

18. Jesus and the Man Born Blind

John 9:1-41

The Gospel According to John

The Light of the World

In our recent studies, we have been considering Jesus' claim that He is *the* Light of the World: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). He said this about Himself while being in the temple courts (John 8:2) and against the backdrop of the four, giant candelabra, which symbolized God as the One who had been their light leading them in the darkness during the wilderness wanderings. He didn't say "I am *a* light," but He said, "I am *the* light of the world." He claimed exclusively to be Israel's Light.

The Apostle John carries this thought into chapter nine, although when he wrote it, there were no chapter divisions. Jesus had given evidence after evidence, sign after sign, with the proof slowly accumulating as to Who He is, viz. God manifest in the flesh. In the previous chapter, the Lord had stated that He was and is the great *I AM* (John 8:58), the name God used to reveal Himself to Moses (Exodus 3:14). To the Jewish people, to make such a declaration was unthinkable! How dare He say that He was God! They were so angry at His statements about Himself that they picked up stones and prepared to stone Him for blasphemy (John 8:59). Although Scripture does not give us the timing of this event, it is likely that it would have been around the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, six months before His crucifixion. As Jesus is leaving the temple precincts, He stopped to minister to a man blind from birth, and in doing so, He proves His statement about His identity through His actions:

¹As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing (John 9:1-7).

Beggars would often be seen sitting near the gates to the temple area, ready to hold out their hands to any worshippers whose hearts were softened by worshiping the Lord. Even today, although there is no temple there, people can often be found begging near one of the gates to the Old City of Jerusalem. Jesus noticed the blind man and stopped. The disciples asked Jesus how this man came to be in this condition, i.e., having been born blind. "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" (v. 2).

Question 1) What difficulties do you imagine this man blind faced? (Think of how his disability affected him physically, emotionally and socially).

The prevailing notion among the Jewish people at that time was that God visited upon the children the sins of the parents. In speaking about the worship of demons masquerading as false idols, God had warned them:

⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, **punishing the children for the sin of the parents** to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20:5-6).

The conclusions that many would have drawn from this was that, perhaps, the man's parents had sinned and that this man was born blind because of their sin. The Pharisees despised the blind man because of his blindness: "To this they replied, 'You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!'" (v. 34). The disciples wanted to know why this man had been born without sight. The Lord did not enter into the discussion, not being concerned so much with the reason for the man's blindness but, instead, with what He was going to do in the situation. He does not comment on how the man came to be in this state. Likewise, we do not always need to know the reasons why people are in the situations in which they find themselves; our mission is to bring the good news into situations when we have an opportunity to show forth the mercy and love of God. Jesus was sensitive to the leading of the Father to demonstrate that whoever was in darkness should know the Light of life.

The Miracle of Sight to the Blind

Put yourself in the shoes of the man born blind. He could hear the conversation between the Lord and His disciples but did not know what was going on. I would think that the Lord would have told him that He was about to put something on his eyes. Did the man know at that point who it was that was speaking to him or putting the mud on his eyes? He explained later, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see" (v. 11). If he knew from the beginning that this was Jesus, he would have said, "Jesus told me to go to Siloam and wash."

Question 2) Why didn't the Lord just lay hands on him and heal him instead of making mud from His saliva? Why was he sent to stumble blindly on his way to Siloam to wash the dirt off his eyes?

Sometimes, the Lord tests our obedience to His voice. The Gospel writer, Luke, told us the story of ten lepers who stood at a distance and shouted to Jesus to have pity on them. What did Jesus do? He said for them to go to the priests. He didn't lay hands on them; instead, He gave them something to do that tested their obedience to His word. It was *as* they went that they were healed (Luke 17:11-19). It was their faith and obedience to the Lord's Word that healed them. Logic would have told them: why go to the priest to get his blessing and permission to enter the community and the synagogue if Jesus had not touched them and healed them? However, in obedience to His word, they walked the distance to see the priests and were healed *as they went*.

