

Healing The Man Born Blind

John 9:1- 41

To begin, it is very important that you [please read this whole chapter first] before you consider any of my words about it.

To me, this sign is too good to be true. You will see why I say this as we move through the chapter together. The author of the Gospel of John has made it very clear as to why he wrote; he wanted us to come to know Jesus and to believe in him. He wanted our eyes to be opened and to see Jesus clearly. I hope that the first five signs have helped you thus far, but this sixth sign is essential if you are to be able to understand the last and seventh sign in this Gospel.

As I read this chapter one of the most famous Gospel Songs, that is played and sung all over the world, Amazing Grace rings in my soul. When we get to the seventh sign you will come to see just how amazing this grace is that Jesus preaches and extends by his words and deeds. I also sense, in this story, an up-to-date commentary on our religious world of today. It is an "eye opener" for the many levels of skepticism and faith that is present in so many. The last three verses (39-41) expresses the summary of what the author expressed after having shared the details he exposes in this sign.

Jesus said, 'It is for judgement that I have come into this world - to give sight to the sightless and to make blind those who see.' Some Pharisees who were present asked, 'Do you mean that we are blind?' 'If you were blind,' said Jesus, 'you would not be guilty, but because you claim to see, your guilt remains.'

As Fr. Brown commented, "*Before narrating the miracle, the evangelist is careful to have Jesus point out the meaning of the sign as an instance of light coming into darkness. This is a story of how a man who sat in darkness was brought to see the light, not only physically but spiritually. On the other hand, it is also a tale of how those who thought they saw (the Pharisees) were blinding themselves to the light and plunging into darkness.*" from: "The Gospel According to John (i-xii) by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Doubleday & Co., Inc.

Here is a running outline of what I see and share in this sixth sign of the Gospel of John:

1. Introduction:

The disciples asked, "*Rabbi, why was this man born blind? Who sinned, this man or his parents?*" To which Jesus basically replied that it had nothing to do with sin!

Ramond Brown says, "*Despite the Book of Job, the old theory of a direct causal relationship between sin and sickness was still alive in Jesus' time.*" It probably stemmed from Exodus 20:5, "*for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me.*"

Guess what, it is still around in our day. We still live with what is called the Doctrine of Original Sin in much of the Christian Church. This concept is not found in Judaism, Budhism or Hinduism. The doctrine of Original Sin was perhaps begun by early Church fathers like Tertullian, Cyprian and Ambrose (@ 160 CE) who considered that mankind shares in Adam's sin, transmitted by human generation. Because this doctrine is not clearly spelled out in scripture, there are a variety of interpretations in various times and ecclesiastical bodies. Not all Christians, especially today, subscribe to this doctrine at all. In any case, in this story, Jesus made it clear to his disciples (vs 3) "*It is not that he or his parents sinned, he was born blind so that God's power might be displayed in curing him*". The purpose of this sign should be clear!

In the next verses (vs 4-7) Jesus explains his mission, "*While I am in the world I am the light of the world*" and also demonstrates the purpose of this sign concerning seeing and believing. I think it is important to note that his was not a direct healing. Jesus makes paste with his spittle and places it on his eyes and tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. After the man did this he was able to see for the first time in his life! What a marvelous demonstration of what the rest of chapter nine is sharing with us as told to us by this colorful author

of the Gospel of John. I think there are many reasons we are told this process as you will partly see from the dialogue that follows.

2. The reaction of others:

A. His neighbors and those who saw him begging (vs 8-12) These people did not witness the healing so the man had to explain how it all happened. Having explained the paste and washing by *"the man called Jesus"*, they wanted to know where Jesus was and the man had no idea. He was not in the presence of Jesus when his sight returned so he has no idea where he is.

B. The Pharisees have several serious problems with Jesus and this whole story (vs 13-34).

a) (vs 13-23) They did not believe the man until they summoned his parents. His parents assured them that he was their son and that he was born blind, but they could not explain, nor did they wish to explain, how he could now see. His parents reminded them that he was of age and could speak for himself. The Gospel provides this explanation, *"His parents gave this answer because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jewish authorities had already agreed that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as Messiah should be banned from the synagogue."*

b) (vs 24-29) The man is again questioned by the authorities with a warning that he tell the truth because they knew Jesus was a sinner and was incapable of such power. The man simple reply was, *"All I know is this: I was blind and now I can see"*, then reminding them he had told them everything already he chided them, *"Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"* The Pharisees became abusive telling him they were disciples of Moses whom they knew was spoken to by God but they had no idea where Jesus came from. Their minds were decidedly against Jesus.

c) (vs 30-34) The man speaks back to them reminding them that he was sure God did not listen to sinners and, since no one before has been able to open the eyes of a blind man, how could this be done except by God. The Pharisees were amazed at his boldness to "lecture" them because he was born and bred in sin so they turned him out.

