

# SIGHT TO THE BLIND

John 9:6-12

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“He anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing” (Jn. 9:6-7).

**T**he Gospel of John does not consist of random memories from the apostle's days with Jesus. Rather, under the guiding hand of divine inspiration, the various accounts present a coherent message about the person and work of the Christ. Realizing this helps us to approach the miracles in John. There are only seven – the changing of water into wine, the curing of the nobleman's son, the healing of the lame man by the pool, the feeding of the five thousand, Christ's walking on water, the restoring of sight to the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. These were not the only miracles witnessed by John, but they were selected to teach us about the nature of the salvation Jesus came to give. John tells us: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:30-31).

## SIGHT TO THE BLIND

**J**ohn's sixth miracle begins, “As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth” (Jn. 9:1). Apparently, as Jesus was departing from the temple after the attempt to stone him (Jn. 8:59), this blind man was begging at the temple gate. When his disciples speculated on the cause for the man's condition, Jesus informed them that the blind man was not there by accident, but so that “the works of God might be displayed in him” (Jn. 9:3). There was a divine purpose in this

encounter; the man's blindness was designed to glorify Jesus' ministry. Moreover, it seems that his situation was designed to contrast with that of the Pharisees. Whereas the Pharisees portray those who fail to benefit from Jesus' saving ministry, the man born blind depicts those who receive his mercy. He depicts, in his blindness, mankind's lost condition in sin and complete need for a Savior.

We see this in four ways. First, the blind man was outside the temple, since his malady disqualified him from entering those holy grounds. This is the situation of man in sin. Corrupted by iniquity, blind in our hostility to his ways, we may not draw near to God to receive his blessings. Adam, having sinned, was cast out from the Garden paradise; all mankind, likewise having sinned, is alienated from God and barred from his holy presence. John Owen writes: "Because of sin, no man in his natural state has fellowship with God. God is light, and we are darkness. What communion has light with darkness?"<sup>1</sup>

Second, though the Savior was near, the blind man lacked the ability to see him. Just as his birth defect deprived him of sight, sin has deprived man of the faculty of spiritual comprehension. Psalm 82:5 says, "They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness." This is why Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3). People might talk to the blind man about the colors of the rainbow but he had no ability to understand. Likewise, the glories of Christ are beyond the comprehension of unregenerate sinners.

Third, this man's condition was beyond the help of others. Who can give sight to a man born blind? No amount of money he might collect would enable him to escape his plight. Therefore, fourth, he made no effort to seek salvation. Hopelessly blind, he understandably resigned himself to life in the darkness. Thus for all the stir caused by Jesus' visit to the temple, we read nothing of this man calling out for help or seeking for Jesus. In the same way, man in sin is without hope in and of himself, and therefore does not seek salvation. Those who cannot even see God's kingdom can only settle to make the best out of life in the darkness.

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *Communion with God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, ), I.

It is against this background that we see more brilliantly the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Man could find no way to God, so God came to man with power to save. For as Jesus now came out from the temple, immediately giving sight to a man born blind, so also God sent him from heaven as a light to a world in darkness. These were the truths Jesus had tried to tell the Pharisees. And immediately after they rejected him, Jesus proved his claims by giving sight to this man born blind. “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world,” he said (Jn. 9:5). The sixth miracle proves these words and illustrates their meaning.

Just as we reflected on the blind man, we should consider Jesus’ actions. What moved Jesus to help this man? Only his compassion and zeal for the glory of God’s grace. These are the same reasons why Jesus offers salvation to the world today. Not because we deserve it, and not because we have done or will do something for him, but because of simple mercy and a desire for God to be glorified in us. Furthermore, Jesus acted to fulfill the commission given by his Father. He had said, “We must work the works of him who sent me” (Jn. 9:4). This miracle represents the work God called Jesus to do. John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah, had foretold Jesus’ coming “to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Lk. 1:78-79). This is the hope of mankind – not a hope of what we can do for ourselves, but the hope of a Savior who has come with light for those who are blind. As Isaiah foretold, “those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Isa. 9:2).

It is surely significant that in the combined record of the four Gospels, one of the healing miracles most frequently performed by Jesus is the granting of sight to the blind. This is what it means to be saved. Believers in Jesus are transferred from darkness to light. Having been blind we gain eyes to see. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me,” wrote John Newton. “I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.” Has this happened to you? If not, then understand that the gospel is preached today for the same reason as when Jesus came to the blind man at the temple gate. It is God who comes to open your eyes with the light of his Word. It is out of mercy for the lost that his gospel shines, and that mercy will have achieved its aim if you look to Jesus in faith.

## SPIT, MUD, AND WATER

In healing this blind man, Jesus followed a procedure that seems bizarre to us today: “He spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and said to him, ‘Go, washing in the pool of Siloam’” (Jn. 9:6-7).

