

"The Work of God Displayed"

John 9:1-41

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In the 9th chapter of John, the Son of God will once again perform a miracle...*on the Sabbath*. It caused a worsening tension between Jesus and Jewish religious leaders, whom John referred to as "the Jews", a group of Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and teachers of the Jewish law. The miracle led a blind man to gain both physical and spiritual sight, yet some in the story chose to remain spiritually blind.

Would you like to hear an example of a modern-day miracle? A shepherd, who was a devout Christian, lost his favorite Bible while he was out looking for a wayward lamb. Three weeks later, a sheep walked up to him carrying the Bible in its mouth. The shepherd couldn't believe his eyes! He took the precious book out of the sheep's mouth, raised his eyes and hands heavenward and exclaimed, "It's a miracle!" The sheep said to the shepherd, "Not really. Your name is written inside the cover."

The miracle in this lesson was the sixth of the seven miracles, that is, signs, John recorded in his gospel. Jesus used the miracle to demonstrate the glory and power of God, adding to His credentials as Messiah.

The recipient of the miracle was a man who had been blind since birth. Blindness destined him to be a beggar, an outcast in his community, totally dependent on the kindness of others to eat, to have clothes, and to be given unmentionable assistance. He could feel the temple walls with his hands, but never saw its magnificence, and he could smell the fragrance from flowers but never saw their beauty. Enter Jesus. Through once-blind eyes, Jesus' power and majesty would be illuminated.

As Jesus and His disciples were in the temple courts, they encountered the blind man. He would have been surrounded by others also with serious ailments, but he alone drew the attention of Jesus' disciples and they asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2)

Their question reflected a common belief in 1st century Judaism that unfortunate circumstances were the result of divine punishment for sin; sin of the individual or of one's parents. Jewish theologians even believed that sin could be committed while still in the womb! Of course, there can be suffering because of one's choices in life, yet, even today, there are those who believe suffering and punishment are always because of sin.

Jesus used this man's blindness to teach that neither willful sin of the man nor his parents was the reason for his blindness, but that God may use the man's terrible circumstance for His purpose. Jesus told His disciples, "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him." (9:3) Jesus' response shifted away from the *cause* of the man's blindness to the *purpose*.

This doesn't necessarily mean God caused the man to be born blind in order that His glory would be displayed when Jesus removed his blindness. To believe that would be to criticize God's

providence and character. "It's a major step of Christian maturity to understand God doesn't have to explain Himself to us." (Carol Martin) It *does* mean that God overruled the adversity of the man's blindness so that His power may be shown in the man's life and so that others could witness God's unmatched glory. And while God doesn't say He will heal every physical ailment, He promises His presence in all circumstances and for those who know Jesus as their Savior, we have confidence of a pain-free eternity.

Jesus continued His conversation with His disciples using metaphors to relate to His and *our* ministry. "We must do the works of Him who sent Me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work." (9:4) He used "day" to refer to the time He had left to serve His Father on earth. "Night" referred to the time after His death, ending His earthly ministry. Jesus' use of the pronoun "we" in verse four meant we believers have only the days of our earthly lives to accomplish the work God has assigned us to do.

Time and again John used images of light and darkness, blindness and sight, to explain Jesus' identity. Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (9:5) And in chapter 12, light referred to spiritual enlightenment when Jesus said: "The light will be with you only a little longer. Walk while you have the light so that darkness doesn't overtake you." (John 12:35)

When Christ performed miraculous healings, He was not tied to any specific method. The power was in God, not in the method. For the blind man, Jesus could have simply touched him with His finger, or said a word, or breathed on him, or even been in another city altogether and healed him. But for this miracle, the Healer bent down in front of the man, "He spit on the ground, made clay of His spit and covered the blind man's eyes with the clay." (9:6b)

In the book of Mark, Jesus performed two other healings using His saliva. In the ancient world, using saliva, or the more dignified word, "spittle", was believed effective as a medicine for some maladies of the eyes. I wondered if the man shirked away from Jesus or freely allowed Him to smear the mud on his eyes. I *do* think Jesus spoke compassionately to him while applying the mud, to calm him and impart His peace.

Jesus then told the man to go wash off the mud in the Pool of Siloam, and the man obeyed. A commentator pondered, "Could it be that God allows us to know we are blind before He gives us sight?"

