

John 9:1-41

Stephen Luney

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So, I went and washed, and then I could see.”

“Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don't know,” he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore, the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So, they were divided.

Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

“We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that

anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.”

The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

Spiritual Blindness

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

Some Pharisees, who were with him, heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Introduction

As we come to open God's Word here in John chapter nine, let me pray for us the Psalmist's prayer in Psalm 119:18 “Open *our* eyes that *we* may see wonderful things in your law.” Amen.

One of the challenges that I would face as a doctor was making sure that I asked my patients the correct question. The surest way of being led in completely the wrong direction when trying to come to the correct diagnosis was to ask the wrong question – or, more often, ask the correct question in the wrong way. For example, when

anaesthetising a patient, it is vitally important to have the correct information about their dentition, do they have crowns, or a partial plate or full dentures and so on, since a partial plate, for example, can be a risk of obstructing a patient's airway if it becomes loose under anaesthesia. The wrong way to inquire about all of this would be to ask, "Are those teeth your own?" since you are as likely to get the answer back "Yes, because my husband's teeth don't fit me anymore." Just one example. Throughout the gospels, the disciples, the Pharisees and the crowds are repeatedly asking the wrong question. Today's version of them missing the point is to ask "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus' answer is, as always, phenomenally helpful. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." This comment, along with the entire book of Job amongst other texts helps us understand that although sickness and illness are present as a factor in our fallen world, they should not be universally understood to be the consequence of sin on the part of an individual. Within this answer, Jesus reiterates his claim to be the light of the world, building on Jn 8:12 "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." The disciples had asked a causation question about blindness and sin, but Jesus gave an answer to the bigger question about saving grace, declaring himself to be the light of the world. John 1:4 introduces the concept with the words "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Jesus follows up this extraordinary claim with the extraordinary miracle of restoring sight to the man born blind. This action now causes division again among the people, just as it had back in chapter seven when Jesus said "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." ... On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" Thus, the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him."

So, too, now with the Pharisees: "Jn 9:16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So, they were divided."

What about you? Which camp do you fall into? Jesus warned that he came to divide people. Luke 12:49-52 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three." We see that not only here in chapters seven and nine of John's gospel but back in chapter three after those famous words of John 3:16. I've spoken about this recently, but it has a specific application here. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in

the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God." Things seen plainly. Things brought into the light. Forget any notions of gentle Jesus meek and mild and rather hear Jesus stark words of warning instead. In verse 39 we read "Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." These sad circumstances of the man born blind become a bright light shone by the light of the world who has come to bring forgiveness of sins to all who will come to him.

The People, the Parents and the Pharisees

There's a real challenge for the people here. Now that the man has been restored to full sight, it is the people who are now doubting their own eyes! His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." And this is where what we believe about Jesus and our testimony about him becomes personal. When the Pharisees quiz him, we read that "Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." As we saw earlier, they are divided about that answer and try to prove that it all didn't really happen by attempting to disprove his blindness. They didn't believe what they saw either, and so interrogated his parents. Verse 18 says; "They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue." How different their testimony. Out of fear of man, they do not acknowledge Jesus. May God save us from falling into that trap. 1 Pet 3:15 "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,..."

Time then for the pharisees to call back the man himself to hear his testimony further.

"A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out."

This man pays the price for speaking up in support of Christ – including his fantastic retort about asking if they want to follow him too. I wonder how many of you started to think about the hymn "Amazing Grace" when we read that. "was blind but now I see!" I have a lovely book at home entitled "Then sings my soul" which has the hymn on one page and the story behind the hymn on the other. John Newton's story is fascinating, the author of that hymn – apologies that we're not singing it this morning, as that would have been another appropriate choice for today.

Jesus goes on to make it even more clear that it is spiritual blindness that is the real issue here, not physical blindness.

"Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

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Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.""

What about us? How do we answer Jesus' question "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

The man born blind said he believed and worshipped him. What causes you to bow down and worship?

What's your story?

How would you bear witness?

Were you once blind?

Do you now see?

How can you help others to see?

So, how do you answer Jesus' question?

Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Romans 10:9-10 "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

Scripture does warn us, just as Jesus spoke to the Pharisees. We have the frightening words of Isaiah, Is 6:9-10, repeated in Matt 13:15, Acts 28:27 He said, "Go and tell this people: "'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Further on in Matthew's gospel Jesus repeatedly accuses the Pharisees of being the blind leading the blind – a phrase that has passed into the English language – and as blind guides. Matt 15:14, 23:16,17,19,24.

But I come back to my attempt to ask the correct questions.

What causes you to bow down and worship?

What's your story – could you share it with others?

Or are you afraid to share it?

How would you bear witness?

Were you once blind?

Do you now see?

How can you help others to see?

So, how do you answer Jesus' question?

Do you believe in the Son of Man?

I pray God that you do and are prepared to be his witnesses.

Amen.