

What is Your Story?

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Kate, and good morning, everyone. Very glad to have you with us, whether you're in the church here or watching online. I want to begin by introducing you to Duncan Donaldson, otherwise known as Dunkey or as Drunken Duncan.

I never met him, but he was a contemporary of my father who knew him fairly well. Duncan lived in Airdrie and was known locally as a character, in inverted commas.

But he said that when he went into a pub, that everyone else walked out, because they knew that when he got a few drinks in, he would turn violent, and he was very strong.

He reckoned he'd been in prison between 60 and 70 times. And then one day he was walking past Airdrie Cross, and someone handed him a Christian leaflet and said, would you like to come to a gospel meeting?

And he thought, well, I might as well. Well, and he went along, he got free tea and biscuits, he got a warm welcome. He thought, well, I'll go back again next week. Arrived the following Sunday and found the hall totally locked.

[1 : 06] No one there. And he thought, oh, no, they know my reputation. No one's coming back. It turned out he was an hour early. So eventually everyone did arrive, and he found out that people had been praying for him during the week.

And as he listened to the gospel message being preached, there were tears streaming down his face, and he gave his life to the Lord Jesus. And after that, he was completely transformed.

He became a well-respected, much-loved school janitor. But what he loved to do above all was to tell his story, particularly in the open air, but in halls as well.

Everywhere he went, he wanted to tell people what a difference Jesus had made in his life. Here's how I was. Here's when I met Jesus.

And here's what has changed in me now. And I was reminded of Duncan Donaldson as I was reading this week the story of the blind man in John 9.

[2 : 03] Because in many ways, it's very similar. As we go through the chapter, the blind man is just repeating again and again, here's what I was. I was blind. Then I met Jesus.

Now I can see. And that must be from God that the healing has taken place. And what I want us to leave thinking about this morning, we'll talk about lots of things as we get into the chapter.

But what I want all of us to leave thinking about this morning is what is my story? Do I have a story I can tell of what Jesus has done in my life, the difference it makes to me of knowing him?

And if I do, am I prepared to go and to tell people about it? Do I want to share it with others, what the Lord has done for me and what he can do for them?

So we'll come back to that various points. And at the end this morning, what is your story? Are you able to share it with others? But let's begin by just reminding ourselves of a bit of the background here.

[3 : 12] We're looking at John's gospel. So every time you're in John, what you have to think is, what does this passage, what does this chapter tell us that will help us to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God?

That is John's purpose in writing his book, and he's very focused. Every chapter points us to Jesus as the Messiah and as the Son of God. I think it's fairly evident how that applies to chapter 9.

We're in a section that extends from chapter 5 to chapter 10, which is based around various feast festivals in Jerusalem and Jesus attending them. Chapter 9 is a little bit different from the chapters round about.

If you have a red-letter Bible or you have an app that shows you the words of Jesus highlighted, that might be fairly evident. In most of the chapters in this section, there is some narrative, but there

is a lot of Jesus teaching.

He says a lot in almost all the chapters. In chapter 9, Jesus speaks at the beginning and at the end, and he doesn't feature at all in the middle.

[4 : 29] What comes in the middle is a kind of crime scene investigation, CSI, Jerusalem, if you like, but it's a bit more Keystone Cops and Sherlock Holmes in the way it happens.

The Pharisees believe a crime has been committed, actually several crimes. Jesus has spat on the Sabbath. He's molded clay on the Sabbath.

He's healed someone on the Sabbath. And according to their rules, their regulations, all of these things were not allowed. They were sins.

Now, we will have our own view on that, but that's the Pharisees' view, and that is what they persist in as we go through the chapter. And so they are trying to find something that they can pin on Jesus and can arrest him and condemn him.

And they go around talking to the people, talking to the blind man, talking to his parents, desperate to get something that they can say a crime has been committed and there must be consequences for it.

[5 : 31] And they become increasingly desperate as they go along, particularly because the blind man, all he can say is, I was blind, I met Jesus, now I can see that must be a work of God.

They don't have any effective argument against that. The other backdrop to the chapter is we are still in the Feast of Tabernacles. We've been there since chapter 7, and indeed the first part of chapter 10 is around the same time.

Now, we're possibly just after the end of the formal feast, but it will still very much be in people's minds. So the Feast of the Tabernacles had three aspects to it. It looked back to how God had provided for these lives in the wilderness.

There's a mention of Moses in this chapter. It looks at the present as a joyful harvest Thanksgiving ceremony, and it looks forward to the coming Messiah. And there are two particular themes to it.