The Pool of Siloam has an interesting history and adds to the evidence of the validity of Scripture. In 701 B.C., King Hezekiah built an underground tunnel to channel water from the Spring of Gihon outside Jerusalem to the Pool of Siloam inside Jerusalem so that the city's inhabitants could survive during an enemy's siege.

The Pool of Siloam was covered over after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Over the centuries, skeptics questioned if the Pool ever existed. However, in 2004, a sewage pipe broke underneath a street in Jerusalem. During repairs, a bulldozer collided with a submerged object. Archaeologists literally rushed to the scene and as mud was brushed away, an ancient, plastered step emerged. Excavations revealed several more steps of an enormous rectangular pool. This monumental reservoir, 160 feet wide by 225 feet long, was identified as the Pool of Siloam. Coins embedded in the plaster there confirmed that it was in use during Jesus' time.

The pool was called Siloam, which John said meant "sent" perhaps because the water was *sent* through the tunnel into the city, but it was appropriately named because the blind man was *sent* to the Pool to wash the mud from his eyes.

As elements of this miracle, the Great Physician chose the *instrument*... clay, the *means*... His touch, and the *manner*...His command. Despite the unconventional method of healing, the man obeyed his unknown Healer. The washing wasn't needed to effect the cure, but to test the man's faith and his obedience.

Put yourself in a pair of Jerusalem sandals and be a bystander at the Pool when the man arrived. You know he was blind since birth and you see the mud drying on his eyes. You watch him get on his knees, put his hands into the water, bring his hands to his eyes, and wash off the mud. Then you watch him open his eyes. What do you think was the first thing he saw? The water? His hands? The faces of those around him?

After he washed, John simply wrote, "... he came back seeing." (9:7) What an understatement! "He came back seeing"?! Having sight given to the blind was one of the powers the Messiah was prophesied to have when He came to earth (Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, and 42:7) but even more miraculously, this man's eyes had *never* seen before Jesus healed him!

Most in his community knew him as a beggar but some weren't sure: "Isn't this the one who used to sit begging?" Some said, "He's the one." Others were saying, "No, but he looks like him." (9:8,9a) The man insisted he was the man. "So, they asked him, 'Then, how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, go to Siloam and wash.' So, when I went and washed, I received my sight." (9:10,11) "Where is he?" they asked. He said, "I don't know." (9:12) Remember, the man had been blind when Jesus sent him to the Pool so he didn't know where Jesus had gone.

Jesus had previously clashed with religious leaders over many issues: religious traditions, associating with sinners, spiritual authority... however, in this chapter we see that conflict with the Pharisees escalated because one thing in particular enraged them...what Jesus did *on the Sabbath*. The formerly blind man was taken to the Pharisees because the miracle of sight had been given to him ... on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is one of the three most important observances in the Jewish faith, along with circumcision and dietary laws. The Sabbath begins Friday at sunset and lasts until sunset on Saturday and is observed as *the* solemn day of rest.

God established "Sabbath rest" to commemorate the seventh day of creation when God rested from His works. And to bless the Israelites, God forbade certain activities to occur on the Sabbath.... certain types of work such as food gathering and carrying heavy burdens. But over the centuries, rabbis created long lists of activities *they* felt qualified as "work" and they forbade the people to do them on the Sabbath. Some of the activities that were forbidden included:

- No carrying anything heavier than a dried fig.
- No eating anything larger than an olive.
- No throwing an object into the air with one hand and catching it with the other hand.
- No bathing because one might spill water and wipe it up, which they considered work.

- Chairs could not be moved as they might make a rut in the dirt floor, which they considered plowing.
- No tying or untying a knot or sewing stitches.
- If one was ill on the Sabbath, only enough treatment could be given to keep the person alive.
- A lamp could not be extinguished.
- One could not wear sandals shod with nails because the weight of the nails would have constituted a burden, and one couldn't carry a burden on the Sabbath.