In the literature on this passage there are many speculations regarding the meaning of Jesus’ action. Some scholars point out that the ancient world attributed healing powers to saliva, in the same way that we stick burnt fingers into our mouths. In fact, there are pagan records stating that a prominent man might cure blindness by applying his saliva to the eyes. Some therefore suggest that Jesus acted this way to stake his own claim to human greatness.

Another explanation is that by using the clay Jesus alluded to the fact that man was created out of the dust. John Calvin explains this view, which was common among the early church fathers: “Just as man was at first made of clay, so Christ used clay in restoring his eyes, to show that He had the same power over a part of the body that the Father had exercised in creating the whole man.”<sup>2</sup>

A third alternative is that Jesus placed the clay on the man’s eyes to highlight his blindness. This was Calvin’s own view, that Jesus was intensifying the blindness so as to magnify the cure. Arthur Pink states, “It prefigured the Lord pressing upon the sinner his lost condition and need of a Saviour. The placing of clay on his eyes emphasizes our blindness.”<sup>3</sup>

The fact is that we are not told the reason for what Jesus did. But the apostle John gives us his emphasis, and it lies not on the spit and mud but on his command to go wash in the pool of Siloam. “He... said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing” (Jn. 9:7). Therefore, it may be most likely that Jesus placed the mud on the man’s eyes so he would have something to wash off. Furthermore, John makes a point of telling us that the pool’s name, Siloam, means “Sent.” This is not idle information but a key to understanding the point of these verses.

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<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *New Testament Commentaries*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 4:242,

<sup>3</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 478

The Pool of Siloam was a landmark with a rich history in Jerusalem. The name was given because the water was conducted to it (or “sent”) by a channel cut in the rock of the temple mount during the reign of King Hezekiah. In 701 B.C., the Assyrian king Sennacherib was coming to besiege the city, and, urged by the prophet Isaiah, Hezekiah ordered the cutting of this 530 meter tunnel so that water from the Kidron Valley could be diverted inside the city walls (see 2 Ki. 20:20 and 2 Chron. 32:30). This achievement is considered one of the engineering marvels of the ancient world and was a glorious act of God’s providence. For many years, the Pool of Siloam was undiscovered and its location in doubt. But in 2004 Israeli construction workers uncovered evidence that led to its positive identification. The excavation on this site is going on now.

Why was the name of this pool so important that the apostle John mentioned it? The answer is obvious in the context of this encounter. Jesus had insisted that he is the One sent by God to bring light to the world (see Jn. 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42). And, in the words of John Calvin, “the fountain... daily reminded the Jews of the Christ who was to come, yet whom they despised when He was exhibited to them.”<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson explains: “Jesus himself is the sent one, and... the granting of sight to this blind man symbolizes the spiritual illumination without which one cannot see the true light from God.”<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, it may be that Jesus here fulfilled the ancient prophecy of the patriarch Jacob in Genesis 49:10: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes.” *Shiloh* is a variant of the Hebrew name for the pool, meaning “sent one.” So by embuing the pool called “Sent” with divine powers Jesus may have been declaring his arrival in terms of the prophecy given so long ago by the very father of the nation Israel.

We should remember the frequent allusions to water in the Gospel of John. It has rightly been said that if you squeezed John’s Gospel water would pour out. In chapter 2, Jesus turned water from the ceremonial jars into wine, thus symbolizing the new life he was bringing to a dead religion. Sitting by the well with the Samaritan

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin, 242.

<sup>5</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 365.

woman in chapter 4, Jesus said, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever” (Jn. 4:14). Chapter 5 found Jesus healing a lame man who had vainly hoped for a miracle at the pool of Bethesda. And just days before this healing in chapter 9, Jesus had interrupted the water pouring ceremony during the Feast of Tabernacles – water drawn from this very Pool of Siloam – by crying out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink” (Jn. 7:37). Just as the pool called “Sent” brought life-giving water to the city, Jesus was sent from God to bring saving life to the world. Now, to back up all these claims, Jesus sends this man to that very pool to wash, and at his command the man born blind received his sight.

What difference does this make to us? For one thing, it shows that Jesus is who he said he was. He is the Savior sent by God to a world held blind in the darkness; he is “the light of the world” so that those who follow him “will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12). Unless the record of John’s Gospel can be discredited – and attempts to do so have failed miserably – then this miracle backs up Jesus’ claims and promises.

Furthermore, we should note that the water in this pool flowed through the temple mount. The temple was where the sacrifices were offered – where sinners came to God through the blood shed for forgiveness. Jesus is telling us that if we want to escape the darkness, we must wash ourselves in the “pool” Jesus was sent by God to provide. We must be cleansed by the sacrifice of his blood – the blood of the true Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29) – so that we are forgiven and restored to God’s blessings. William Hendriksen summarizes: “For spiritual cleansing one must go to the true Siloam, i.e., to the One who was *sent* by the Father to save sinners.”<sup>6</sup>

With this in mind, let us not forget Jesus’ instruction to this blind man: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (Jn. 9:7). Jesus required him to believe and to act on that belief. It was when the blind man “went and washed” that he came back seeing. This is the message that Jesus has proclaimed all through John’s Gospel: that we must believe in order to be saved. He told Nicodemus, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not

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<sup>6</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 2:76.

perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). He said, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (Jn. 3:36). Even as he saves us by grace alone, Jesus calls us to faith as the instrument of that salvation. He sends us first to the place of cleansing – his cross – and from there he sends us to a life freed from darkness and sin.

