

December 11, 2011

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

For Judgment I Came Into This World

John 9: 4 – 41

Two weeks ago we focused on the first three verses of this chapter where Jesus encounters a man blind from birth. And we looked at the question the disciples asked, '*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?*' John 9:2 And we heard Jesus tell them that the question of who sinned is not the conclusive reason in explaining illness and suffering, but rather the purposes of God are the conclusive explanation. Jesus told them, '*It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*' John 9:3 He was not denying that suffering and illness and indeed all the wrongs in the world are a result of sin in the world, but He was affirming that even in the suffering and illness and wrongs that we see, at the bottom of it all is the purpose of God in the world. He was saying that **human causes are not the definitive explanation of things – divine purposes are.** God is not responding to events – He didn't heal the blind man in response to his condition – He was the creator of that condition to begin with – for one purpose – so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

And the implications for our lives are huge. No matter what you are going through, no matter the depth of your pain and suffering, the causes of the mess you may find yourself in are not conclusive in explaining it. What is conclusive and decisive are the purposes of God. It may be true that your situation or your condition are a result of poor decisions on your part – it may be your fault – or it may not be. But the cause is not conclusive in determining the meaning of your situation or condition – the purposes of God are – but it is so that the works of God might be displayed in us. And if you trust in Christ – if you hold fast to Him as your salvation – His purpose for your pain and suffering will be a good purpose because for every one who loves God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

But unless Christ is your highest goal, your supreme value in this world – more valued than life or breath or health or friends or family or career or goals or dreams or ambitions or money or security – more valued than anything, this will not make sense to you. This man was born blind for one reason – as a living display of the awesome works of God. ***That means that the glory of God is so great a thing that being born blind just so that His works would be revealed is not a punishment but an honor.*** When Jesus says that the purpose of this man's blindness is so that the works of God would be displayed, ***He assumes that the display of God's work has a value that far outweighs the years of blindness and begging this man endured.*** Being loved by God in this life, and anticipating being loved and being with Him in eternity is far better than having sight in this life. But if we don't believe that, then saying that God has wise and wonderful purposes in all our suffering or loss won't be much comfort. But if we do believe it, then not only will our hearts be comforted and strengthened, we will be able to comfort and strengthen others through difficult times.

So Jesus answers the disciples' question and then adds: '*We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.*' John 9:4-5 Jesus was not just healing a blind man – He was also teaching His disciples some things. The first is that **what is true of Jesus is true of those who are His disciples.** There is work to do. Blind eyes need to be opened to the truth of who Jesus is. That is why missions are vital. The primary work of His disciples is to bring the gospel light to those who have been blinded by the god of this age. And '*...as long as it is day...*' means that **there is a given time in which this must be accomplished,** and the night is coming when the work will be over. In fact the day of the Lord's return is often depicted in the prophetic writings as night. And that is when the work will cease. That is why the Bible tells us to '*...encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*' Hebrews 3:13 and that '*Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...*' Hebrews 3:15 '***While I am in the world...***' suggests that as long as there are those in whom the Spirit of Christ resides on the earth, blind eyes will continue to be opened and people brought to a saving knowledge of the Son of God. Jesus has already told His disciples that '*...you are the light of the world...*' indicating that because they hold within the light that He is, while they are in the world, He is in the world, bringing light to blind eyes.

And then Jesus turns to the blind man and begins to heal him: *When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came back seeing.* John 9:6-7 And at this point we have to wonder – **Why did Jesus use mud and spit to heal this man?** Couldn't He have just sort of touched his eyes and said, 'See!?' Why did He have to use mud? Well if you read 10 commentaries you'll get ten different opinions on this. But I think if you understand the context of this healing it explains why He used mud and spit. I think there are at least three things here.

The first is that Jesus deliberately broke the sacred Sabbath law by using mud. One of the many, many prohibitions of the Sabbath law was that you could not knead dough, or anything like it on the Sabbath – and kneading a mixture of clay and spit would fit that prohibition. The reason I believe He used mud and spit is because He intentionally did this on a Sabbath, and John deliberately points that out in verse 14: *Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.* John 9:14 Why would He deliberately break the Sabbath? **To demonstrate that He was Lord of the Sabbath** – that the Sabbath was made for man and not the other way around. He defines the Sabbath and the Sabbath was for rest and healing – that is why you rest – to heal! The point of a Sabbath rest is that we are weak and frail, and it is God who renews and revitalizes, it is God who sustains and heals. What day could be better than to heal a man's eyes – to give him rest from his daily struggles with blindness? Jesus was always messing with these religious hypocrites and their phony worship – and He does this on a Sabbath to generate this controversy to expose the real condition of these guys – they were blind.