Isn't that the way it worked with Naaman, the Syrian general? Naaman had leprosy and heard that the prophet Elisha could heal him. So, he and his accompanying soldiers came to Elisha's

house with gold, silver, and expensive clothing, only for Elisha to send out his servant telling him that, if he dipped himself seven times in the River Jordan, then he would be healed. Naaman saw this as a lack of respect by Elisha. He went away angry and offended at first.

¹¹But Naaman went away angry and said, “**I thought that he would surely come** out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹²Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage. ¹³Naaman’s servants went to him and said, “My father, **if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?** How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed’!” ¹⁴So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy (2 Kings 5:11-14).

The Lord will sometimes offend your mind to reveal your heart. Naaman had preconceived ideas as to how Elisha was going to heal him. The last thing he wanted to do was wash in some small, muddy, little river like the River Jordan. However, obedience sometimes requires us to obey something that goes against our logic. The act of obedience to God will often offend our minds. God’s ways are higher than our ways:

⁸“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

At that time, people believed that the saliva of a person had healing properties. Indeed, this passage is not the only occurrence of Jesus using His saliva to heal a person. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus healed a deaf man after the people wanted the Lord to lay His hands on him. He chose to use a different method:

³²There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and **they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.** ³³After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. **Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue.** ³⁴He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “*Ephphatha!*” (which means “Be opened!”). ³⁵At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly (Mark 7:32-35).

Question 3) Do you remember a time in your life when you had an answer to prayer that did not come in a way that you expected?

The blind man was sent to the Pool of Siloam to wash. This pool was situated on the lower south side of the hill of King David’s City of Zion, probably about 400 yards or so from the Temple.

Imagine what it was like for this man. He had to walk without being able to see to get to the pool of Siloam. Somehow, he went in obedience to the words of Jesus. He may have needed assistance to reach the pool. We do not know these details, but no matter what was on the path or

who was leading him, he was determined to do just as Jesus said. He was well rewarded when he went down the steps to the pool of water. He washed and was instantly healed.

Three Interrogations by the Pharisees

⁸His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” ¹⁰“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked. ¹¹He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” ¹²“Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said. ¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided. ¹⁷Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.” ¹⁸They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. ¹⁹“Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?” ²⁰“We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. ²¹But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” ²⁴A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” ²⁶Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?” ²⁸Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.” ³⁰The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³²Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out (Luke 9:8-34).

I’m sure that he began to rejoice at all the things he could see for the first time. Don’t you think he wondered as he looked at the sky, the green grass, and the faces of friends and people he knew only by voice? How beautiful it would have been for him finally to see the beauty of God’s creation! This miracle would have caused quite a commotion for all who witnessed the event as many would have been acquainted with the man and had probably seen him begging at the gates.

It wasn't long before all hell broke loose because of his healing. His joy was not allowed to continue, for the religious leaders were quick to disturb his joy. He was probably well known by many due to his begging at the city gates. When people saw him full of joy at his healing, they wanted to know what had happened to him, for who had ever heard of someone healing a man who was blind from birth? This healing was particularly significant. To cure a person born blind would also beg the question: how did they deal with the sin problem? Jesus had healed the blind before this occurrence, but this was the first time that a man was healed who had been blind from birth. They took him to the Pharisees when they heard that it was Jesus Who had performed the miracle (v. 13). Perhaps, those who took the man to the Pharisees were wondering whether this was the work of the Messiah, or maybe those who brought him were sympathetic to Jesus and wanted to prove that Jesus was Who He said He was: The Messiah of Israel.

There was more to this miracle, I believe, than meets the eye. This healing was a sign to the Israelites that this was, indeed, the Messiah, and that is why John the Apostle goes in great depth about the details of this miracle and the response following it. The children of Israel believed that, when the Messiah would come, He would accomplish at least four things prophesied of Him. These things were written down in the prophet Isaiah's writings:

³Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; ⁴say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; **your God will come**, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." ⁵Then will **the eyes of the blind be opened** and the **ears of the deaf unstopped**. ⁶Then will the **lame leap like a deer**, and the **mute tongue shout for joy** (Isaiah 35:3-6).

