

Jesus in the Gospel of John

“The Signs of Jesus - Part II”

[John 9:1-5](#)

Among the seven miraculous signs Jesus performs in the gospel of John, we are taking a closer look at two of them in our current sermon series. Last Sunday, we read and reflected on the story of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Today, we examine the 6th sign, Jesus healing a man born blind.

This unique healing story, one of the greatest miracles in the Bible, is stretched out in 41 verses of the 9th chapter in John’s gospel. It narrates not only the miracle itself but also the controversy it creates. Since we’ve only heard the first 5 verses in today’s scripture reading, I encourage you to take out the pew Bible or the Bible apps on your phone and turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 9 and follow along, as I try to cover the whole story in today’s message.

One day, Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem and saw a beggar, who was born blind. The disciples asked Jesus, *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parent, that he was born blind?”* If I may paraphrase their question, what they were asking was *“Whose sin caused this man’s disability?”*

The nature of this question reflects a popular belief people held about human suffering in Jewish society during the first century. Sickness or misfortune was associated with divine punishment. Those who were afflicted were being punished for the sins they committed. When no specific sin could be named, or if the judgment seemed disproportional to the offense that was committed, people speculated that it must have been the sin of the suffering person’s parents or even their ancestors. This kind of view on suffering and adversity in life is a major assumption in the Old Testament. And, unfortunately, it is found among today’s Christians, as well.

When my mother converted to the Christian faith, she made a promise to God that she would never get married and devote her life serving as a missionary. Well, that changed when she met my father. Somehow he was able to convince her to marry him, and she became his faithful partner in life and ministry. Yet, she could not shake off a sense of guilt. Whenever something terrible happened, she thought God was punishing her for breaking her promise. I remember her sorrowful cries and her confession of guilt when my baby sister died unexpectedly, and the time when my baby brother almost died, and when another brother of mine was suffering from a terrible disease for several months at a very young age...

What was Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question? *“Neither this man nor his parent sinned; he was blind so that God works might be revealed in him.”* In crystal-clear terms, Jesus rejects the ancient view on human suffering held by the Israelites. He clarifies that the beggar’s blindness was not a punishment from God but an opportunity for God’s work to be displayed. Of course, there is a connection between sins and sickness. We do bear the consequences of our sins. But, we also know all too well that the innocent suffer, too. So, Jesus’ perspective on illness and disability are clear: Whether they be physical or mental, they are not rooted in sin. They are not the result of God’s punishment for our sins!

After he answered his disciples' question, Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes. Then, he asked the blind man to go wash in the pool of Siloam. It sounds really strange, doesn't it? In the other healing story in John chapter 5, Jesus asks a man who had been disabled for 38 year simply to get up, pick up his mat, and walk. And, the man was healed as he did what Jesus had asked him to do. Then, why, this time, did Jesus take the trouble to make mud and have the blind man go down to the pool to wash?

There are different explanations given for this strange act of Jesus. Some say that there is nothing strange about Jesus' action because prophets in the past often spoke through symbolic actions. Some point out that spittle was often used in healing in the 1st century. Some others suggest a parallel between the story of Jesus' healing the blind man in the Gospel of John and the story of God creating Adam in the book of Genesis. By using the ground, the dirt, Jesus was reenacting God's act of creating the first human being from the dust. According to this interpretation, through a redemptive act of restoration, Jesus not only healed the man but also transformed him to a new creation.

What happens in our story? The blind man does as Jesus instructed him to do. He goes to the pool, washes his eyes, and comes back able to see! Do you remember how the miracle of Jesus' turning water into wine happened? The servants at the wedding reception did as Jesus had asked them to do. They filled the empty water jars with water. They drew some out and took it to the master of the banquet. Soon, they realized that the water had become high quality wine. As Jesus' first miraculous sign happened because of the obedience of the servants, the miracle of healing of the blind man happened because he trusted and obeyed Jesus. Likewise, our faith journey involves our trust and obedience.

