

Finally, the man, meets Jesus and realised who He was. What was his response? The man worshipped him. It's remarkable how a blind man who most likely had increased hearing sensitivity did not recognise Jesus from His voice. He certainly heard, but he wasn't really listening. He was preoccupied with his life, his blindness and the rest of it to hear the voice of Jesus. The encounter with Jesus changed him from a man who barely recognised the voice of Jesus to someone whom he worshipped.

The mark of someone who has encountered Jesus is someone whose life shows what He is worth to them. As we encounter Him we find Him amazing, working in our lives in unimagined ways. And we worship Him. By that I don't just mean that we are people who come to church and sing and pray or whatever – but are people who show in the way that we live our lives that reflect the measure of what He is worth.

One of the truths we have been exploring in Swaffham over the last few months are the ways in which our lives broadcast what we think of Jesus. Our words, our deeds, our thoughts, our actions all tell other believers and the world what Jesus means to us. If we meet Jesus in an unexpected and unimagined way, then like the man born blind, our lives will be transformed. He opens our eyes and we worship Him.

You've heard a lot of words this morning, remember this Jesus wants to change our lives and our church in unexpected and unimagined ways. And how do we respond? With scepticism? Or do we realise afresh a Saviour, who comes to use with grace and mercy – ready to pour our His Spirit on us in unexpected an unimagined ways.

Let's pray and come before Him

- ◆ come to say sorry for the way in which we have often walked our own way rather than trust in the God who is strong and mighty
- ◆ for our lack of vision and expectancy for what God wants to do – for being blind to it
- ◆ by Your Spirit give us a vision for what you want to do – individuals/church – re-imagine our minds to see what You want to do however improbable
- ◆ helps us to recognise your way and not be skeptical, cynical or unbelieving – but to trust You
- ◆ as we see you work, transform our lives, transform our church

Invitation for prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
Dereham Baptist Church
27/2/05
Scripture quotes from NIV*