

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## Studies in John's Gospel: The blind man made to see - John 9

The man who sat begging by the roadside in Jerusalem had never seen anything. He had been born blind. So many of the things which the sighted take for granted were quite outside his experience and, not only so, but some could not even be explained to him.

But he could hear. And a man was walking past who was saying that his blindness was not punishment for his sin or for his parents' sin but that God's works might be displayed in him. The man walking past was, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ. His disciples wanted to know whose fault it was that the man was blind but only the Lord had the divine insight to know the reason.

Like the disciples, we often want to know whose fault it is when something has gone wrong. Very often, it is right that it should be known who is to blame but we are on very uncertain ground when we say that somebody else's tragedy is punishment from God for their sins and it's even worse when we try and guess what the sin was. Of course, there are certain kinds of behaviour that inevitably lead to trouble. For example, drinking and driving, an explosive temper, violence, lying and cheating, criminal behaviour, laziness etc often have unhappy results for ourselves and always for others. But when disaster and tragedy strike somebody else, we should never assume that it's God's punishment on them. In any case, it's not our business; it's between God and them. Instead we should remember the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 13 when He told his listeners they should not think that Pilate's killing of some Galileans and the death of others when the tower of Siloam fell was because those who had died were worse sinners than other people but rather that they should repent.

We should also remember what Hebrews 12:5-6 says: "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not lightly regard the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when you are reproved by Him; for the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.'" Further down we read, "For they (that is our fathers) disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Then the Lord Jesus said that He Himself was the light of the world. He had already said this in John 8:12 and He is described as the true Light in John 1:9. It is one of the dominant themes of John's Gospel. But how was the blind man to see that light if he couldn't see anything? He needed the power of God. And how could he receive that? He needed to be obedient to what he knew. That reminds that Christians should be obedient to what they know of God's word. You remember the preacher who was asked, "What do you do about those parts of the Bible you don't understand?" He replied, "The Scriptures I don't understand aren't the problem - it's the Scriptures I do understand which are the problem." He was right; it's what we do know that we are responsible to obey. And when we do obey, then the Lord gives more light.

We also see the Lord's sense of urgency. He said, "We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no man can work," - an example for us His servants. We do not know how long we have got to work for God - how long our lives are going to be, or the day of the return of the Lord Jesus. Either way, we've got less time than we think.

Now, what was the blind man responsible to do? The Lord Jesus had spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva, He had then put this on the blind man's eyes and had told him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. The man's responsibility was to be obedient - to go to Siloam and wash off the mud.

Incidentally, Siloam means "Sent." It got this name from the fact that the water in it came from a tunnel cut through the rock from a spring outside Jerusalem called Gihon. The tunnel had been cut in the reign of Hezekiah about 700 BC or so in order to stop Jerusalem's water supply getting into the hands of any enemies who might besiege the city, at that time the Assyrians under Sennacherib. The tunnel and pool had survived until the Lord's day and they are still there now. Of course, in the context of this chapter, it also refers to the sending of the man and the fact that God the Father had sent the Lord Jesus into this world.

To return to our subject, we might have thought that putting mud on the blind man's eyes would have made it doubly impossible for him to see. Mud on the eyes would make us all blind. And it was because people generally saw Jesus through eyes blinded by earthly attitudes that they only saw Him as the carpenter's son and not as the Messiah, the Son of God. Things haven't changed. Many people still think that the Lord was only a very good man or a teacher, and some say that it would be a good thing if we kept His teaching as found in the Sermon on the Mount. Whether they have ever read the Sermon on the Mount is another thing. They may only have a vague feeling that we all should be nicer to each other. Well, it would certainly help if we were all nicer people but that won't save us from our sins. We need to see ourselves as sinners deserving God's wrath and needing to turn to Him in repentance through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And not many people see that.

The man did what he was supposed to. He didn't ask for an explanation nor did he argue and say that he didn't get the point, nor did he ask whether he couldn't do something himself to receive his sight. He just did what he was told - what should characterise us in our relationship with our Lord. The result was that he came back seeing. What a wonderful and marvellous experience! We don't know what it was like for him, though obviously it was completely new. I understand there are some conditions where a person who has always been blind can get their sight through an operation. Their initial impression of their surroundings can be frightening. I read of one man born blind who had such an operation. When the bandages were removed from his eyes, what he saw first was a round pink thing with a hole in the middle which sounds were coming from. He was alarmed and it took him a moment or two to work out that it was the surgeon's face.

Our man came back seeing. People could hardly believe it. Some realised that it was the same man. Others said that he looked like him. He kept on saying, "I am the man." When asked how his eyes had been opened, he said what Jesus had done and how he had received his sight. The people could have rejoiced with him. They could have just shrugged their shoulders. Instead they took him to the Pharisees, that ultra-religious Jewish group who, it seems, were regarded as the best people to judge on any religious matter and, for them, getting your sight was a religious matter. In a sense, they were right because, for Christians, every part of our life has a spiritual content, everything matters to God. However, on this occasion, they asked the wrong people.