One is light. The knights are drawing in, and there are four great lamps lit in the temple that lights up the whole city, representing the light that God gives. And the other is water.

[6 : 40] It's the dry season, and so there's a daily ceremony where water is taken from the Pool of Siloam, carried up the hill, and put onto the altar. And you'll see again both light and water as we go through this chapter.

But let's get into John 9, and we'll divide it into three sections. So the first section is from verse 1 to verse 7. I've called it a miraculous intervention.

This is the narrative about the healing of the blind man. We don't know much about this blind man, but I think we can deduce a little bit about his age from the passage.

He's got two parents still alive. That's established. And the parents say to the Pharisees, he is of age. Ask him what's happened. Now, being of age in first century Israel meant for a boy that he was at least 13 years old.

That was when a boy was deemed to become a man. I'm not suggesting this man is necessarily 13 years old, but I think we can take it from the fact that his parents refer to him being of age, that he was relatively young.

[7 : 53] He may well have been a teenager. That's speculation, but I think we can assume he was probably quite a young man. And Jesus and his disciples come across him as they're walking through Jerusalem.

Now, that wouldn't have been an uncommon thing if in that day you were disabled in any kind of way and weren't able to earn a living, there was no social security, so you were dependent on the goodwill of others.

Most disabled people, whether blind or lame or whatever, they would sit beside the roadside and beg, and people would give them alms, would give them money out of sympathy.

So it wasn't an uncommon sight, but for some reason it attracted the attention of Jesus' disciples.

And they asked a question which we might find a little strange. They said, is this man blind because of his sin or because of the sin of his parents?

Now, remember, he'd been blind from birth. So a type was saying, perhaps his parents had done something wrong, and he is suffering the retribution for that.

[9 : 00] Or even more surprisingly, they're saying, perhaps he did something wrong before he was born, before he even came into this world blind. Perhaps he's done some kind of sin and is being

punished for that now.

Now, we won't go into theology of that. It was something that might have been quite a common view in that day, although it seems strange to us. But Jesus makes it clear the reason he's blind is not because of his sin or his parents' sin.

He is going to be healed. He is going to have his sight given to him, and that will mean that his illness will bring glory to God as Jesus heals him.

I think maybe we need to take a little pause there. Because when people suffer, very often we ask, why? Whether it's ourself or someone close to us, we think, well, why is that happening?

Now, usually there are no straightforward answers. We can say that all suffering is a result of being in a sinful, fallen world.

[10:10] And Christians are not exempt from that in any kind of way. I think we need to be very, very careful about saying that people are suffering, whether ourselves or others, because of some sin of theirs or because of something someone else has done.

In some cases it will be. It will be very obvious there's a connection, but generally need to be very careful about making that deduction. What I think we can say is that every suffering, every illness, is an opportunity to bring glory to God.

Now, sometimes it can be through miraculous healings, through things happening that confounds the medical profession and can only be from God.

But other times, it is not as spectacular as that. When we suffer, if we're Christians, then that should draw us closer to God.

That should develop our Christian character, help us to be more like the Lord Jesus. We suffered in ways that we never could know or even imagine.

[11:26] And as we develop as Christian, as we become more like Jesus, that brings glory to God. Paul says in Romans 5, suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope.

And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given to us.

So as we become more like Jesus, as we suffer and grow in character, that is glorifying to God. We also can glorify God through times of suffering, through the example that we set to others.

Through showing our faith in the Lord Jesus, and they can look at us and they can say in the face of the most difficult situations, they still trust, they still love Jesus.

In our church at the moment, we have quite a lot of people who are unwell. Some acute, some chronic, some mental illness, some physical illness, some who are suffering for other reasons.

[12:33] And I can look at quite a lot of them and I see an example they set that it would be good for me and others to follow. whether it's those who are suffering or those who care for them.

There are some quite remarkable people in this church and we thank God for them that in times of difficulty and suffering would point us to Jesus and would show the difference that knowing Christ makes when we go through difficult times.

So even in our suffering, God can be glorified. Now I've covered that very quickly. If you want to talk about it more later on, speak to me or to Archie or to Graham or to another Christian you know.

So we've got to the point where the disciples have been talking to Jesus and then Jesus approaches the man. But before he does that, he has a little bit of explanation for us.

And this links us back to chapter 8. You remember, I think it was probably about three weeks ago now that Graham was talking about Jesus, the light of the world and that we need to recognize that we're lost and to follow the light.

