



from TORCH TRUST

# Sermon Notes



**Sight Loss Sunday**

Equipping churches to enable blind and partially sighted people to contribute to church life..



# Made in God's Image

**A short reflection is given for the OT lesson, Psalm and NT lesson, with slightly longer reflections given under headings from the Gospel passage.**

## Jeremiah 1

Jeremiah is told by God that he was chosen long before he was born. Jeremiah has a challenging task of promising four words of destruction and two of reconstruction. The task will be difficult as he will speak out against false prophets who promise specious comfort. He will suffer persecution for a message which no one wants to hear and he will experience the bitter-sweet reality of the truth of his message (Jer. 20).

Many people fear disability, as they might fear invasion, and also seek after false hope. SLFC brings a reality to help others face difficult truths, but with ultimate hope.

## Psalm 139

This popular Psalm has inspired many. From verse 13 the psalmist reflects on how he has been fearfully and wonderfully made, and also that he has been made for a purpose and calling. We too are formed in the image of God. God is perfect, but the image may not be. None of us is perfectly

formed. What we are is beautiful in the eyes of God and each of us precious in his sight.

## Romans 8:31-39

This mighty chapter compares the life of sin with the life of the Spirit who gives life. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Disability can still separate us in society, yet nothing can separate us from the love of God. Satan's condemnation can make us feel guilty in disability but, praise God, Jesus has conquered Satan.

## John 9

Not only is this a beautifully told story, but it is cleverly crafted. Amongst other possible issues, 5 are noted below.

- The issue of sin and sickness
- Jesus is the light of the world
- The growth of faith in a man under pressure from the authorities
- Physical and spiritual blindness
- Exclusion of those with disabilities

## The issue of sin and sickness

Who sinned, the man or his parents, that he was born blind? This is an issue in Scripture and even in present society. Many Jews of that time linked sickness with sin. Here Jesus says that neither the



man nor his parents were responsible for his blindness. He was born blind so that the works of God could be displayed in him. Jesus could use this situation of disability to manifest His glory.

## Jesus is the light of the world

There are 7 sayings of the kind 'Jesus is...', and in some cases they are linked to particular incidents. While in the world, Jesus is the light of the world, and here is one way in which he can illustrate this, by bringing light to one who has only ever known darkness. Where the other Gospel writers speak of miracles, John speaks of signs. This sign points to Jesus as the light of the world. This sign is also accompanied by a physical act - in this case saliva and sand; an interaction of humanity and nature. It also requires action from the man himself, common in healings in both Old and New Testaments.

## The growth of faith in a man under pressure from the authorities

This is developed in detail. He is questioned by onlookers and then by the Pharisees. He begins by knowing that the act was performed by a man called Jesus, but he has no idea where this Jesus has gone. Next he appears before the Pharisees who were offended because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. The healed man now says Jesus is a prophet. They summon the parents who pass the buck as they did not want to be involved. The Pharisees summon him again. The man cheekily asks the Pharisees if they wanted to be his disciples, acknowledging that this prophet also had a following. He also says that God listens to the godly person who does his will, and if he were not from God he could do nothing. After the

Pharisees had thrown him out, Jesus goes to find him. He wants to believe in the Son of Man, and when Jesus proclaimed that he was the Son of Man, the man says he believes and worships him. He has grown in faith to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of Man.

## Physical and spiritual blindness

This is clearly noted by Jesus. Jesus said he had come into this world for judgement, so that "the blind will see, and those who see will become blind". The blind man was physically healed, but the Pharisees had become blind. Some Pharisees had asked, 'are we blind too?' Jesus' response was that they had sinned, and in claiming to be able to see their guilt remained. Their spiritual sight was clouded by their legalistic Sabbath interpretations, and when put to the test they had become blind. The unique physical healing of a blind man also holds a spiritual meaning. We are all in a sense born blind, and need to gain sight in putting our trust in the Son of Man and following him.

## Exclusion of those with disabilities

The man born blind had begun to win an argument against the Pharisees through his experience of healing, and with clear logic. The outwitted Pharisees resorted to their authority and power and they threw him out claiming he was born in sin and had no right to lecture them. In their eyes the man was blind because of sin and was not worthy of being heard.

Sadly in society, sometimes even in church, those with disabilities (including blindness) can suffer exclusion or, even if included, not have their contribution and gifts acknowledged.



## Closing reflection

The theme for Sight Loss Friendly Church this year is 'made in God's image'. Other than Jesus, no person perfectly reflects the image of God, but we must beware of any thinking which suggests that those with disabilities reflect an image that is marred. This would suggest that others are somehow perfectly made. None of us is perfectly made and, even if we seem free from physical disabilities, at least for the present, we are always emotionally, psychologically and spiritually short of perfection. As we have seen above, there are

those who are physically blind, and those who are spiritually blind. It is only when we yield ourselves fully to Christ, and ask him to enter our lives and make and renew us in the power of the Holy Spirit, that we may more perfectly reflect the image of God, for we would like others to see God in and through us, looking beyond ourselves and our own imperfections. In the words of Psalm 115, 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to your name be the glory'.

