

“A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN” SERIES

#16: “Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind” (Part 1)

SCRIPTURE: John 9:1-12

INTRO:

Jesus and His disciples are still in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, when they come across this blind man. He was probably begging for coins.

I like the way Paul Butler summarizes this 9th chapter:

If it were not so tragic, this ninth chapter would be comical. Here is a man blind from birth healed by the Nazarene, and the Pharisees, rather than accept the evident fact that Jesus had healed him, chose to question the man’s former blindness. Next, his parents, out of cowardice, “pass the buck” and will not take sides with their son. The really amusing section, however, is found in verses 24-34. In these verses the former blind man by common-sense reasoning makes the learned Pharisees look ridiculous. The beggar turns the tables on the Pharisees and the questioner instead of the questioned. The Pharisees, unable to withstand the man’s testimony, can think of nothing but to attack the character of the beggar and use ecclesiastical force against him.

Chapter nine is simply a continued record of teachings and works of Jesus in Jerusalem during the Feast of the Tabernacles. Whether this incident was on the same day and immediately after the discourse of chapter 8, or whether it was on another day afterward is of little significance. The important matter is the eventual power of the miracle and the teaching Jesus attached to it.

Encountering a beggar in that area of the temple was pretty common. It was fairly accessible and lots of people were coming and going past that area on a daily basis.

This particular beggar was probably known to the disciples since they knew that he had been blind from birth.

First, let’s consider...

...THE QUESTION HIS DISCIPLES ASKED.

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (v. 2) was their question. What do you think prompted such a question?

Well, for one thing, the Jews had come to associate *any* suffering with sin, so since this man was blind, either he or his parents are guilty of some serious

sin. The book of Job describes Job's friends as assuming that his suffering was caused by his hypocrisy (Job 4:5-8). Ultimately, of course, sin is the root cause of *all* infirmities, but when people are born with abnormalities of varying degrees, it is rarely the direct fault of the parents. It is often the result of development failure due to some mutation of the genes. Examples of this can be seen in the Shriner's Hospital's TV commercials. In Jesus' day, the Jews believed such abnormalities were punishment for sin.

For another thing, the sins of parents may be visited upon their children in physical calamities even to the fourth generation (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14-18; Deuteronomy 5:9; 28:32; Jeremiah 31:28; Ezekiel 18:2).

Of course, much of man's suffering is due to his own sinful acts and behavior.

So, they wanted to know: was this man born blind because God punished him for sin before he was born, or because God was punishing the parents for their sin?

Some of the Rabbis back then are believed to have taught that babies in the womb can commit prenatal sin. They based it on their belief that in Genesis 25:22-26 Esau attempted to murder Jacob in the womb of their mother!

Second, let's consider...

...HOW JESUS ANSWERED THEIR QUESTION.

"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" was his answer.

Now, the man was subject to the infirmities that come upon *any* person, whether it be blindness or some other malady. And He didn't say that the parents were without sin, either. He simply said that this was an opportunity for Him to teach the people what He came to do. It was a time to glorify God.

How many blind and/or invalid people do you think there might have been in Jerusalem in that day? I would say at least hundreds, maybe thousands. How many of them did Jesus heal? We don't really know but suffice it to say that He didn't heal them all.

I bring this to your attention as "push back" on the teaching and thinking that healing is available to anyone at any time and to help us to understand that physical well-being is not the Lord's priority.

Jesus chose to heal this man so ***“...that the works of God might be displayed in him.”*** In other words, He chose this man for healing – one among many – in order to show that He was doing the works of God.

Third, let's consider...

...THE MIRACLE JESUS PERFORMED.

John tells us that ***“...he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent).’”***

Now, why all the “rigamaro” with the mud? Why not just heal the man like he healed the Capernaum official's son? Why did He do it the way He did? You might be saying, “Larry, what difference does it make? Who cares how He did it? The important thing is that He made the man see for the first time in his life!”

And I'll say, “You're right.” But I still have a curious nature. I've found a couple of possibilities:

1. Jesus put mud on the man's eyes to challenge the Pharisees who considered it sinful to apply medication on the Sabbath.

I think this is the weaker of the two possibilities, but I wouldn't rule it out.

2. To give the blind man some symbolic or expressive action that would cause him to know that the power to heal his blindness came from Jesus.

While spittle and spitting was frowned upon in Old Testament times, and while spitting was a way of showing distaste for someone or something, it eventually came to be recognized as medicinal. The ancient Chinese commonly used spittle for the treatment of eye problems. One commentator has written:

The Roman naturalist and writer Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) who was contemporary with Jesus has a whole chapter in his Natural History on the many, often ridiculous and fanciful, diseases/injuries that can be cured by “fasting saliva” (meaning saliva in the morning before breakfast). He mentions in 28.7: “lichens and leprous spots may be remedied by early morning application of fasting spittle . . . eyes may be cured by early morning fasting spittle.” So, the student of nature Pliny did at least know the healing properties of saliva.

Thousands of years later in our day microbiologists have turned their attention and experiments to the half gallon of our saliva generated each day. (We don't swallow our saliva when we are asleep — hence “fasting saliva.”)

They have found histatins in our spit. Histatins, a protein, are a group of histidine-rich cationic peptides which are antibacterial and antifungal and are found only in humans and primates. They, also, found neutrophils with their

abundance of white blood cells which are the micro cells that protect our body against infectious diseases and foreign invaders. And they found laminin in our saliva! Laminin is "a glycoprotein component of connective tissue basement membrane that promotes cell adhesion" (Miriam Webster Dictionary).

But why did Jesus have him go and wash in the pool of Siloam? It was some distance from the temple to the pool. I have found two possible reasons:

1. It was a test of the man's faith.

We can find other examples of such a test. The Syrian captain Naaman, who was told to dip in the Jordan seven times in order to be miraculously healed of his leprosy (2 Kings 5).

2. The pool of Siloam had some symbolic or spiritual Messianic significance (Isaiah 8:6).

Jerusalem's water supply came from outside the city's walls, and it was always in danger of being taken by enemy forces. In about 701 B.C. King Hezekiah had workers tunnel through solid rock to make a conduit from the Spring Gihon to a pool inside the city, a distance of nearly 600 yards. That pool was the pool of Siloam.

CONCLUSION:

In closing, I say this: "miracle" has become a rather commonly-used word – too commonly. Many things that are really not "miracles" have come to be called "miracles."

For example, here are two of today's definitions of a "miracle":

- a highly improbable or extraordinary event, development, or accomplishment that brings very welcome consequences, as "it was a miracle that more people hadn't been killed or injured."
- an amazing product or achievement, or an outstanding example of something, as "a machine which was a miracle of design."

Here's the biblical definition: "an event or effect contrary to the established constitution and course of things, or a deviation from the known laws of nature; a supernatural event."

There are ten epic miracles described in the Bible:

1. God speaking the world into existence;
2. Sarah giving birth at ninety years of age;
3. The parting of the Red Sea;

4. The manna from heaven in the wilderness;
5. Jonah surviving after being swallowed by a huge fish;
6. Daniel surviving the lions' den;
7. The virgin birth of Jesus;
8. Jesus turning the water to wine at Cana;
9. The feeding of the five thousand plus with five loaves and two fish;
10. Jesus walking on water.

So, there are miracles, and there are miracles. I think the closest thing to a miracle most of us have seen is that of the conception, development, and birth of a child, although such is an established common thing to the extent that the miraculous today is considered to be a "preemie" who survives.

Of course, I recognize your right to call your own miracles. I hope you all have experienced the "miracle" of the "new birth." Amen? Amen!