When I was in Israel during a Sabbath, the elevator in the hotel was set to automatically stop at every floor because on the Sabbath, an orthodox Jew could not depress the button for their floor. No wonder Jesus called the people to exchange their yoke of burden for His easy one. (Matthew 11:28-30)

But lest we want to cast stones, decades ago right here in America, laws were created to prohibit certain activities on Sundays. These laws are referred to as "Blue Laws" and according to the internet, some still exist, but not all are still enforced:

- In Salem, West Virginia, it's against the law to eat candy less than 1½ hours before church on Sunday.
- In Winona Lake, Wisconsin, it's illegal to eat ice cream at a counter on Sunday.
- In Kansas, you can't order cherry pie a la mode on the Lord's Day.
- In Arizona, picture taking is illegal on Sunday unless it's after twelve noon.
- It's illegal to sell musical instruments on Sundays in South Carolina.
- In Ohio, it's illegal to fish for a whale on Sunday.
- Marbles, dominoes, and yo-yos are banned on Sundays in several states.
- If you're in Tennessee and have a hankering for a bologna sandwich on Sunday, you better hope you have some in your frig because you can't buy bologna on Sunday in Tennessee.

Jesus' actions in healing the blind man included kneading the clay with His hands and anointing the man's eyes. Both were, according to Pharisee's rules, considered work, which was forbidden on the Sabbath, especially since the man wasn't in danger of dying that day!

Christ didn't come to abolish the Law of God but He *did* oppose legalistic, man-made rules that oppressed His people. In God's eyes, acts of mercy, love and compassion were *not* work. The Jewish leaders didn't care that the blind beggar had never seen God's creation or the faces of his family. They only cared that such blessings were not allowed for him to receive on the Sabbath.

Let's imagine what happened next. The once-blind man may have bounded into the temple *without* his walking stick or his beggar's basket and marveled at the beauty of the temple he had never seen before. He was then made to stand before the Pharisees to answer for his healing as though he had done something wrong. The Pharisees wanted to know how was it that he could see. Simply and factually, he told them, "He put mud on my eyes. I washed and I can see." (9:15)

The Pharisees were divided. Some said the miracle was not authentic because it was performed on the Sabbath, while others believed that only a man of God could perform such a sign. The inquisition continued. They asked, "What do you say about him, since he opened your

eyes?" The man replied, "He's a prophet." (9:17) He knew prophets performed great things by the power of God.

The religious leaders didn't believe a miracle occurred so they rounded up the man's parents to make sure he *had* been born blind. Hoping the man was never blind at all would discredit Jesus so they asked his parents, "Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" (9:19)

Can you imagine the emotions his parents experienced having their son healed? But their joy was silenced because the religious leaders had threatened to ban anyone from the temple if they acknowledged Jesus was a man of God. The man's parents confirmed their son was born blind but said they didn't know how he could see or who healed him and deferred the leaders back to their son.

The Pharisees didn't get what they wanted from cross-examining the man's parents so they summoned the man back again, this time commanding him to: "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." (9:24) "Give glory to God," was a phrase used in Jewish courts demanding the truth be spoken. The Pharisees wanted the man to confess his part in what they determined was a sham miracle and they proclaimed Jesus was a sinner. What a horrible, blasphemous accusation against the sinless Son of God!

The man answered, "Whether or not he's a sinner, I don't know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!" (9:25) That testimony has gone down in history. The blind man had neither physical nor spiritual sight *until* his encounter with Jesus. His testimony demonstrates how a personal experience in encountering the Lord can change one's life and should encourage us to share our *own* stories of God's works in our lives.

Yet, the man's interrogators wouldn't give up. They demanded, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" (9:26) I'm sure there were many places he'd rather be and things he'd rather see than the angry faces before him trying to make him admit something that wasn't true.

His boldness increased and he steadfastly held to the truth: "I already told you, yet you don't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don't want to become His disciples too, do you?" (9:27) I thought it amusing that he dared speak disrespectfully to the "righteous" Pharisees asking them if they also wanted to follow Jesus! That was exactly the *opposite* of what these men wanted!

"They ridiculed him: "You're that man's disciple, but we're Moses's disciples. We know that God has spoken to Moses. But this man—we don't know where he's from." (9:28,29) Claiming to be Moses' disciples was their way of saying, "WE are righteous. WE follow what Moses said. YOU follow that man you claimed healed you." The formerly blind man saw more clearly who Jesus is than did the spiritually blind Pharisees. While sin didn't cause the *man* to be born blind, sin *did* cause the Pharisees' blindness.