The second reason I believe He uses mud here is to demonstrate that **God uses means in doing the work that glorifies Him.** There are times when God simply spoke – and things happened. But most of the time He uses means to work His wonders in the world. Time would fail for us to detail all the ways in which God did that in the Bible, and does that today, but consider how He used the rod of Moses to work miracles; or the lanterns and trumpets of Gideon to wipe out an army; or the mantle of Elijah to part the river; or just the fact that He uses you and me and every other believer to spread the good news of the gospel. As Proverbs 21:31 says: *'The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.'* Proverbs 21:31 He doesn't need the horse – but He uses the horse. He doesn't need us to accomplish His purposes in the world but He uses us. He uses the means of food and drink to sustain life in the world. He uses the means of sex to create children. He uses aspirin and naturopathy and penicillin and a doctor's skill and a thousand other means to bring about healing. And He uses mud and spit to open blind eyes.

And the third thing I think we can take from this is that He uses mud and spit just to mess us up. If you look at the pattern of healings in the Lord's ministry, what you don't find is a pattern. He doesn't heal the same way every time. There is no magic formula. Some He heals with a word – some He touches – some just touch Him. On one occasion He spits on a blind man's eyes – here He packs them with mud and spit and then tells him to go wash it off. There really isn't a methodology that we can grab onto and say, 'This is how you get healed'. I don't believe He meant us to do that. **All healing, any healing, is a sovereign work of God** as He sees fit. And it all works to point to Him and glorify His name – not the man, nor the method.

And when Jesus tells the man to go wash the mud out of his eyes – He sends him to **Siloam** – which, John says, means 'Sent'. And John was probably making the comparison between the pool called 'Sent' and Jesus as the one 'Sent' from the Father as living water in John 4. So the water signifies not just cleansing and healing, but the genesis of life. When God opens your eyes to who Jesus is, you see, you live, and you begin to be healed. All seeing, all healing is due to new life that is generated by the One who is life – Christ Himself.

And now John gives us five little vignettes that show us a progression from blindness to clearer and clearer sight that finally results in salvation for the man – and at the same time the progression of those who claimed to see into deeper and darker blindness. *Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" Others were saying, "This is he," still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed, and I received sight." They said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."* John 9:8-12 At this point, the man's eyes are opened but he has no idea who opened them – and the neighbors are curious because this doesn't seem like the same guy. He probably walked differently, held himself differently – and what they saw was a changed man. And it is always true that an encounter with Jesus will leave an indelible mark on our soul that others will see and say, 'There's something different about you'. That is how you know someone has met Jesus.

And his neighbors thought this was so remarkable they had to bring him to the authorities: *They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet."* John 9:13-17

Unbelief will always try to marginalize the message – the healing was done on the Sabbath – therefore whatever happened is discounted. It made no difference that this was something none of them had ever seen before – the man was obviously not from God because he broke the Sabbath. What kind of reasoning is that? That is unbelief at work. But the man whose eyes were opened had no problem attributing his healing to the power of God – 'He is a prophet' – that is, 'He is obviously a man of God – He performed the miraculous'. And what is more to the point – this man is moving from blindness to sight – from unbelief to saving faith.

Unbelief always demands more evidence: *The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."* John 9:18-23

Jesus Himself said that He didn't come to bring peace, but a sword and we can see that at work here with His parents. They knew the truth of the matter – their son was blind from birth and now through the ministry of Jesus – he can see for the first time. They also knew that Jesus must be at least a prophet of God – but they were afraid to admit it because it would mess up their lives. For a Jew to be put out of the synagogue was the worst possible thing that could happen. It meant that you were excluded from the social, economic and religious life of your community – essentially you were considered as one of the Gentiles – the heathen. Your friends and acquaintances would avoid you like the plague – and in some sense you weren't even considered to be Jewish. It was a dangerous step to do anything that would unsynagogue you. This is in fact what the early Christians, who were overwhelmingly Jewish, faced. It meant you were cut off from the life of the community. But this is what happens when people meet Jesus – they meet the sword. And you have to decide at that point if following Jesus is worth losing your friends, your family, your community. What is He worth to you?

If unbelief cannot marginalize the message – it will marginalize the messenger: *So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner."* John 9:24 In other words, 'Join us in our blasphemy – glorify God by calling His Son a sinner'. The message of this miracle is that Jesus is the Light of the world; He is the Sent One from God, and to believe on Him is to have real, eternal life. And His opponents can't argue with the fact that a blind man now sees, so they slander Him.

