

JONAS INTERVIEW

Interviewer My next guest is Jonas...who has regained his sight in miraculous circumstances after years of blindness. Jonas, you must be a pretty happy man.

Jonas I'm ecstatic. You can't imagine what it's like. There's so much to see and discover.

Interviewer Is it true you were born blind? Because we heard allegations that you had always been able to see.

Jonas You don't want to listen to that rubbish. I've never been able to see. It wasn't a problem for me really. I'd not known anything else so I learned to adapt. You'd be amazed what blind people can do – some of it better than sighted. Our hearing is very acute because we learn to listen. And our sense of smell too, though that's not always a good thing. (Wafts hand in front of nose.)

Interviewer So tell us how it happened Jonas. Had you any idea something was about to happen to you? I mean had you gone into town looking for a miracle?

Jonas No. I was just sitting by the side of the road, begging as usual. Quite a few people came along and they started talking about me. Some people seem to assume that if you're blind you must be deaf or stupid as well, probably both. Anyway, they said my blindness must either be my own stupid fault or my parents must have done something awful.

Interviewer That's quite a common belief...

Jonas Yes. Too many people are looking for someone to blame. But there was one man in the group who everyone else seemed to look up to. I heard him say my blindness was neither because of my sin nor my parents' sin. Then he said something I'll never forget. He said, "This man's blindness happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

Interviewer How did you feel about that? What did you think he meant? After all, it's a pretty weird thing to say.

Jonas I didn't really have time to think about it. But it's kind of nice to have someone defend you in public. Most people abuse me. I did get a surge inside me like an adrenalin rush and something like hope, I suppose. Then I suddenly got mud slapped on my eyes!

Interviewer Excuse me? Could you see who did it? No, sorry – I was forgetting...

Jonas No. That's all right. It's a fair question. People do throw things at me so it could easily have been someone having a go at me. But I knew it was this same man and...

Interviewer How did you know? Who was he?

Jonas Because he spoke to me. I'll come to who he was later. He just said, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam".

Interviewer Couldn't you have washed it off anywhere you chose? Like somewhere nearby?

Jonas Maybe. But something about the voice made me want to do what he said. I had a feeling it mattered. So I got to the pool with a bit of help and washed the mud off and you know what happened then?

Interviewer We'll stop just there, Jonas. [Turns to audience] Keep tuned to us and join us after the break to find out what happened next.

BREAK

Interviewer Welcome back. We're talking to Jonas...Jonas we've been hearing how you were a blind beggar, born blind, and a man first put mud on your eyes and then told you to wash it off. What next?

Jonas I saw all this rippling water with light dancing off the ripples. It hurt at first and I was dazzled. Then I made a mistake and looked up and the sun hit me right in the eyes. For a while I kept my eyes half shut but I so much wanted to look and see everything. I was in a right mess I can tell you. I was laughing and then crying. I smacked the water just to see the splash. Then I started dancing around. If anybody thought I'd gone mad, I'm not surprised.

Interviewer How did people respond? Your family, for example?

Jonas Well, my parents they were glad but they were also scared.

Interviewer Why scared? Scared of you?

Jonas No, I don't think so. Scared of the Pharisees finding out because I'd been healed on a Sabbath. Naughty. Against their rules. The Pharisees could have banned us all from the Synagogue. Some people didn't even believe I was the same man – they thought I was an impostor trying to fake a miracle. But all my family and neighbours knew me. They'd known me for years.

Interviewer So what happened when the news got round? If all these people were in the know, it must have reached the Pharisees' ears pretty quickly. They don't miss much do they?

Jonas To be honest with you, I wasn't paying much attention to what people thought or said. I was having the time of my life. I was looking at faces and olive trees and fruit. And the flowers! I was stunned by the beauty of the flowers. I said to one neighbour, "Look at this lily!" "Nice," he said. "Nice! Is that all you can say? 'Nice', Look at it! Look at the colour, look at the tiny markings". I was like a child. I was seeing things for the first time ever in my life and it was wonderful.

Interviewer So you were leaping around and being misunderstood again...

Jonas Yes. I was having a private party all by myself. And then some of the people around me hauled me off to the Pharisees. Talk about “Neighbourhood Watch!” And my parents, they had to come too – just what they had been dreading. “Don’t drag us into this,” they told me – “we can’t afford to be thrown out of the Synagogue. You speak up for yourself.”

Interviewer I imagine you had quite a bit to say. What did the Pharisees want to know?

Jonas Well, they were all talking about this being the work of devils because I’d been healed on a Sabbath. And they joined in the blame game and told me I’d been full of sin since my birth. Nice lot! And of course they wanted to know who this man was who had put mud on my eyes. That’s when I cracked up again. I started laughing because they didn’t even know where this man came from. I shouted out, “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” I went a bit far and asked the Pharisees if they wanted to follow this man too!

Interviewer What did they do?

Jonas They threw me out. I suppose I should have shown more respect for their position, but I was glad to be thrown out. There was more life outside in the streets than in there I can tell you. And I was still in party mood.

Interviewer What did you most enjoy being able to see? The hills, the architecture, your family?...

Jonas It was wonderful to see my mother and father’s faces. All faces actually, there was so much variety, so many expressions. I began to wonder if I might see the man who healed me but of course I’d have no means of recognising him. For people who had had sight all their lives I must have been getting a bit tiresome, keeping on pointing things out.

Interviewer And did you see the man? You did, didn’t you? How did you know him?

Jonas He searched me out. He wanted me to know who he was. Men called him Jesus. He said he was the Son of Man. I just knew in my spirit he was telling the truth and I knew that the Son of Man is also the Son of God, the Messiah.

Interviewer What did you do then, Jonas?

Jonas I just worshipped him.

Interviewer Thank you Jonas. That’s all we have time for. Jonas’ new book, “*A Man Born Blind*” is published tomorrow. And we’re back next week with a new series of guests with their own extraordinary stories.

From me, it’s goodnight.