

When the Light Shines (John 9:1-7)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (12/12/2021)

Introduction

1. The setting of the story is between the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication, six months later (10:22).
 - a. This is the sixth of seven miracles in John. (1) changing water into wine in Cana of Galilee (2:1ff), (2) healing the Roman official's son in Cana of Galilee (4:46ff). (3) healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (5:1ff), (4) feeding the five thousand in Galilee (6:1ff), (5) walking on water on the sea of Galilee (6:16ff), (6) restoring sight to the blind man in Jerusalem (9:1ff), and (7) raising of Lazarus from the dead in Bethany of Judah (11:1ff).
 - b. The focus of John 9 in this story is not so much the miracle itself as the inordinate attention of the Jews on *how* the blind man received his sight.
2. The story has connections and contrasts with the themes John advances in his Gospel.
 - a. The main *connection* is with Jesus' pronouncement in Chapter 8: "*I am the light of the world*" (8:12). Clear symbolism is found in the story, likely in this detail: all persons are spiritually blind from birth.
 - b. The blind man's receiving his sight is contrasted with spiritual blindness, that of the Pharisees. The one who knows that he cannot see is contrasted with those who are blind but think they can see.
 - c. Another connection ties the contrast to Chapter 10, where Jesus (the Good Shepherd) is set against these blind religious leaders, who are there identified as *thieves* and *hirelings* (10:2, 12).
3. The message of this text that we would apply today is this: with whom do you, the listener, identify?

I. A Problematic Assumption

1. The disciples thought that the man's blindness was divine judgment due to some grievous sin in either him or his parents.
 - a. Their assumption was true to the extent that suffering and death are the universal consequences of Adam's fall. The OT supports this assumption (Psalm 89:30, 32).
 - b. However, sickness and suffering may also fill purposes other than punishment. For example, Job and Paul (Galatians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 12:7; 2 Corinthians 4:8-10).
2. How could this man have sinned since he was *born* blind? Did he sin in the womb?
 - a. The Jews believed that Esau tried to kill Jacob in the womb (Genesis 25:22).
 - b. Scripture teaches that children in the womb respond to their surroundings: (Luke 1:41).
 - c. How could God allow the man to suffer for his parents' guilt? Sins of the fathers are visited upon their children by way of natural consequence. However, ordinarily, judgment is on one's personal sinning (Ezekiel 18:20).
3. The answer to the problem is first to see the issue as one of *perspective*.
 - a. The disciples' perspective was to ask, "How did he get that way?" However, the Savior's perspective was to ask, "What can we do for him now?"

- b. This story is also one of *purpose*: God's works (power and healing) were to be displayed in this man.

II. A Divine Mission

1. Jesus was on a divine mission to accomplish the purpose of God, as is evident by the *obligation* pressed upon Him and his disciples: "*We must work*" (v. 4).
 - a. The *obligation* identified this *work* as the *means* by which God's will would be accomplished and His *glory* displayed in the exclusive *nature* of the obligation, "*the works of Him who sent me.*"
 - b. The *urgency* of the work was also pressed—"while it is day"—while Jesus was present. He explained, "*Night is coming, when no one can work.*" This was, again, a reference to Jesus' leaving by way of the cross (John 12:35, 36).
2. This divine mission was introduced when Jesus announced that He was the Light of the world (8:12).
 - a. As the Light of the world, Jesus exposed the world, judged the world, and thereby saved the world. The miracle of the healing of the man born blind was to illustrate that claim.
 - b. However, this was more than a miracle; this was a *sign*—a work of the Father, mediated through the One whom He sent (Isaiah 9:2).

III. A Divine Miracle

1. Jesus took the initiative to heal this man.
 - a. This healing made use of physical means—spittle and mud applied to the eyes. At first reading, it is difficult to determine the significance of these means. There is also another occasion when Jesus used His saliva in healing (Mark 7:32-33; 8:23).
 - b. Jews believed that all forms of human excreta (blood, spit, urine, etc.) were pollutant "dirt," making one who was touched by them ceremonially unclean. In the hands of Jesus, who had appropriate authority, the "dirt" was transformed into a healing matter—blood cleanses, saliva cures (Matthew 8:2, 3).
2. The blind man was not immediately healed upon the application of the mud. Obedience of faith was required.
 - a. Jesus commanded the blind man to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam (Chapter 7). *Siloam* means "sent," a transliteration from *siloah*, which comes from *salah*, "to send." The Jews rejected the waters of Siloam (sent), just as they are now rejecting Jesus, the One sent. (Isaiah 8:6).
 - b. The man believed Jesus, obeyed His instruction, washed in the pool, and returned seeing; however, the healing power did not come from the man's obedience, nor from the pool, but from the Sent One Himself.

Conclusion

1. How do we view those we encounter? With envy, as the Jews (8:59)? With curiosity, as the disciples (9:2)? With compassion, as Jesus (9:37-39)?
2. God is sovereign over everything, even a man's forty-year blindness.
3. In the work of the Kingdom, we are co-laborers with God (1 Corinthians 3:9-17).