JESUS HEALS A MAN BORN BLIND

John 9:1–41

Key Verse: 9:25

“He replied, ‘Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’”

There are so many things in life we don’t understand: Why some people suffer and others don’t, why someone did something nice for me, why people can be so skeptical, or prejudiced, or self-righteous. Today’s passage gets at the root of it all. Spiritually, we can either be blind, or we can see. How can we see things spiritually? We need Jesus, the light of the world, to open our eyes. But we’re also involved in the process. We see it in this story of a man who gets healed physically, but only gradually starts to see spiritually. In this study we want to learn how he grew. And we especially want to learn from our Lord Jesus’ words and example. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

Look at verse 1. We’re not sure exactly when or where this event takes place. What is clear is that it is a Jewish-dominated place. People have to keep religious rules and rituals strictly. In that place the Pharisees are considered the religious authorities. People who don’t abide by their rules can be put out of the synagogue, which meant social suicide. As Jesus went along in that place, he saw a man blind from birth. From other details in the passage we learn that this man had a regular place in town where he would sit and beg. It was the only way for him to earn a living.

Today we see people begging in various places—at intersections or train stations. Sometimes we wonder what happened to them. Often it seems they made a lot of bad decisions and now have a drug problem. They may even be lying about their condition. But in this case, this man was blind from birth. His blindness didn’t happen from a cruelty that was done to him, or from an accident. And it wasn’t fake; it was visibly evident, like a deformity. For most of us, it’s hard even to imagine what it’s like to go through an entire lifetime without ever being able to see anything. Today our society offers help to the blind, such as a seeing eye dog, and braille on hallway signs and elevators. But in Jesus’ day there were no social cushions for the blind whatsoever. All they could do was beg in public, and it was people’s religious duty to give them a little something, once in a while. People looked at such a person as inferior, and as an object of pity. From the man’s point of view, to have to beg for a living made his blindness even worse.

Look at verse 2. It’s not clear why the disciples take notice of this man. But one thing stands out—his visible condition has touched their hearts enough for them to ask Jesus about him. Their question reveals the Jews’ mentality at that time. To them, anything bad in human life had to be the result of somebody’s sin. If you worked hard enough and did enough good deeds, this way of thinking goes, you would be blessed in every way. But if anything bad happened to you, it *must* be because you did something bad. This includes even accidents, even birth defects. Actually it’s a pretty fatalistic way of thinking. What’s dangerous is that there’s some truth to it. Sometimes, bad things that happen are definitely because we did something bad. But not *always*. Sometimes, innocent people suffer through no fault of their own, like Job. The Jewish idea that suffering may come from our parents’ sins comes from the Ten Commandments, where God says he will punish children for the sin of their parents to the third and fourth generation (Ex20:5). We call it “generational sin.” Bad things in people’s lives can often be the culmination of generations of bad living. But again, not *always*.

How does Jesus answer his disciples’ question? Read verse 3. Jesus refuses to endorse their cause-and-effect idea about sin and suffering. Instead, he says this man’s blindness from birth happened so that God could display his works in him. What are God’s “works”? There are so many ways in which God can work, even in the worst of circumstances. In this man’s case, it meant restoring his physical sight, as well as his spiritual sight, and, his soul. In any case, Jesus always sees human sufferings as the opportunity for God to be glorified. When we suffer, we naturally can develop dark thinking and get depressed. But Jesus’ view of suffering is very bright. To Jesus, suffering can help people know God better and deeper.

He goes on to teach his disciples. Read verses 4,5. There’s a sense of urgency in his words. It’s because there’s only a certain amount of time he had to do the works of his Father. And notice how he uses the word “we.” He’s saying that we, too, have only a certain amount of time on earth. Instead of wasting our lives on shallow, temporary, selfish things, or in dark thinking, sorrow or despair, we should be seeking each day to do the works of God, like our Lord Jesus did. But how can weak and sinful people like us do the works of God? Jesus says we’re supposed to, so it must mean we can. We *can* do the works of God. But how? First and foremost, we have to be following Jesus, the light of the world. Without following him, we can’t but be wandering in spiritual darkness. But as we follow him, we learn how to do God’s works. We learn from Jesus that God’s works require us to exercise both faith and compassion in real life situations. That’s actually what discipleship means. God’s works are different from working for food that spoils (6:27). God’s works are to bring healing into others’ lives, both physically and spiritually. God’s works are to alleviate human suffering and show people God’s great love and compassion. Most of all, God’s works are to help people open their spiritual eyes

How does Jesus do that? Read verses 6,7. We can learn several things here. First of all, Jesus uses what he has. He doesn’t have lots of money, a state-of-the-arts medical facility, or highly trained specialists. In this situation, all he has, really, is dirt on the ground, and his own saliva. But he doesn’t think there’s nothing he can do. We saw this same lesson when he fed the 5,000 with five small barley loaves and two small fish (6:1–13). He offered something so small to do something so great. Secondly, Jesus gets personally involved. Many people were passing by the blind man in indifference. Some may have thrown him a few coins. But Jesus stops and uses his own saliva and his own fingers. He personally touches the man’s eyes with the mud he makes. Behind these actions are his own personal faith in God, who can heal any incurable disease, as well as his personal compassion for a suffering human being. Without his faith in God and his compassion, even these activities would have been hollow, or a joke. With even a little of Jesus’ faith and compassion, we too can do the works of God and bring his healing into others’ lives. Finally, Jesus challenges the man to act in faith. It isn’t just the holy mud made by Jesus; the man actually has to *do* something. He has to go where Jesus tells him to and wash it off. It isn’t that there are healing powers in the Pool of Siloam; it was the *act of obeying* Jesus’ command. We too, even in our blindness, can be healed as we learn to obey what Jesus commands. And we too can heal others of spiritual blindness as we help them learn to obey what Jesus commands.

