



Seven signs from the Gospel of John

Jesus heals a blind man JOHN 9:1-16



That you Might Believe
Jesus heals a man born blind
John 9:1-16
June 6th 2021
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In our journey through the seven miraculous signs John records for us in his Gospel, we've arrived at number six: the healing of a man who was blind from birth.

Jesus performed many miracles - but John has carefully chosen to record just seven of them to show us the character and glory of Jesus Christ. And so as we open up today's miracle we need to ask: "What's the deep meaning, the real significance of the healing of a man born blind?"

May God give us fresh eyes and new insights into a well-known miracle.

The Story

Jesus is walking with his disciples when they come across this man blind from birth. In those days blind men earned their keep by begging; and that was true of this man, we read in verse 8. Now what would you and I do if we saw a blind man begging? For most of us there would only be two options: We might pass him by – perhaps because we had no money on us or we felt unable to help, Or we could assist him with food or money. But if you were a Jew in the days of Jesus, a third option came to mind: speculate on what sins the man might have committed to make him blind! That idea might not have crossed our minds, but it's what the disciples did:

Because many Jews believed that if you were sick it was caused by your own personal sins; the sickness was judgement on you.

But if you were sick from birth, like this man, that made the speculation even more perplexing: if the man had sinned, he had to have done so before he was born! Or perhaps his parents sinned and the judgement was passed on to their child: "Rabbi" (teacher) they said to Jesus, "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Instead of doing something to help a desperate man in front of them, they engaged in idle speculation about the cause of his blindness.....and this choice to speculate over someone's misery rather than help them was not compassionate, because they knew how hard a blind man's life was!

Even today, with all our technological aids, life is still difficult for blind folks: only around a quarter find employment, 40% say they have difficulty making ends meet, 30% say they are rarely positive about the future. To help us get some understand of the difficulty of being blind here is a recent real-life testimony:

"Perhaps there is nothing more disorienting than losing your vision. The world is turned upside down. The independence once taken for granted is shattered... one's previous existence seems as distant as another life. It isn't one or two things that need to be relearned; it's everything. Going to the fridge to get a glass of milk used to be something I could do half asleep; after I lost my vision it became a multi-step process, and any error meant I found myself standing, lost in a house I'd lived in for years"

In the days of Jesus life was even more difficult for a blind person. With no technological aids or state help, you were thrown upon the kindness of strangers or the support of your family.

But all of this suffering is lost on the disciples whose response to a pitiful sight is idle speculation! May the Lord save us from such coldness of heart in the face of desperate need.

Now; according to the Bible, disease is caused by sin. Before Adam and Eve disobeyed God there was no disease or sickness or death. But their sin and the sin of the whole world resulted in the curse, from which disease flows. So in one sense, the disciples were right: sin had caused this man's blindness.

But they were wrong in two ways: First, when they reasoned that an individual's sins causes that person's illness they were in error, because there is no necessary connection between a person's behaviour and their health. (Of course if we abuse our bodies, drink too much, eat the wrong food, do drugs, and so on, there can be a direct connection between our actions and our health). But that's not what we have with this man born blind. No sin this man had committed caused his blindness.

But the disciples went wrong in another way too —faced with a tragic situation, they failed to take into account God's mercy and his sovereign power to turn a seemingly hopeless situation into an opportunity for blessing and good! In their minds there was no hope for this man! Listen carefully to Jesus' words:

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned." (there's Jesus correcting their first error, now listen to him correcting their second error: "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life!!")

"All you disciples can see is a helpless case over which to idly speculate, you have forgotten that in his mercy God loves to take a hopeless case and bring out good! God has good things to bring out of this tragedy that will bring him glory!"

"this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

If only you and I would be filled with confidence in this truth when we are faced with tragedy, either in our own lives or the lives of others! If only instead of gloom we trusted in the mercy and the power of God to turn hopeless situations around! May God increase our small faith!

What happened next?

Well Jesus gently rebukes his disciples. The blindness of this man sparks the metaphor of day and night. In those days you could only work during the day, when the sun set it was too dark, "As long as it is day" says Jesus "we that's you disciples and me) must do the work 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."

"Disciples, we haven't got time for idle speculation. We've got work to do! Before long our time will run out."

There was a single-mindedness and an urgency to Jesus which is all too often lacking among his followers. Time is precious, time is running out, let's not waste it!

Only one life twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last

When the great modern song writer Stuart Townend lost his brother to terminal cancer in November 2017, it made him—as death often does—ponder the shortness of life. And he wrote a song which includes these words:

*For time is given,
And time is taken away;
The least that we can do
Is make the most of every day.*

Are you and I using the precious time God has given us usefully and profitably for God's glory? Or, do we in the words of Pink Floyd, "Fritter and waste the hours in an off-hand way"? One day we will be called to give an account of every gift God has given to us – including the gift of time.