## A NEW MAN

One last reason why Jesus might have sent this man to the pool was so that other people would see him. What a stir it caused when they did! “The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some said, ‘It is he.’ Others said, ‘No, but he is like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man’” (Jn. 9:8-9). They did not consider such a healing possible, so they did not believe their eyes. As William Barclay comments, “Jesus is always doing things which seem to the unbeliever far too good and far too wonderful to be true.”<sup>7</sup>

This makes another important point for us. Mark Johnson comments: “When God works in a person’s life the effect will be plain to see. Just as it was beyond dispute that the man born blind had been given sight – even though some could hardly believe it – so it is with every true convert. The power of God that saves is a power that will begin to show itself in a transformed life”<sup>8</sup> Have people seen a change in your life since you came to faith in Christ? Are you still being changed into his holy image so that people continue to see God’s power in you? If not, then perhaps you need to return to the pool for cleansing and open your eyes anew to the light of Christ. So radical is the change made by God’s power in a believer’s life that it is impossible for it to be concealed from others, so long as believers do not hide that light under a bushel of worldly affections.

Just as this man was given new eyes to see, a Christian gains an entirely new outlook on life. We see this in conversion accounts all through the New Testament. Greedy Zacchaeus gained a new attitude towards his money after spending time with Jesus: “the half of my

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<sup>7</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 2:51.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, 134.

goods I give to the poor,” he said. “And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Lk. 19:8). Saul of Tarsus stopped seeing with self-righteous, scornful eyes after Jesus blinded him on the Road to Damascus and then opened his eyes as the apostle Paul, God’s chief messenger of grace. Perhaps most vivid is a man possessed by a legion of demons, who lived a wild, violent, and miserable life. After Jesus restored him, he was “sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind” (Lk. 8:35). If we have been touched by Jesus’ saving power and have responded in genuine faith, these are the very changes that will happen in our lives. Jesus’ righteousness is given to us to cover our sin. Jesus’ light restores our minds to right thinking, and freed from blindness and darkness we go on to lead a new and godly life to the glory of his name.

When this happens to you, people are going to notice! Your friends and neighbors will talk about you and wonder what has happened. They will see the difference in the way you treat people and the joy that you display in all circumstances. They will ask what this means, giving you the privilege of telling them about the One who was sent from heaven to bring light to the world.

This is exactly what happened with the man who was born blind. “So they said to him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’ He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight’” (Jn. 9:10-11). Notice that he focused not on the strange procedure – on the *how* – but on the One who gave him sight – the *who*. This is a good example for us. We have the privilege not merely of telling people *what* has happened to us, but also *who* has come to us and opened our eyes. The heart of our witness is always Jesus himself. This was the first action of this believer’s new life. Seeing his old friends for the first time with his new eyes, how fitting it was that the first thing he did was tell them about the Savior who had blessed him.

## WHERE IS HE NOW?

**T**elevision shows are sometimes aired that track down former stars from yesteryear. “Where are they now?” is always a popular feature, as viewers enjoy discovering who went on to greater

stardom, who went home to raise kids, and who ended up selling insurance. But that question took on a more serious tone when asked about the man who healed the eyes of the man born blind. “They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know’” (Jn. 9:12).

After healing the man’s eyes, Jesus disappeared from public view, appearing only at the end of the chapter to minister to this man after he was persecuted for his witness. But soon the people who asked for Jesus would learn that he did not intend to drift off into obscurity. Instead, his path was heading directly to the cross. Within six months, these people would see him riding triumphantly into their city and teaching to large crowds at this very temple. Then they would witness – and participate in – his dreadful rejection, his deliverance into the hands of enemies, the farce of a trial that would condemn him to death, and then his terrible crucifixion, as the storm clouds of God’s wrath gathered over their city.

“Where is he now?” people still wonder today. And well they might wonder – for there is still no one else in the world who can give the salvation Jesus Christ was sent to give. The Bible tells us the thrilling answer. After his death, Jesus rose from the grave and forty days later he ascended into heaven. Now he lives and reigns at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, and through the ministry of the gospel he still shines his light to open the eyes of those who believe.

We, now, are entrusted to shine the light of that gospel into the dark world. Jesus met the man born blind in the very gate of the temple, and as soon as our feet take us outside the church we too will encounter people who are blind towards God, completely ignorant of the saving grace that is in Jesus. We do not have the power to open their eyes, but we can tell them about the Savior who opened ours. And through our witness of his gospel, Jesus will continue doing the miracle today, so that the spiritually blind will open their eyes and see the Son of God, believe on him, and receive eternal life.