C. (vs 35-38) Having heard that they turned out the man born blind, Jesus found him and asked, *"Have you faith in the Son of Man?"* It becomes obvious that the man had no idea who Jesus was talking about when he replies, *"Tell me who he is, sir, that I may put my faith in him"*. Jesus tells him that he has not only seen him but that he is now talking with him. Then the man declares his belief and falls on his knees before Jesus. This points out the distinct difference between physical sight and spiritual sight.

3. Jesus explains the conclusion for this chapter:

"It is for judgement that I have come into this world - to give sight to the sightless and to make blind those who see". The point that Jesus is making is made clearer by the reaction of the Pharisees who respond, *"Do you mean that we are blind?"* Jesus, in his candid manner replies, *"If you were blind you would not be guilty, but because you claim to see, your guilt remains"*. To me this is similar to people today who believe and claim to have all the answers in matters of faith but have few if any questions.

The value and teaching in each of these three sections:

1. Original Sin and the Mission of Jesus. (vs 1-7)

Original sin is a doctrine; it is an idea and belief that developed in the early church as time progressed and is not directly found in scripture. While the word sin is used frequently, it is never firmly establish that it was an inherited condition in creation. This idea that mankind shares in Adam's sin and that it is transmitted by human generation is one that developed into doctrine as noted above by some in the early Christian church. Doctrines come into existence to authorize human interpretations that are not actually obvious in scripture. This is why Judiasm, along with other major religions, including many Christians, do not hold to this concept. When the disciples made reference to sin as a reason for this man's blindness from birth Jesus quickly corrected that idea as false. Sin had nothing to do with it whether he was or his parents were sinners.

What was the mission of Jesus as revealed in this sign or healing? It was to bring light into a world that had become dark in so many ways. To enable us to see and experience the salvation of God's Realm that is able to change and sustain all people who accept God's grace for living. (GRACE: God's Recreative Activity Causing Excellence) As Marcus Borg says in his latest book, "Speaking Christian" (HarperCollins e-books), Chapter 1 - *"Salvation now refers to life after death; it is about going to heaven. But in the Bible, it is seldom about an afterlife; rather, it is about transformation this side of death."* In chapter 3 - *"Salvation is liberation from the Pharaoh within as well as the Pharaoh from without."* It was a way of liberation from Rome's authority and the legalism of the Jewish religious leadership then and that is still available to everyone in the twenty-first century. In every age there are political, cultural and religious beliefs and practices that blind us to the freedom of God's abundant way of life for ourselves and in community with others.

As one can see from the closing remarks of Jesus at the end of this chapter, the whole purpose for healing this man is to open our eyes to see the real beauty of living in the Realm of God as intended from the beginning of creation. To envision the life that can be open to us when we are free from the distortions of our own making that bring bondage and repression upon us in our common life together as well as in our individual lives. To enable us to receive the gift of life that God has provided and to see and be open to the abundant life that Jesus came to show us in word and deed.

2. Reaction of others:

A. Neighbors and family (vs 8-12) did not see how and when the man was healed. Jesus continually referred to himself as "the son of man" and seldom did anything to deliberately bring attention to himself. His mission was to bring everyone's attention to God and the salvation that was available to all who would believe and follow him. His kindness to humanity was a demonstration of his connection to the essence of God and his intention to establish the Realm of God in the world. So, after the man explained how he received his sight and told them that he followed the instruction of the one called Jesus, they wanted to know where he was but the man could not tell them. They were aware that he was blind from birth so they were more than curious as to how it all happened. Even to this day there are many who are curious about Jesus but find it difficult to meet and know him as the "son of man" and the God of love about which he spoke.

B. Political and Religious Authority (vs 13-34) had continuing problems with Jesus but, in this story, it was mainly the Pharisees who are mentioned. Even today those in authority have similar problems when their authority is questioned or criticized.

a) (vs 13-23) They struggled with getting to the truth. The man and his parents were grilled with questions because they found it hard to believe. Authority was easily insulted, even as it often is today, and these leaders seemed to feel that no one was telling them the truth. The writer even tells us that his parents were reluctant to say much of anything because they were afraid of their authority. These leaders had already made it clear that their judgement about Jesus was not good and they did not want to say anything that might cause them to be expelled from the Temple. Fortunately for them their son was old enough to speak for himself and that seems to have gotten them off the hook. Perhaps we should not be too quick to criticize the Pharisees because, even today, many religious leaders are hardened in their beliefs. The old saying, "don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is already made up", is still alive and well today.

b) (vs 24-29) The Pharisees turn again to challenge the man's testimony and try to get him to change his story. They begin to argue with him and even became abusive toward him according to the author of this Gospel. In order to keep their authority under Roman rule they had to make sure that their people were kept in control and cause no political trouble. Jesus was becoming a constant challenge to all authority where he lived and taught because he saw their power as uncaring and abusive, especially to those who were vulnerable. Jesus was considered an insurgent and, from their point of view, not a godly person in the tradition of Moses. With the tension of their need to keep control they were extremely strict with their teaching to maintain respect for themselves and the Temple. This is the style of leadership, even today, when religious leaders feel threatened. They become firm in insisting that

they hold the truth and are the true representatives of God and proclaim that any variance from their interpretation is corrupt and wrong. As we all know, this attitude and practice has caused many wars in both politics and religion.

c) (vs 30-34) This man, who had received his sight, replied just as firmly that he could see clearly that Jesus had to be a man of God. These religious leaders were taken back by his boldness and clarity of reasoning that sinners could not do such things. As a result they "turned him out" and reminded him, using the old adage, that he was born blind because he was born a sinner. This reminds me of another old saying, "the cheapest way to build yourself up is to run someone else down". A popular habit of those in power who try hard to keep it.