For all the Pharisees' knowledge of God's Word as it then existed, and their desire to keep it down to the minutest detail, they didn't really know God at all. Instead, they had got themselves locked into such a completely legalistic and blinding frame of mind that, when confronted by this miracle, they could not accept it. They could hardly say that the miracle hadn't occurred because the man's parents said he was their son who had been born blind. What was the problem? It was that the Lord Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. The Lord never broke the Sabbath or any of God's law. His was a life of sinless perfection. He did not even have a sinful nature, unlike the nature we are all born with. So whatever He did on the Sabbath was right as far as God was concerned. The Sabbath was instituted by God to give a day completely free of work. Even slaves could refuse to work on the Sabbath. God meant it for rest and peace. However, it had been turned into a form of bondage which even the Pharisees couldn't completely keep. As the Lord pointed out on one occasion, on the Sabbath they watered their animals and would rescue one which had fallen into a pit. Even the priests had to work on the Sabbath when they carried out the sacrifices in the Temple. So to complain that the Lord should not have healed on the Sabbath was inconsistent. They could not heal on any day of the week and yet they found fault with Jesus because He healed on the wrong day. Actually, there were a number of other occasions when He healed on the Sabbath so perhaps it was the right day for healing.

It would not have mattered what day the Lord healed on; the Pharisees were dead set against Him. Whatever He did was wrong in their eyes. "They hated Him without a cause." So blind were they that they could not rejoice with the once-blind man. They could not be glad that God had sent one who could perform such miracles for the benefit of His people Israel. Here we have to be careful because we too can have the same rigid, legalistic and blinding attitude. We can all too easily and proudly, even bitterly, dismiss another believer's service for the Lord, their spiritual experiences or their way of doing things, on no proper basis at all except jealousy, a rigid traditionalism, a spiritual rut or spiritual deadness. Of course, we cannot accept uncritically everything that others do or say. People make mistakes in interpreting the Bible and in what they practise but surely we should be looking for what is good rather than being always on the lookout for what is bad.

The difficulty the man had with the Pharisees had the effect of making him grow in his understanding of what had happened. When the local people asked him where Jesus was, he didn't know - he only knew his healer's name. When the Pharisees asked him what he thought of Jesus, he said, "He is a prophet." In other words, he recognised Jesus as someone from God and with God's approval and power. When the Pharisees said, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner," his reply was, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." He was growing in understanding and awareness, working out the implications of what he himself had experienced, an experience which none of the bystanders, parents or Pharisees could share or understand because they had not come into living, powerful, healing contact with Christ. Only another person born blind could know what it was like to experience nothing but perpetual and incurable darkness and then to come into a God-given light where what was once either completely unknown or a source of bewilderment and misunderstanding

was now clearly seen and understood. Only a person who has had to admit before God that they are a sinner and has experienced the salvation that only the Lord Jesus can give can know what it is like. Others can have no idea at all.

The man had seen people's faces - they had expressions! He had seen the blueness of the sky, the colour of clothes, the true appearance of those buildings which he had previously felt his way round. And more besides. Perhaps he had seen by this time the magnificent cream stone and gold of the Temple. It all made sense now. What was also making sense was the person of the Lord Jesus. What had previously been only hands doing a strange thing to his eyes and a voice issuing a strange command was now a person he was beginning to understand, even though he had yet to see Him.

The Pharisees were completely lost here. They could not cope with the man's unanswerable assertion that he once had been blind but could now see. He clearly saw himself as a disciple of Jesus as we read from his invitation to the Pharisees to become Christ's disciples as well. He said, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" They received this with the frustrated anger that arises from being in a weak position but being completely unable to accept the rightness of the other person's position. So they fall back on the only course open to them - they insulted the man. They 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 comes from."

The man exposed the falseness of their position by pointing out that God does not listen to sinners but listens to those who worship Him and do His will. The fact that Jesus had given him his sight showed He was from God, otherwise He could not have done it. This unanswerably true reasoning provoked a further outburst from the Pharisees - "You were born in utter sin and would you teach us? And they cast him out." The cheek of it! A man born blind, and therefore so obviously affected by sin, not only failing to admit the rightness of the Pharisees and being the disciple of a discredited and Sabbath-breaking teacher but, worst of all, trying to teach them, the great and respected Pharisees!

So he was thrown out of the synagogue. As a result, he was barred from all religious activities. He'd lost all his social contacts, and probably his family too. He was an outcast. But there was someone else who was already an outcast, who had already become unacceptable to the religious authorities. In the John 1:11, we read, "He came to his own and his own did not receive him." It was like a man coming to his own house and finding that the people inside would not let him in, although they were actually his people. And this is exactly what happened to the Lord Jesus. He came to Israel as their Messiah, the man that God had promised centuries beforehand. He fulfilled the conditions which proved who He was. However, instead of accepting Him, the nation's leaders hated him so much that eventually they had him crucified, preferring to have Barabbas freed, a man who was in prison for rebellion and murder, rather than Jesus.