[13:40] Well, Jesus again says, I am the light of the world and he's about to demonstrate that in a physical as well as in a spiritual sense. But he says, I'm only here for a while.

The night is coming. I think that probably refers to his crucifixion. While I'm here, I have to do God's work. And so saying that, he goes up to the man, he makes something out of the mud from the clay, puts it in the man's eye and sends him down to the pool of Siloam.

I suspect there's a lot of symbolism in this. The clay that the Lord uses perhaps is symbolic of the fact that all of us are made from the earth, from the dust as Adam was to begin with.

John points out the pool of Siloam means sent and Jesus sent the man and he himself had been sent into the world. Lots of symbolism there, but let's not get too caught up in that.

What we see here is the most remarkable miracle. Imagine you are the blind man. You go out that morning as normal to beg, to look for sympathy from people and hope they'll give you some money. [14:51] You meet this man, perhaps you hear a bit of the conversation saying, was he a sinner before he was born? And that might seem a bit strange. Jesus comes and apparently without any explanation puts the mud in his eyes and sends him away.

It wasn't like the case of Bartimaeus where Bartimaeus called out to Jesus to have mercy. There's no sign that this man even really knew who Jesus was. And yet Jesus sends him down to the pool with the mud on his eyes.

He washes his eyes and he can see. And what an amazing thing that must have been for the man. Blind all his life, he meets Jesus and he's able to see.

And we can rejoice in the miracle of what God does there and in the miraculous ways God changes people's lives today as well. This man really had a story worth telling.

Let's move on. And the main section of the chapter I've called a malicious interrogation. On the face of it, the Pharisees were saying, well, we're just trying to enforce the law.

[16:00] In practice, what they were doing was trying to trap people into condemning Jesus and ultimately to arrest him. And when they can't do that, they eventually take it out on the man who had been blind.

So there are a number of conversations here. We'll just go very quickly through what they are. So it begins, the man born blind, he goes home and the people are wondering, what's happened?

Is this really the person we knew who sat begging beside the road or is it someone else? And the man says to him, no, it's me. Jesus put mud in my eyes.

I washed it off. Now I can see. So the people then go to the Pharisees. I guess if you've got a religious problem as this might have appeared to be, you go to religious people.

And they went to the Pharisees and told them what had happened. And the Pharisees saw an opportunity here perhaps to get at Jesus. So again, they go to the blind man and they ask him about the healing and he explains again very simply what had happened.

[17:06] And they say to him, well, what do you deduce from that? And he said, this man must be a prophet. Now in the Old Testament, most of the miracles of healing were in the times of the prophets like Elijah and Elisha.

That was why he might have deduced that Jesus was a prophet. They still not satisfied. They think, well, maybe it's not really the same person. So they go to his parents and ask them.

Parents are really cowardly. They confirm as their son, but they're not willing to go beyond that because of what the Pharisees might do to them.

So they fob them off and say, well, he's of age. Go and ask him. The Pharisees go back and have a slightly longer conversation with the man. He gets, I think, a bit irritated with them and he says, well, why do you keep asking me these questions?

Do you want to become Jesus' disciples too? And that really annoys the Pharisees and they end up sending him out of the temple. They excommunicate him in the religious terminology.

[18:08] And then Jesus finds him and explains what's happening and who he is. So that's the story. What I particularly want us to notice from it, though, is how the blind man's understanding increases as time goes on.

As he tells this story, he becomes more confident in it, but he also becomes more aware of how this must be God at work in his life.

So to begin with, he is just stating the facts. There was this man called Jesus. Verse 11, they're following along. There's a man called Jesus. He told me to go to the pool of Siloam and wash off the mud.

I did and I saw. So we start with the man, Jesus. He knows nothing about him. At this point, he hasn't even seen him because the only time he encountered Jesus, he was blind.

We then have the first interrogation by the Pharisees and then in verse 17, as I mentioned a minute ago, the man says, he's a prophet. So he's gone from, this was a man I'd never met before.

[19:14] I know his name was Jesus, but nothing more. And he's deduced, this must be a prophet because of what he's done. If we jump forward to the end of the second interrogation in verse 33, the man says, if this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

So we've gone from, he's a man called Jesus, he's probably a prophet, and he could do nothing if he wasn't from God. And then Jesus comes and talks to the man, explains that he is the son of

man, and then in verse 38, the man says, Lord, I believe and worships Jesus.

So he goes from, I met this man called Jesus to, Lord, I believe in you. As he tells this story, as it sinks in exactly what the Lord Jesus has done for him, he begins to realize more and more how special this man Jesus is.

