

Signs of Glory

Studies in John's Gospel

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Study 7

The Sixth Sign (John 9:1-12; 13-41)

Jesus Brings Light to the World of Blind Beggar's

Introduction

Jesus had been ministering back in Jerusalem. In chapter eight He had made the claim to be the light of the world. *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life"* (John 8:12). By restoring sight to the beggar Jesus showed Israel and the world in deed what His claim had meant. Man sought 'light' apart from God in the Garden by taking the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Under the illusion that knowledge of truth existed apart from communion with the Father/Creator humanity ever since has been infatuated by anyone or thing or programme that claims to be able to give true light. Our Lord's claim is absolute. He was not *a* light in the world, one of many but *the* light. It is accommodating to modernity not to make exclusive claims about anything. All things are up for grabs. The only absolute is that there are no absolutes. Arminianism has plagued the church and spawned within it a similar spirit. By holding to the lordship of the sinful human will over the Lordship of Christ, all absolute claims about our utter need of grace are modified. The doctrine that if we will, we can find light in ourselves to find God, is commonly held and taught. This seems to honour humanity and make us accountable, but in reality shields us from ever humbling ourselves before the sovereign grace of God, and thus leaves us proudly separate from the fullness of the Gospel. This beggar, blind from birth was in terrible straits. There was no way he could find healing by looking, either to another human being or into himself. To say that he had the freedom of will to find true healing and wholeness was as impossible as saying that Israel could find her way to Christ through her religious will. As we have seen, Israel's most religious were most opposed to Christ. As we noted in the previous signs, some saw the signs by grace while others thinking they already knew, or seeing something that suited their image of who Christ should be, got mad and 'blinded by the light' sought to destroy Him. Nothing has changed.

Jesus Passing By

As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth (Vs.1). What seemed like a casual, random encounter was to become a moment of surprising grace, for the blind beggar, his neighbours and the disciples. Jesus claimed that everywhere He went He knew the Father was working. He knew that the work of the Father was to bring needy people to Him (See John 5:17 and 6:37-45). So there was no such thing as a Fatherless encounter for Jesus. There was no such thing as an accidental meeting.

Jesus Passing By in the Love of His Father

As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. The disciples saw a theological problem, a fascinating puzzle; Jesus saw a needy man symbolic of a needy Israel and a needy world ready for the mercy of His Father. By getting side-tracked into seeing a puzzle to be solved the disciples found themselves on a different track to Jesus. The disciple's quandary as to who must have sinned for this man to be born blind was not unreasonable or theologically off the planet. Jesus did not deny that sin could cause blindness. (Note the appendix of Study 4). It is not helpful to generalise as the disciples did that everything was the product of cause and effect. A black and white, mechanistic interpretation of the Scriptures may turn them into something that insulates us from the truth. Oversimplification and the inability to live with mystery may press us into a kind of analysis of events that takes us right away from what the Father is on about. Jesus was definite about this. *"It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him"* (Vs.3). Despite the issue of sin, personal or parental, the Father had brought this man to Jesus for His glory, the wonder of healing. "God as ruler of the universe not only takes but makes a situation such as this" (G. C. Bingham, Commentary on John, p. 69). Blindness from birth does not place this beggar outside of the glory of God or too remote from the possibility of grace. Remember that Jesus said the chief work of God in us is that we believe. It is possible that the somewhat bizarre road to healing implemented by Jesus in this case was with a view to bringing this man to faith as well as to seeing. The light needed in his life was far more than seeing eyes.

We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

Jesus was constant in referring to the Father. Knowing that it was the Father who sent Him was both a blessing and direction giving. He knew His Father's heart so He knew what it was to have the Father for Him and with Him. Knowing the Father's heart also meant that He knew what and how to do things. His disciples were included in His ministry, ***We must work the works of Him who sent Me.*** They too, as they watched Jesus, would be getting to know and experience the blessings and directive wisdom of the Father.

Whilst Jesus was with them it was 'day', because He was the light of the world. Wherever he went He exposed the world, exposed the glory of the Father, exposed the rebellion of those who thought they knew all about God apart from receiving grace, exposed the utter helplessness of sinful humanity and the amazing newness and completeness of Father's love. The 'day' also meant opportunity. Jesus was no activist, 'having' to be busy to feel significant or important. Paul explained true faith action best when he said: *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died* (2 Corinthians 5:14). We must be prepared to work when opportunity is given but never to boost our sense of self importance. All work 'driven' by expectations of others or self will automatically be oblivious to what the Father is doing and the way He does it.

"While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."(Vs. 5) Again Jesus claimed exclusivity when it comes to light (Lit. the Greek has no 'the' simply 'I am light'). There is no other light. In Exodus 13:21-22 the light of God was His present glory revealing who He was and therefore the way for His people to proceed. Psalm 119:105 epitomises Israel's familiar cry concerning God's word being a light to our path. In Jesus God's fullness of glory is present with us (1:14), and Jesus is the enfleshed word explaining the Father (1:18). All other so called light must actually be darkness. This is seen most clearly in our culture where the light is taken to be what I feel and want.