Miracles still happen even in our modern age and in a world of ever advancing science and technology. And, they are possible when we trust and obey Jesus, the Lord of all. This reminds me of one of my favorite old hymns: "Trust and Obey."

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

(Refrain)

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

The healing of the blind man created a great fuss among the people, and this was mainly because the healing happened on the day of Sabbath. According to Jewish law, no one was allowed to do any work on the Sabbath. Healing the sick was forbidden unless the person's life was in danger. Apparently, Jesus' act of healing was in violation of the Sabbath law because, being born blind, the blind man was not in any form of present danger. So, his neighbors questioned him about his healing and then took him to the Pharisees, who were the experts of the law.

But, the Pharisees' investigation did not go anywhere, and they became divided. Some of them believed Jesus was a sinner because he violated the Sabbath law. Some others argued that no sinner would have been able to perform such an incredible miracle of healing a man born blind.

And some even suspected whether he was truly born blind. Fake news must have existed even back then, too! So, they questioned the man's parents to see if he was their son and if he had been born blind. The parents confirmed that the man was indeed their son and that he was born blind. But, they refused to talk about how his blindness was healed.

Frustrated, the Pharisees called the formerly blind man again and said to him, "*We know that this man is a sinner*" (referring to Jesus). To which he responded, "*I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that, though I was blind, now I see.*" They demanded that he explain to them again exactly how Jesus healed him. But, the blind man refused to do as he was told, telling them he had already given his testimony. Instead, he sarcastically asked them if they wanted to become disciples of Jesus, since they were so interested in him. And then, he had the audacity to give them, the experts of the law, a lecture concerning God's law. He said, "We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will."

Did the Pharisees listen to him? Of course not. They became so frustrated and outraged that they kicked him out. After all, the truly blind in the story was not the man born blind but rather the religious leaders who willfully chose to be blind.

When we carefully look at the multiple interactions between the man and his accusers, we notice a change in the man's explanation of how Jesus healed him. When he was asked for the first time, he went into details of what happened to him. He said, "*The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then, I went and washed and received my sight.*" When he was asked for the second time to explain how he received his sight, he said, "*He put mud on my eyes. Then, I washed, and now I see.*" When he told his miracle story for the third time, it was simply, "All I know is that I was blind, now I see."

Isn't that interesting? At first, the man born blind tried to explain the miracle of his healing -- the moment of his conversion -- as accurately as possible to others. But, soon, he realized that he could not do so to anyone's satisfaction. So, with each telling of his story of healing, it got simpler until it was simply, "I was blind, now I see."

When you experience a miracle, an extraordinary, a holy moment of amazing grace, people might notice and ask you, "What happened?" But, how do you describe it to someone else? How do you explain what cannot be fully explained? In the commentary, *Feasting on the Word*, Anna Carter Florence writes (p.121), "one's ecstatic moment with mud usually looks, to the rest of us, like a classic case of self-delusion. Try to describe it, as the man born blind did, and others will question your sanity, doubt your word, and write you off." She suggests that we should instead "focus on what we can actually describe: the difference between before and after... Once I saw the world like this; now I see it like this. Once I believed this; now I believe this. Once I lived in a place that I now see was blind to certain things. Now, my eyes are opened, and here is what I see and know. These are the stories the church needs to hear."

One such miraculous story is of John Newton, a sailor in the slave trade in the mid 1700s. After a storm at sea which killed almost the entire crew of his ship, he decided to give his life to Christ. He eventually left the slave trade and became a pastor. For the rest of his life, he worked tirelessly to end the slave trade in the British Empire. In 1779, he wrote a poem that became one of the most popular, favorite hymns of all time.

Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I am found
was blind, but now I see.

In a way, we are all like the man born blind. We wander for most of our lives in darkness. As John Newton and countless others have discovered before, are discovering now, and will discover in the future, it is in Christ that we are found. It is through Christ our eyes are opened. And when we walk with the Lord, when we trust and obey, we will become a new creation, proclaiming to those with ears to hear and eyes to see, "I was blind, now I see." Thanks be to God. Amen!