The passage above is believed to be speaking about the Messiah. It is explicit in saying that this One Who comes will Himself be God (v. 4). When He comes, there will be four things that this passage of Scripture says that He will do:

- 1) He will open the eyes of the blind (v. 5).
- 2) He will unstop the ears of the deaf (v. 5).
- 3) The lame will be healed (v. 6).
- 4) The dumb will shout with delight at having a voice again (v. 6).

Of course, Jesus did all these things and more during his estimated three years of ministry. This recent healing was too much evidence for the Pharisees to bear. They did not see or accept Jesus as the Messiah. They believed that the Messiah would be a great King who would come with great power and glory, not this humble person fulfilling Scripture by riding into the city on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). They did not understand that there are two comings of the Messiah: one appearance as a substitute to put away sin, and another as a righteous warrior King who would slay all of His enemies. Even though they had eyes, they refused to see the truth even when it was plain before them. They had seen the four signs (miracles) before, but now this was close up and personal and right inside Jerusalem—the city that they claimed as their territory!

The Blindness of the Pharisees

The Pharisees were spiritually blind to what had just happened. Very conspicuous by its absence is any joy and praise toward God for this man's healing. One would think that there would be some expression of emotion, a celebration, a party, or something. Even a "Praise God!" or a "Hallelujah!" would not have been amiss! Instead, there was religious controversy, debate and an inquisition. To them, their rigid interpretation of the Law prevented them from seeing any good deeds done on the Sabbath. Jesus had broken their strict interpretation by the following acts:

- 1) He made clay on the Sabbath. Mixing saliva with dirt was regarded by the ruling establishment as kneading, which, to them, constituted working on the Sabbath.
- 2) It was forbidden to heal on the Sabbath. Only if one's life was in actual danger could one heal on the Sabbath.

They quickly concluded that this healing could not have happened, for their opinion was that Jesus was a sinner because He had broken their interpretation of the Law. There had to be some other explanation. First of all, they tried to explain it away by saying that it was not the man who was born blind. "But he insisted, 'I am the man'" (v. 9). They wanted an explanation for what had happened, perhaps thinking that this was all a big con trick. In his response, the man is an excellent example for us. He might not be able to put it all together theologically, but he testified to what he knew and had experienced and was at peace with the consequences of his action, come what may. He merely shared his story of what happened to him. We may not be able to debate with people concerning the power of the Gospel, but we can share our story of what happened to us. It is often a heartfelt personal story that will linger with people and open their hearts to the truth. This is because, if you know Christ, your story is compelling and can cut through intellectual arguments or spiritual darkness. In a personal testimony, the love and the power of God are revealed.

Question 4) How do you think this man's life may have changed from this point forward, aside from his physical state? What issues do you think this may have posed for others in the community?

The Pharisees questioned the man's parents about his healing. They could not believe that he had been born blind. "Is this your son? They asked" (v. 19). John added a side note to help us understand why the parents would acknowledge him as their son, but not add any details as to what had happened: "His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him'" (vv. 22-23). The underlying theme in this story is of the Pharisees' using threats and intimidation against anyone placing their trust and belief in Jesus' being the Messiah. It is impossible for many of us who live in secular western nations to understand what it meant for a Jewish person in that first-century culture to be put out of the synagogue. This excommunication meant that other Jews were not to associate with them at all. Excommunication was more than that, though, for if you did not obey the mandates of the ruling elders, your property could be taken: "His property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles" (Ezra 10:8). Everything revolved around the Jewish social network, with the synagogue just being part of it. It meant a lonely existence. The blind man's parents did not want to go there; they said, "He is of age, let him speak for himself" (v. 23).

They struggled to build their case against Jesus, but the man who was healed would not be intimidated. He would not back down. They summoned him again and said,

“Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:24-25).