"Disciples stop wasting your time in idle unprofitable theological speculation!"

"As long as it is day we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no-one can work."

And with that rebuke, Jesus gets on with the work of healing. And what a strange way he goes about! He spits on the ground—salvia is, as every doctor will tell you, hygienic stuff—and he makes a clay paste which he puts on the man's eyes. I don't believe he put the mud into his eyes, but as the man's eyelids would have closed for protection, we see Jesus place the mud on the eyelids of the man born blind.

Why this strange method? Why not just a word of healing? Every miracle of Jesus was unique to the person he healed: Jesus knew the needs of this man and no doubt he had reasons which suited this particular man's needs. Perhaps Jesus wanted to communicate to this man that the healing had come from Jesus himself, because with the senses of hearing and touch, the man would have heard Jesus spit and felt the mud on his eyelids. So Jesus is saying, "It is I who is healing you" "The power is coming from me." And by putting mud on his eyes which the man would want to wash off as soon as possible, Jesus is testing this man's obedience, for he went on to say: "Go wash in the pool of Siloam." Don't wash off the mud anywhere – only in the pool of Siloam. If this man really believes that Jesus could heal him, he will obey him and go to the pool of Siloam. Does the man believe Jesus has the power to heal his eyesight? The Answer is yes! "The man went and washed, and came home seeing." What a world of wonder lies in the four words "he came home seeing." His life was never the same again! His life was transformed, he could now see where he was going, he could see the blue of sky and the green of trees, the faces of his family - and his own face all for the very first time! (Perhaps he had a hasty shave and clean up!) And no more begging, no more relying on handouts, he could earn for himself! What a changed life! And wherever the Gospel has gone around the world it has always brought hope and help and healing and blessing.

Of course whenever something wonderful happens, there is controversy: Some people said "this is the same man who used to beg." Others disagreed, "no, it's not, it's just a look-alike." The blind man put an end to the controversy with "I am the man!"

Let us draw out two lessons from this miraculous sign. First, this miraculous sign proves that Jesus truly is God's long-promised Messiah.

#1 Jesus is God's Promised Messiah

In the OT there were many predictions about a coming Saviour, a coming Messiah, all written long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. One of them said that Messiah would open blind eyes: "*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.*" (Isaiah 35:5) Healing the blind was one of the miracles Messiah would perform – and in all of the Bible, Jesus is the only one who performs the miracle of sight!!

Moses, Elijah and Elisha, performed miracles before Jesus came into the world; the apostles performed miracles after Jesus ascended into heaven, but none of them is recorded as healing the blind! This was a miracle pointed in a special way to the coming Messiah.

"When John the Baptist, who was in prison, (this is Matthew 11 I am reading) heard about the deeds Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: (here it is:) The blind receive sight,

the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

Why should you and I believe that Jesus Christ is God’s promised Messiah? For many reasons, but one of them is the way the Old Testament predicted that the coming Messiah would heal the blind! And so he did—here and on four other occasions; in fact no other healing type is recorded more frequently than that of Jesus healing the blind! This miracle demonstrates, it proves that Jesus is God’s great promised Messiah! PAUSE

#2 Jesus came to heal spiritual blindness

But there is a reason Jesus uniquely and repeatedly performs this miracle: physical blindness points to a far greater blindness, to spiritual blindness, and the power of Jesus to heal physical blindness points to his power to heal our spiritual blindness! And it’s with this wonderful truth that we end. This man received a far greater healing than a healing of the body: he received healing of the soul:

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (Jesus asked the cured 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 worshipped him.”

The Bible teaches that we are all born spiritually blind. Spiritual blindness means lots of things. For example, if we say “I’m a good person I’m not a sinner” then we are spiritually blind – we can’t see our true condition!

But most of all, spiritual blindness means we cannot see who Jesus Christ is. We have low opinions of Jesus, we might think that he was only a good man or only a good teacher perhaps, but we don’t believe he is the divine Son of God, God’s promised Messiah who came into the world to rescue us from our sins and rose from the dead to give us eternal hope. Spiritual blindness - above everything else - is being unable to see who Jesus is.

But this man’s spiritual blindness was healed; he could now see who Jesus was, he called him “Lord” which means God, and he worshipped him.

This is the greater meaning of this wonderful miracle: Jesus came to heal our spiritual blindness; he sent his Spirit into the world to open our blind eyes so that you and I could see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So as I close, may I ask you: who do you think Jesus is?

If you reply, “He is the Son of God, the promised messiah, worthy of my worship and obedience!” thank God for the miracle of new sight and new birth he has performed in you!

If you say, “Jesus was just a man, just a good man” then you are still spiritually in the dark, and our prayer is that God in his mercy would open your blind eyes, as he did for this man.

*“Amazing grace how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see”*

Please join me in this great hymn of personal testimony.