He's a prophet, he's from God, he is the Messiah. That was what Jesus implied by calling himself the son of man. And by the end, he is a true disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Can we come back to our stories? If you have a story to tell, to begin with, it can be quite difficult to speak to people. But like this man, the more you tell it, the more people you explain what Jesus has done for you to, the more confident you will become in talking about the Lord Jesus.

[20 : 50] And as you do and as you read the Bible, as you learn more about and from Jesus, then your faith will also grow. And you'll begin to understand more and more about who Jesus is and exactly what it is that he has done for you.

I think that is one of the great lessons from this chapter. If you know Jesus, if you have an experience of Jesus in your life, tell people about it, think about what he's done, and then you'll grow in your faith and in your confidence in sharing it with others.

Let's look at the last bit of the chapter which I've called a momentous insight. Momentous meaning really important or significant. I think it is that. So we're looking particularly at verse 39.

Jesus said, For judgment I have come into the world so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind. We'll have a very clear example of the blind seeing here.

Not just physically, but as the man's eyes spiritually were open and he came to know and to recognize who Jesus was and to worship him. The reference of the seeing who become blind I think is fairly clear and they got it is fairly clearly a reference to the Pharisees.

[22 : 18] Jesus says, You're not going to see because you should be able to see but you've chosen not to. They had chosen darkness rather than light.

The people who knew the Old Testament knew what God had said in the past knew what God had done in the past chose instead to reject God's Son.

To get so caught up in petty arguments of what you couldn't or couldn't could or couldn't do on the Sabbath. That they lost sight of the fact that here was a wonderful thing God's Son with us working among us healing and drawing people to God.

They were sighted but they chose to be blind. The saying goes there is none so blind as he who will not see.

Can I put it a different way using words from Tim Keller? Now some of you may know that Tim Keller passed away earlier this weekend. Tim Keller was a minister in the United States.

[23 : 23] He for many years had a big church in Manhattan in New York which he planted. He found a church planting movement. He was a co-founder of the Gospel Coalition and he was a well-known Christian writer and theologian.

Also I believe a very humble man of great integrity. He'll be much missed. I'm going to quote three things from him this morning.

And here's the one that particularly relates to this passage. Tim Keller says there is no blindness so deep and incurable as the one we don't acknowledge.

There is no blindness so deep and incurable as the one we don't acknowledge. Can't we see that in this passage? These Pharisees who should have sight who should be able to understand who Jesus is yet they have blinded themselves with their own law and they can't acknowledge that. They think they are superior they think they are the ones who see clearly when in fact they've been blinded by themselves. Let's challenge ourselves on that as well.

[24 : 36] We look at these Pharisees and might say well we are not like that. We know Jesus we follow him. But couldn't the Pharisees say we are Moses disciples?

On the face of it they were good living religious people. I wonder whether many of us have blind spots in our Christian life.

Things that we wouldn't want to acknowledge and yet which are going against God's way. Perhaps there are works of God we can see round about us and we say well I'm not sure they should really do it that way.

I don't really approve of that. But God's at work and we don't acknowledge it. Tim Keller as I said worked in Manhattan in New York.

He went to an environment where people said you have no chance as an evangelical Christian preaching the gospel. You're never going to reach these people. They're so materialistic and so caught up in themselves.

[25 : 39] He ended up with a church of more than 5,000 people. And he did that partly by respectfully challenging people about their lifestyles and their attitudes.

So here's something he said. He said we want to feel beautiful. We want to feel loved. We want to feel significant. That's why we're working so hard.

And that's the source of the evil. Talking to respectable New Yorkers, people who are pillars of society and saying actually you've got things wrong.

You think the way to get on in life, the way to succeed is to work hard and to be seen to be an achiever. You're missing the point.

The way to get on in life, the way to really have satisfaction in life is to follow Jesus and to know him and to live for him. Perhaps that's a word for us in Edinburgh as well as in New York.

[26 : 42] Do we get too caught up in the busyness of life, in our personal ambitions, in wanting to be seen to be good and respectable? And do we sometimes miss the point that the key thing is that we know Jesus and that our lives are with him and led by him?

So the answer that Tim Keller presents, the third quotation I'm going to give from a very well-known quotation you may have heard before, Tim Keller says, we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.

So two things in that quotation, we are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe. I know a lot about the sin in my life.

You may know a bit about it too, perhaps there are things you spot that I don't spot. But how much more is there that God looks on and sees my sinfulness, my putting myself first my going against his way and not following Jesus as I should.