But there’s way more to this story than just the man’s physical healing. In verses 8–38 we see how he comes to open his spiritual eyes, too. It’s a hard journey for him. First he has to deal with his neighbors and those who used to see him begging. Look at verses 8–12. They don’t want to believe that he was the same man who’d been born blind. Such a wonderful thing had happened to him, but they aren’t even happy for him; they remain skeptical. It shows us how hard people’s hearts can become due to unbelief.

Next, the man has to deal with the religious leaders, the Pharisees. Look at verses 13–17. Typically, all they can think about is that the man’s healing had occurred on a Sabbath. To them, it’s a violation of the Sabbath law. They can think only in very legalistic terms. Others think the man who had healed him had done a great sign, but it all just ended up in a big argument. Again, there’s no rejoicing for this poor man.

It gets worse when the man has to see how his parents respond. Look at verses 18–23. The Pharisees refuse to believe the man had been born blind until they hear directly from his parents. So they call them in. What stands out here is that even *they* are only thinking about protecting themselves. They admit that he is their son, that he had been born blind, and that now he can see. But they don’t want to be put out of the synagogue, so they refrain from being thankful to Jesus. They’re concerned more about their own social status than about their son. The man must have been so disappointed in them.

Then the man has to deal with yet another abusive interrogation. Look at verses 24–38. The Pharisees are trying to intimidate him with their so-called religious authority. They refuse to give up their opinion that Jesus is a sinner, and they try to force the man to say so himself. Read verse 25. Having been born blind, and begging for a living, this man has some glaring human weaknesses. But even though he has such a weak foundation and no support from his neighbors or parents, he refuses to be intimidated. He doesn’t know much, but he stands up for himself, and for Jesus. How? He states the obvious: “I was blind but now I see!” What does this mean to us?

First of all, we need to see how this man contrasts with the invalid man in chapter 5. That man had been an invalid for 38 years, and Jesus had healed him, but instead of being thankful, he turned Jesus in to the religious authorities. This blind man was just the opposite. He’d been blind from birth, but when Jesus heals him he is so thankful. Nobody is celebrating, people are being so dour, but this man can’t stop thinking about the wonderful thing that has happened to him because of Jesus: “I was blind but now I see!” It’s amazing! This man refuses to get sidetracked by any kind of negativity, no matter where it comes from.

It’s a great lesson for us in remembering God’s saving grace. First, we need to actually experience God’s grace very personally. Then we need to hold onto it, no matter what. Apostle Paul is good example. Ever since Jesus met him personally when he was living as his enemy and forgave all his sins, Paul held onto his grace. No matter how fruitfully God used him, no matter how much persecution he had to endure, he didn’t become either proud or bitter; he always held onto the grace of Jesus. He wrote: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst” (1Ti1:15). He also taught: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph2:8,9). The more we hold onto God’s saving grace to us in Jesus, the deeper our relationship with him grows.

We see this in the healed blind man. At first, he only knows that the man who had healed him was called Jesus (11). Later, he confesses that Jesus is a prophet (17)—good, but still far away from who Jesus really is. When pressed harder, the man says he didn’t know whether Jesus was a sinner or not (25). He does identify himself as a disciple of Jesus. But then we see a shift. When the Pharisees insult him, and Jesus, the man makes a great statement. Read verses 30–33. The fact that Jesus healed him, even though he was blind from birth, was clear proof that Jesus is from God. His personal conviction is growing. Look at verse 34. Clearly, these men are not interested in truth. When the man doesn’t fit their agenda, they throw him out.

In the last part of today’s passage, Jesus personally goes and finds the man. This man had lost so much in standing up for what Jesus had done for him. He lost his neighbors, his parents, and even being able to go into the synagogue. Things had gone from bad to worse. Now he couldn’t even beg for a living anymore. How does Jesus help him? Does he give him sympathy? A job? No. Look at verses 35–37. Jesus helps him believe in him deeper. Jesus reveals himself to this man as the Messiah. The only other time he did this was to the Samaritan woman. It tells us that the best blessing is not fitting in, being praised or even comforted by people; the best blessing is really believing in Jesus personally. It usually happens only when everything and everyone else we rely on is somehow stripped away. How did the man respond? Read verse 38. The man’s spiritual eyes are now fully opened to see who Jesus really is.

What does Jesus say at this moment? Read verse 39. Here, the “blind” refer to those who are humble and know they have a problem. Jesus came to give them spiritual sight. And “those who see” refers to proud, self-righteous people who think they’re good and that they know everything without Jesus’ help. These are the people who become totally blind spiritually. Some Pharisees there are offended (40). What does Jesus say to them? Read verse 41. It again emphasizes how dangerous self-righteousness can be.

Today we learned again that our Lord Jesus is the light of the world. He can give light to the most fatalistic, sorrowful person in the world. He can give the best blessing not just of physical healing, but of spiritual sight. He calls us to do the works of God with a sense of urgency, for as long as God allows. We also learned from this man how we can experience Jesus’ healing. We need to obey his commands. We need to hold onto his grace, regardless of people’s pressures. Ultimately, we need Jesus to reveal himself to us personally.