Now, where are we in this? Have we experienced the saving power of the Lord Jesus? Have our spiritual eyes been opened to see ourselves as we really are - guilty sinners who deserve God's wrath but who can be saved from that wrath by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have we experienced Christ's love for us? Have we by faith seen Him on Calvary's cross bearing our sins? Do we believe that He rose from the dead? Are we His disciples? Do we identify ourselves with Him as the man born blind did?

Or do we prefer someone or something else? Do we think we can manage without the Lord Jesus and His salvation? If we don't think we need Him, what have we got instead? And will that something else last beyond this life, however good we may think it is at the moment? Will it bring us back to God? When the man born blind became a disciple of the Lord Jesus, he lost ever such a lot. Socially, he may even have been better off remaining blind. What was he going to do instead of begging if no one would give him a job? But he gained far, far more, not only in the next life but in this life as well because he met Jesus again.

As I said earlier, the Lord Jesus was also an outcast, one on the outside. And when the man found himself in the same position, the Lord was there. He heard what had happened and found the man. He then asked the man, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The man replied, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' And Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him, and it is He who is talking with you.' Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!' And he worshipped Him."

What an enormous transformation! First, the man had been changed from being blind to being sighted physically, and that had happened immediately he obeyed the Lord Jesus. Secondly, he had received spiritual sight. This had taken longer and was a gradual process which was only completed when he saw and understood who Jesus was. We see the man progress in his understanding of the Lord. First of all he was "the man called Jesus." Then, when asked who he thought the man was who had opened his eyes, he said, "He is a prophet." Next, he described Jesus as being from God, then he acknowledged Him as the Son of God, and finally he called Him Lord.

Do we know who Jesus is? How good is our spiritual sight? Are you the type of person who agrees to the standard traditional statements about the Lord Jesus - His being both God and man, the virgin birth, that He died on the cross and rose again the third day, His future return to this earth - but without actually seeing the significance for us of any of these things? Once the man realised that the Son of God was standing there before him, he immediately responded by bowing down before Jesus. How do we respond to Christ? Does His death mean for us our personal salvation from God's judgement? Do we feel that the love He has for all humanity is for us individually? Are we aware of and confess His greatness? What meaning for us personally has His resurrection? Do we realise that His rising again means that all who believe in Him will also rise from the dead? Has the penny, so to speak, dropped for us?

There were those for whom the penny had definitely not dropped. Some of the Pharisees overheard the Lord Jesus say, "for judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." Instead of taking it as a warning to themselves, they said, "Are we blind also?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

This really is a most serious warning to us all. The Pharisees thought they knew so much. On religious matters, no one could tell them anything but, although they could actually hear His words and see His miracles, they failed to recognise the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, the Son of God. What a terrible blindness - far worse than physical blindness. Partly it was their traditions which had blinkered them but there was also their pride which prevented them from seeing the obvious. Let it be a lesson to all of us because we can all make the same mistakes. We all still have the fallen sinful nature which we were born with, and that fallen nature can take a peculiarly nasty twist when it becomes religious. Was it not for religious reasons that Cain murdered Abel? And was not hurt religious pride at the root of it?

The Lord said He had come for judgment. His presence did two things. Firstly, it introduced into any situation His moral and spiritual perfection and holiness. He was the Son of God, come down from heaven, and He brought that heavenly standard wherever He went and whoever he spoke to. Secondly, His presence created a division between people and this division is stressed very much in John's Gospel. In our passage, the division is between those who respond positively to Christ's light, and those who respond negatively. The first obey Christ, experience His salvation, and are therefore truly enlightened, and further, He becomes their object of worship. On the other hand, the second group reject the light of Christ and find themselves remaining blind and staying in their darkness.

Where are we? Have we come to Christ and found Him to be the true light, which coming into the world, gives light to everyone and light to us in particular? Or have we said, "No, this man is ..." Now, what do we think He is? We are unlikely to call Him a sinner as the Pharisees did but calling Him anything less than the Son of God - for example, a great man, a great teacher, a guru, a leader, an example - is not much better and certainly not good enough.

May we all do as the man born blind did, and obey the command of the Lord Jesus. For us it will not be to go to a pool in Jerusalem and wash mud off our eyes but, in our case, the first step will be to repent of our sins and to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. We shall have the privilege of knowing Him, of growing in that knowledge and experience, of worshipping Him, of witnessing for Him and, when our witness and perhaps we ourselves are rejected, there is the promise that Jesus Himself, God's own Son, will be there to find us.

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