When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes (Vs.6) Since commentators began they have differed over why Jesus used spittle and clay. Why didn't He simply heal the beggar? Jesus used a similar method with the deaf and dumb man at Decapolis (Mark 7:33). Jewish tradition was that spittle of a first-born son had healing qualities. Pagans of the time believed it had magical properties. Doubtless Jesus did it for other reasons. Because of the nature of this sign and the blindness of Israel His use of clay may have been an allusion back to creation. God (through His Son) had formed the first man from the earth. Was this Christ saying a whole new creation must happen to people's eyes if they are to see Me as the Light of the world? We do see that the coating with damp clay and the washing involved the man in a simple form of obedience. It is interesting that the Pharisees were directly interested in how Jesus healed the man (Vs. 15; 19; 26), which may indicate that Jesus was refuting the old taboos that spittle and blood defiled a person. Carson points to the nervousness of the leaders about Jesus so disrupting their old ways that the Romans would come and take away their place in the nation (11:48).

And said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent) (Vs. 7). Jesus had already made much of being the Father's sent One, so it seems clear that the name of the pool refers to Christ not the man's obedience. The pool of Siloam was fed by the brook Siloam which came from the Temple Hill. In the OT it stood for the blessings which flowed from God's Holy habitation (Isaiah 8:6, and Ezekiel 47:1). As in Isaiah's time the people were again rejecting the 'river' of God which came directly from God's dwelling place (See the Isaiah passage above). Jesus was claiming to be the true Siloam into whom all blind sinners must go to be healed.

So he went away and washed, and came back seeing (Vs. 7). Here again John's economy of description highlights the quality of the wonderful change. ***Therefore the neighbours, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?"*** The man's whole appearance had changed so much that some thought it was a different person (maybe that was easier to believe). ***He kept saying, "I am the one"*** (Vs. 9). All this directed people to the fullness of the Father's blessings in the Kingdom. Christ knows only one way the Father blesses and that is full bore. There is only total transformation to be looked for with joy. The worship of the beggar was spontaneous and free in his repeated cries "I am the one". The staggering transformation of grace was most amazing to him. Nothing would ever stop his mouth from singing to and adoring the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The fullness of that worship was triggered later by Jesus.

The Post Script

The Lord is not spoken of again till He met with the man after he had been interrogated by the Pharisees and excommunicated from the synagogue. Immediately after the healing the Pharisees grilled the man (Vs.13-34). This grilling also included the man's parents. The sign had divided the leaders. Some insisted that if Jesus was from God He would observe the Sabbath. Others said that the sign indicated He was from God. Always there was/is division. Where the light shines the shadows are deepened. Dormant water with the warmth of the sun soon becomes stagnant and stinking. When asked what he felt about Jesus the healed man said "He is a prophet!" That was a progression from verse eleven where he had called Him 'A man called Jesus'. His parents were brought into the debate (Vs 18). The fear regime that surrounded the 'kingdom' of the Pharisees was crippling. To confess Jesus would

mean exclusion from the synagogue (Vs. 22). The power the Pharisees exercised was one of exclusion compared to the inclusive ministry of Jesus.

The second time they called the healed man a great exchange took place. He now like Jesus could see their refusal to see and listen. His heart eyes had been opened too (Vs. 27). With the innocence of purity the man asked them if they too wanted to become disciples of Jesus. Their cynicism was met with a logic of experience and grace. It was then that they fell back to derision bred from their insecurity. ***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."***(Vs. 28, 29). The man's reply bore all the marks of the wisdom of Christ. Here is what Christ promised, ***But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say*** (Matthew 10:19). His answer was not smart but wise; it was not designed to win an argument but witness to the truth, to bear the light of God into the situation. ***The man answered and said to them, "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.*** (Vs.30-33).

The shame driven anger of the Pharisees rose to breaking point. Still viciously linking the man's blindness with his sin, they excommunicated him from the synagogue. This was no small matter and involved wide social and religious penalties.

Hearing of the man's situation Jesus deliberately sought him out (Vs. 35-41). A very beautiful blooming of faith occurred. ***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.*** Suddenly the experience of healing was linked with the Father's only begotten Son standing before him. His faith spontaneously translated into worship. The Lord's final words were indeed frightening.

"For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." 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."

Who are those who 'do not see'? Men like the blind beggar. Who are those who see? The Pharisees who saying they saw yet didn't become sealed in their blindness. A sinner cannot be released from unconfessed sin, however much they claim they have or can.

Questions for discussion and further reflection

1. Discuss how the glory of Christ and the Father was revealed to you as we considered this sixth sign.
2. The judgement upon Israel because of the presence of God's light was critical. Discuss how this judgement manifested itself in the story.
3. Whenever we see sin as a moral puzzle to unravel we miss the mark. Discuss how this becomes apparent in the story.

4. Discuss what we see in this story about the root and sustenance of worship.