Unbelief can never undermine the power of a personal testimony. The Pharisees tried hard to marginalize this guy's testimony, but they couldn't shake the fact that he had been blind all his life and now he could see. *He then answered, Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.* John 9:25 In other words, 'All your arguments mean nothing in the face of the evidence of sight. You can say whatever you want, but the fact is, I was blind, now I see'. Even the dire threat of being unsynagogued failed to shake his testimony. In fact, his healing provided the foundation of his courage in the face of his opponents: *So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from."* John 9:26-29

And then this formerly blind beggar begins to teach the teachers: *"Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."* John 9:30 -33

And the Pharisees couldn't argue with the evidence, they couldn't shake his testimony, and they couldn't win the debate, so they deal with the truth the only way hardened unbelief can – they simply write it off. *They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out.* John 9:34 When all else fails, stick your fingers in your ears and sing very loudly. Essentially that is what these guys were doing. Just as this blind man's faith had been growing, their unbelief had been hardening and eventually they couldn't believe even if they wanted to. Left unchecked, unbelief becomes irredeemable. Just like Esau, '*...when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.*' Hebrews 12:17

But just as with everyone who comes to faith in Christ, Jesus sought out and found this man: *Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.* John 9:35-38 And here the journey of this man from utter blindness to full sight concludes. **The end of the gospel is worship** – that is why Jesus came into the world – to seek and find those who would worship God in spirit and in truth. He came to give sight to the blind **so that** they could worship Him. He doesn't heal the sick, make the lame to walk again, give sight to the blind, cleanse the leper or raise the dead for the sake of healing, or even just to demonstrate the power and majesty of God. He does those things **so that** men might worship Him. The goal is to bring them to real, authentic worship of the only one who is worthy of worship.

But we also see the end of unbelief as Jesus concludes with these words: *And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."* John 9:39 Jesus is not contradicting Himself when He told Nicodemus: *"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.* John 3:17 When He says that He did not come to judge in chapter 3, He was saying that condemnation was not His goal in His first coming – salvation was. And when He says 'For judgment I came into the world...' here in chapter 9, He was saying that but when He does come and save people, a real judgment happens as unbelief and rebellion are exposed and people are confirmed in their refusal to believe. **The end of unbelief is permanent blindness.**

Jesus did not come to condemn but to save. But the truth of the gospel exposes the condition of the heart; it exposes people's unwillingness to embrace the truth and be saved, and they stand judged already and condemned by their refusal to worship Jesus. The ministry of Jesus, in fact, the proclamation of the gospel, will inevitably reveal and confirm the blindness and unbelief that ultimately condemns. In the very next verse in chapter three, Jesus explains what happens: *"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* John 3:18 So on the one hand, the light of the gospel cuts through the blindness of the heart, and those who are blind will see. *so that those who do not see may see.* But on the other hand, the same light confirms the unbelieving blindness of those who reject Him. *and that those who see may become blind.* That is, those who have eyesight, who can read the word of God, who can think and reason and understand, who listen to the message and think they are alright, but who will not admit that they are blind and need healing, will not admit their sin and their desperate need to be born again – they become blind. The more they resist the truth, the harder and deeper their blindness becomes.

And those unbelieving Jews heard this and understood at least that Jesus was making a statement about them: *Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.* John 9:40-41 And I believe that this is the point Jesus was making: Unless you understand that without Christ you are all like that blind beggar who needed Jesus to heal His blindness, take away his sins and lead him to faith; then you are like those Pharisees who have no sense that they need healing and think that they see clearly. And the reality is that they are blind and their sin remains – it cannot be taken away in Christ because they reject Him. Don't reject Him today. The end of the gospel is worship. Come and worship Jesus Christ the Lord.

Our gracious God and Father,

We confess we are that blind beggar and apart from Your great mercy and grace our sin remains. Show us our ruined selves and open our eyes to see the healing there is in Jesus we pray. Open our ears to hear the Spirit's speaking so that we run to the pool of Siloam and wash. Melt our conscience so that no hardness remains. Work repentance in our souls and soften our hearts by the majesty and mercy of God. Your cross was raised to be our refuge; Your blood was spilled to wash us clean; Your death means life for us; and through You all heaven is poured into our hearts. May Your saving grace inspire white-hot affection for Jesus and unending worship that finds its delight in You through Your Son and lives to spread His joy through the gospel to all people we pray, in the precious, healing and life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.