C. (vs. 35-38) Now the man who was healed was found again by Jesus and asked him if he had faith in the son of man? He asked Jesus to tell him who this man is so that he can put his faith in him. Jesus simply reminds him that he has seen him and, in fact, is the one now speaking to you. He then recognized Jesus and fell on his knees before him. Remember the man was blind when he was told to go and wash the paste off his eyes in the pool at Siloam. He had not yet seen Jesus with his own eyes and obviously did not know where he was when the Pharisees asked where Jesus was. I am sure that the man was ecstatic when he could see for the first time in his life but had little time to appreciate it before the Pharisees heard about it and confronted him. The Pharisees were more concerned about the Sabbath and keeping the law with little or no concern for his joy and his former condition of blindness.

3. Further Comments on this chapter:

This story surely tells us the truth about ourselves and about religion in general. The writer of this Gospel wanted to make sure that we get the point of our own blindness, especially our spiritual blindness when we are so sure that we see it all so clearly. Religion seems to be like a cataract, an eye disease that involves the clouding or opacification of the natural lens of the eye. It is a slow progressive clouding that eventually prevents us from seeing clearly. When our religious beliefs become more profuse they tend to overtake the light of God's presence in the very core of our being that connects us to God. Remember that our sight is a function of the mind where the real images are formed and recognized. Our eyes are simply the camera lenses that allow the images to access this marvelous capacity of sight. It is not uncommon to have eye problems but, when they are noticed, they can be corrected and cataracts can be removed. Too many religious people are like the Pharisees, they can only see what they choose to see and even Jesus could not clear their vision to get the clear picture of God's Realm.

One of the larger problems with spiritual vision and insight is doctrine, a belief (or system of beliefs) accepted as authoritative by some group or school.

Etymology < Middle English < Old French < Latin *doctrina* ("teaching, instruction, learning, knowledge") < *doctor* ("a teacher") < *docere* ("to teach"); see *doctor*.

Noun - doctrine (plural doctrines) A belief or tenet, especially about philosophical or theological matters. The body of teachings of a religion, or a religious leader, organization, group or text.

- o The incarnation is a basic doctrine of classical Christianity.
- o The four noble truths summarise the main doctrines of Buddhism.

I have often heard people say that doctrines are "man made" and this is basically true. Doctrines are gleaned from various texts in scripture but they are nowhere actually stated as such. Many would say that doctrines are ideas that are read into scripture rather than ideas that are clearly pronounced in scripture. We started out this story about the man born blind with a popular notion that formed the question asked by Jesus' disciples, "*Rabbi, why was this man born blind? Who sinned, this man or his parents?*" Jesus made it clear that his blindness had nothing to do with sin in his life or his parents. As we noted, this notion became the doctrine of "original sin" that gradually crept into the church's understanding and became a doctrine. It is unique to the Christian church even though all churches do not teach or believe it. As noted in the above definition of

doctrine, we have two samples of a doctrine from Christianity (The Incarnation) and Buddhism (The Four Noble Truths).

Probably the most confusing doctrine of the Christian church is the doctrine of the Trinity. In an earlier edition of "The Scofield Reference Bible" published by NY Oxford University Press with several copyrights before 1945, it contained a verse in I John 5:7, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." It was, however, clearly marked with a marginal notation lettered "o" which says, "It is generally agreed that vs. 7 has no real authority, and has been inserted". It was not long after this edition that this verse was left out entirely from the letter of I John in further Scofield editions. This verse was acknowledged to be inserted because the doctrine of the Trinity, while implied in many scriptural references to Father, Son, and Spirit, there is no statement in scripture that these three are "three persons in one substance" as the doctrine proclaims. The main confusion today is that the definition of "person" and "substance" has changed dramatically from the understanding of when this doctrine was formulated.

Like the Pharisees, who in this story were placing the Law and the Sabbath above the wonder and joy of this man receiving his sight, likewise many religious people place doctrinal "truth" above God's love for all people, in all times, in all circumstances, and in all places. God so loved the world and all creation is the theme of the Realm of God with no restrictions or exclusions!

Jesus was authentic, bona fide, and reliable. Jesus authentically represented God by showing an intense love for the creation and for all people, especially those in need. He was bona fide in the way he dealt with all authority and power that was not practicing compassion and respect, extending grace and kindness as servants of God. Jesus was reliable in what he said and did, referring to himself as the "son of man" who was not here to be served but to serve. We are given a lot to think about and learn about blindness and vision from this particular sign about Jesus and the man who was blind from birth so that we may clearly see God and the world he envisioned for everyone.

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.