The man again responded with a testimony they could not argue with. He said, "This is amazing! You don't know where He's from, and yet He made me see. God doesn't listen to sinners, but to those who fear Him and do His will. No one has ever heard of someone opening

the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He wouldn't be able to do this." (9:30-33) He mocked the religious leaders, for if they truly knew the Old Testament Scriptures, they would know the Messiah would perform such signs.

This former beggar, one of the lowliest of society, testified to the truth but the religious leaders insulted him and threw him out of the temple. "Religious bigots don't want to face either evidence or logic - their minds are made up." (Warren Wiersbe) That he had testified that a man of God performed a miracle, cost him something no Jew wanted to experience – excommunication from the synagogue. He would be cut off from worshipping in the temple and scorned among fellow Jews.

When Jesus heard what the Pharisees did to the man, He, "went and found him" (9:35) and for that once-blind man, Jesus offered him the ability to see with spiritual eyes and to know the truth when He revealed His identity to him.

Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (9:35) "Son of Man" was a title Jewish people knew meant the Messiah. The man asked, "Who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?" (9:36) During his healing, the man would have heard Jesus's voice but he had not seen His face until that moment. Jesus replied, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." (9:37) Did you catch that Jesus used the word "see"? Jesus gave the man sight so he could physically see Him and then he could see spiritually when Jesus revealed his Messiahship to him.

That man met Jesus face to face and believed. There was no hesitation to his confession: "I believe, Lord!" (9:38) and he worshipped Jesus. Although he had been forbidden to worship in the temple, he gained the reward of worshipping God in person. Can you describe the moment Jesus' identity was revealed to you and how you responded?

Following the man's confession Jesus continued teaching to all who were around Him, which included the Pharisees. Jesus said: "I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see, and those who do see will become blind." (9:39) In essence Jesus said, "Those who claim to have spiritual sight but don't think they're a sinner, will remain spiritually blind until they come before Me in judgment. Those who are spiritually blind but realize their need for the Savior and come to Me will be given spiritual sight."

The Pharisees knew Jesus directed His statement toward them and with their typical arrogance asked Him: "We aren't blind too, are we?" (9:40) That's exactly what Jesus was saying! Basically, Jesus' reply was, "Because you say, 'We see just fine,' you are sinners." (9:41)

Have you heard the saying, 'denial is not a river in Egypt'? The Pharisees denied they were spiritually blind. They had *physical* eyesight, but because of their biases, they were blind to the truth of Jesus' identity.

Unfortunately, we have all suffered, in some degree or another, with spiritual blindness. It keeps us from seeing with clarity. And most of the time we're blind to our blindness. It can manifest itself as self-righteousness or denial of sin. When our sin, or our failure, is pointed out to us we often view the truth as something different than what it is. We can all use help with our eyesight with the gift of God's word - the universe's most accurate mirror. When we stand in front

of it, through God's Word we can see ourselves as we really are. The word of God is able to offer the only reliable cure for our poor spiritual eyesight.

Jesus' ministry was to give spiritual sight to those who sought it, and to reveal spiritual blindness to those who *thought* they could see just fine without Him. The *reason* He came to us is salvation, but to those who refuse to believe, the *result* of His coming is condemnation.

The once blind beggar had been both physically blind and spiritually blind yet his eyes *and* his heart were healed because he listened to Jesus, believed Him, obeyed Him, and experienced God's grace.

During the Pharisee's inquisition, knowledge given by the Holy Spirit to the former blind man, led him to better understand who Jesus is. From initially declaring He was, "The man called Jesus" (9:11) as his faith grew, he professed:

- "[Jesus] is a prophet." vs 17
- "[Jesus] is from God." vs 33
- "[Jesus] is the Son of God." vs 38

"A tremendous thing about Jesus is that the more we know Him the greater He becomes."
(William Barclay)

In each lesson we're being asked a question about 1 Peter 3:15 as it relates to our faith. We don't need degrees in theology or need to know the Bible from cover to cover, but each believer should be able to tell others who Jesus is to them. The once blind man summed up his faith when he testified:

"One thing I know,
though I was blind,
now I see."
(9:25)