Give glory to God was an expression used in cross-examination. “Tell us the truth,” they were saying. “Have a clear conscience before God.” However, this man was not intimidated in the slightest. He didn't care if he was excommunicated, he had gone through much worse things in his life of blindness. We see in him such a heart for the truth and for the One who had healed him. He would stay faithful to share what had happened and not back down. “What did He do to you?” they said. The healed man saw through their entire sham inquisition. They did not want the truth; they wanted to destroy his testimony.

He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?” (v. 27).

Here the man makes his decision and takes his stand. Here is where I belong! With the word “*too*,” he is stating whose disciple he will be. He says, “I will be a disciple of Christ! Will you be His disciple, too?” With great anger, the Pharisees called down curses upon him and barred him from the synagogue. These curses were words spoken whenever anyone had departed from following the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 11:28). They were not merely swearing at this man; they were officially shunning him from the community. From this point forward, a man who had been at the mercy of others in the community for his livelihood would no longer be able to live that way. His story, his proclamation, was perhaps a costly statement to make, but he could not deny what had happened to him. He merely told the truth. When God intercepts our lives, and we have an encounter with Him, it is only the beginning. This man's life was to change in ways that he could not have imagined when that mud was placed on his eyes.

Two Kinds of Blindness

³⁵Jesus 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.” ³⁷Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” ³⁸Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” ⁴⁰Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” ⁴¹Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains (John 9:35-41).

I love how the Lord draws him in! It is so like the Lord Who is our Shepherd. When the man was thrown out of fellowship, the Lord went seeking for him and found him. Jesus brought him into fellowship with Himself. He cares for His lost sheep who have strayed from the flock. “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” Jesus said to him. The words, “*Son of Man*” was a Messianic

term given to the One who should come, first mentioned in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 7:13). The English King James Version renders it this way: “Do you believe on the Son of God?” The Lord says that He has come into the world so those who are blind will see and those who think they see will become blind (v. 38). Every encounter that we have with the person of Jesus either drives us closer to Him or pushes us further away.

Notice the progression of this man’s faith. First of all, his view of Jesus was somewhat remote, i.e. “**the man they call Jesus**” (v. 11). However, as he deepened in his revelation of Who Jesus is, he called Jesus “**a prophet**” (v. 17). Further at the end of his encounter, he said; “**Lord, I believe,**” and he worshiped Him” (v. 38).

At the other end of the spectrum, i.e., to those whose hearts are closed and refuse to believe, they became spiritually blind. The response to Jesus was, “**What? Are we blind too?**” (v. 40). They were expecting a “no” from the Lord, but they didn’t get it! They *were* spiritually blind! There are none so blind as those who refuse to see. Many fear to look at the truth because they know that the truth will change their lives, so they refuse to listen and weigh the clear facts presented to them. When individuals stubbornly refuse to see the truth of Jesus, i.e., Who He is and what He has done for them, they become further entrenched in their sin, and their guilt remains. The Lord will hold accountable in the Day of Judgment all those who knew the truth and yet stood steadfastly against it. These Pharisees were blind to spiritual things, even though they believed that they were the most spiritual people in the community.

When the power of God is revealed, you will often see a direct challenge and a struggle. The incredible healing of this man who had been blind would have immediately posed a question for those who believed what they saw. Would they stand with this blind man and believe that God had, indeed, healed him, or would they shun him and align themselves in agreement with the Pharisees? Once again, Jesus brought His light into a situation and exposed the darkness that was in the hearts of those opposing Him. His very actions posed a question each of us has to answer: are we for Him or against Him? With whom do you align yourself? Will you be stubborn-hearted, or will you allow yourself to be drawn to the Light of Christ? Pray that God will give you a pliable, sensitive heart to walk in the knowledge and truth of Christ.

Prayer: Father, please keep our eyes open to the truth as found in Your Word. Please grant me a sensitive spirit to respond to You in the same way as this man who was born blind. You loved him enough to step into his life and change it forever. Please help me to be open to You and to be faithful to You as he was. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email Address: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com