We're more sinful and flawed than we ever dare believe. And yes, says Tim Keller, at the same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.

[28 : 15] Despite all my sin, despite all my failure, Christ loves me more than I could ever hope could ever understand. He loved me enough to go to the cross on Calvary and to die for me there and to take my punishment.

And I'm accepted not just grudgingly, not just while your sins are forgiven, and that's it. I'm accepted as a child of God. I can come to God as my father, knowing my relationship with him has been restored through the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. And that is the story of everyone who has trusted in Jesus. And the challenge for all of us is have we come to that point?

Have we recognised the sin that's in our life that we have gone our own way rather than God's way? And have we accepted the only way back to God is through Jesus?

And if we have, if we're Christians, let's just think, where do we stand today? Are we in some ways getting blinded? Are we letting sinful things that maybe we don't even realise take the place of God in our lives?

[29 : 27] And perhaps we need to come back to the cross and to recognise again all that Jesus has done for us. So the question is again, what is your story?

I suspect some people may be thinking, well I haven't got much of a story. You might be a Christian, you might know Jesus as your saviour, think, well actually my story is a bit dull. I trusted the Lord Jesus when I was seven years old and my father led me to the Lord.

Not very exciting, very significant for me, but not the most exciting of stories. Well if you feel I've not got much of a story, let me tell you about one other person.

We're going to sing one of his hymns in a few minutes. It's John Newton. It's quite well known that John Newton was a slave trader and that he lived a very sinful life, but he had a pious mother who remembered something of what she had said to him and in the midst of a storm when he feared for his life, he put himself on the mercy of God and his life was changed.

So that was his conversion. But if you look at the story of John Newton, it actually took a long time before you could get to the point where he said, I was blind, but now I see.

[30 : 45] He continued as a slave trader for several years, at first not seeing any problem with it, laterally being much more convicted about it. He fell several times into moral sin.

And it was probably around ten years after his conversion, a process that John Newton went through in getting to know Jesus and having his eyes opened and eventually becoming a clergyman as well as a hymn writer and very influential in the abolition of slavery.

And I think for many of us, our story might not be that different. We probably don't have the dramatic start that John Newton had. But having trusted the Lord Jesus, that is not something that immediately changes everything for most of us.

Sometimes it did. It seems for Duncan Donaldson it did immediately. But over time, God speaks to us and draws us to himself. So if I look back at my own life, there was a period of around five years from when I was 17 to when I was 22, which I would mark as being when I matured as a Christian and became committed really to the Lord Jesus.

It started with a holiday club in this church, the first holiday club we had. I was a very junior helper. At the end of five years, I was leading my first trip through Union Mission, which would have been unimaginable when I was 17.

[32 : 07] In between, there was university. And a series of things where God worked in my life and I can look back and say, I've got a story there of what God did for me. And of course, there are other stories as we go on.

And I would encourage you, if you're a Christian, not just to think of the moment of your conversion, that's really important if you can identify it, but to think, what has God done in my life that has been significant and how can I share that with others?

We all have a story, and we have a story that we should be able to share with other people. And if we have a story, don't be afraid to tell it.

Yes, it's difficult to begin with. I struggle with it as well. But don't be afraid to tell your story. People want to hear. People are interested in our story. Some of them might laugh at us.

Some of them might not be interested. But generally, if you've got a good story, that is a really powerful witness to others alongside telling them about Jesus.

[33 : 12] So if you have a story, tell it. But the question also this morning is, do you have a story? Can you say, yes, there was a time when I trusted in the Lord Jesus, when I handed my life over to him, and that has really changed and transformed me?

If you can't say, yes, I have a story, yes, I know Jesus, then please consider this morning what Jesus has been saying to us, and what the story of the blind man signifies to us.

Here is someone who can take us from blindness, from sin, who can transform us and can help us to know God and to have confidence in the future.

Let's make sure that we have a story we can tell about God's goodness to us, and let's make sure that we go and we tell it. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word to us this morning. Thank you for the story of the blind man, the very powerful story and the real transformation in his life. Once he was blind, then he met Jesus, then he could see.

[34 : 20] And we thank you that many of us have stories that we can tell others about how Jesus has worked in our lives. Help us to be willing to do that and to share with others how God has been good to us.

And we pray that all of us will come to the point where we do have that story where we can say Jesus is my saviour. My life has been changed through trusting in him.

We thank you for your presence with us. Pray for your blessing as we continue together now. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.