

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The signs in John's Gospel: Signs 6 and 7

Today we continue our present series of talks, looking at the "signs" in John's Gospel. These miracles are used by John to convince his readers that "*Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*", John 20:31. John calls these miracles "signs" as his focus is on the Person who did these wonderful things more than the miracles themselves. We've already quoted from John 20 where we get the reason, summed up in two verses, why John wrote his Gospel, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*", John 20:30-31.

In our first talk we looked at the time when the Lord Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). I believe the fact that this miracle took place at a marriage would show us the importance of this 'much maligned' God given institution! As believers on the Lord Jesus Christ we should not be moved away from what the Bible clearly teaches about marriage. The lesson for us is that obedience to what Jesus says is the means of great joy and blessing. Then we considered the healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54) and the wonderful way that Jesus could heal, even at a distance! Once again we read that "*the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him*", John 4:50, and the blessing was instantaneous.

In our second talk we looked at the healing of the lame man (John 5:1-15), who had lain by the pool of Bethesda for 38 years. Bethesda means "house of mercy", and what mercy the Lord Jesus Christ showed to this poor man! The man was unable to help himself and had no one to help him into the water and Jesus demonstrates both His mighty power and His marvellous grace. We also considered the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-14). It is worthy of special note that of all the many wonderful miracles which Jesus did, this is the only one recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-14). Who but the "*Bread of Life*" (see John 6:35) could do such a thing? Five thousand men (as well as women and children) were fed with five barley loaves of bread and two small fish! Finally, the Lord Jesus walked on the water to aid his troubled disciples on the Sea of Galilee (John 6:15-21). They were afraid because of the great storm but the Master brought peace to their hearts.

Today we will look at the sixth and seventh signs, the last two signs given during the Lord's public ministry. Of the four Gospel writers, only John records these two miracles in his Gospel. In John 9:1-41 we get the story of the healing of the man who was born blind, and in John 11:1-44 we get the story of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus' friend who had died. As both of these stories take up the full chapter the time we have will not permit us to read them together, but read them for yourself later - they are wonderful chapters!

These two signs demonstrate in a wonderful way the characteristic themes of the Apostle John's writings - light, life and love. In John 9:5, Jesus says, "*I am the light of the world*". Earlier in John 8:12 He added, "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life". Undoubtedly this blind man was also a picture of the nation of Israel who were spiritually blind in relation to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the force of the closing verses in the chapter where Jesus exposes their claims of sight as false and says that their sin remained as a result of their unbelief.

In John 11:25, Jesus says, "*I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*". The nation of Israel was spiritually dead at this point and this is pictured in the story of Lazarus. They needed both 'the light' and 'the life' which can only be found in the Saviour. In this chapter we read that Lazarus had died. Martha and Mary were weeping as were many in the town of Bethany. Jesus also wept, but in the midst of it all, He speaks of resurrection and eternal life. At the command of the Son of God, Lazarus came forth! This sign was such a clear demonstration of Who Jesus was that the chief priests and Pharisees immediately began plotting to put Him to death. Let us look at each of these in turn and marvel at the greatness of the One who made the blind to see and raised the dead to life.

The Sixth Sign: The healing of the man who was born blind (John 9:1-41)

John 9 begins with the disciples asking Jesus a very interesting question in relation to the condition of the blind man. This man had evidently been born blind and the disciples wanted to know if it was as a result of his sins or the sins of

his parents (John 9:2). The basis for such a question perhaps is found in Exodus 20:5, when in the giving of the law, God said that the iniquity of the fathers would be visited on the children. The answer given by Jesus is very instructive and completely removes any idea that this man's condition was the result of either his sins or his parents' sins. We read in Romans 5:12, *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"*. This is the reason mankind suffers disease and death. It is as a result of sin entering into the world and not necessarily as a result of individual, personal sins. We believe that the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden meant that the human race would be subjected to disease and death as a consequence (see Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7). We need to remember this today as we see so much suffering and death, perhaps especially in so called 'third world' countries. These dreadful things are as a consequence of 'sin' and not necessarily the 'sins' of the people directly affected.

We need to carefully differentiate between 'sin' and 'sins' - sin is the root, sins are the fruit; sin is the cause, sins are the effects. Of course God can use these things in the chastisement of His people, but we need to be careful remembering that His ultimate aim is to bless us and glorify Himself, as was the case with this blind man. The *"works of God"* were going to be made manifest in him

It is worth noting that nowhere do we read that this man asked to be healed. It would appear that the whole occasion was to glorify God, and to bear testimony to who Jesus is. The fact that the man received his sight as a result of this sign was secondary to the manifestation of the Saviour's power. As we have previously said, these signs were to shine a light on the Person who did these wonderful things more than the miracles themselves. John 9:5 brings before us the fact that Jesus was not going to be in the world for much longer. In the John 8:28, He had spoken about being *"lifted up"*, and He knew the cross was before Him. Three times in John's Gospel the Saviour talks about being *"lifted up"* (John 3:14; 8:28 and 12:32). The means by which the Son of God was to be *"lifted up"* (which has the thought, too, of glorification) was by way of Calvary's cross.

It has been suggested that the clay which the Lord made with His spittle (John 9:6) was symbolic of His humanity and certainly the blind man bore testimony to the 'man' called Jesus who opened his eyes. Siloam means "sent" (the interpretation is given in the passage, John 9:7) and the blind man was obedient to the instruction of the Saviour. In John 9:7 we read, *"He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing"*. What a valuable lesson for us today! The way to blessing is obedience to the Word of God, spoken here in power by the One who was the Incarnate Son. *"Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever"* Romans 9:5.

Reading on in the chapter we find that there was much discussion as to what had taken place. Some people thought that the blind man they knew was the one who was healed, whilst others thought that it was just someone who looked like him. But no amount of questions could rob the blind man of his personal assurance of what had taken place. In John 9:9 in response to these questions he said plainly, *"I am he"*. The Pharisees were more concerned that this miracle was done on the Sabbath and therefore concluded that because (in their eyes) Jesus had broken the Sabbath, He was *"not of God"*, (John 9:16). Although they appeared keen to learn what had taken place, they refused the man's simple testimony. He didn't know very much, but said what he knew. I love his words in John 9:11 when he says *"A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight"*. A simple and straightforward testimony of exactly what Jesus had done personally for him! But the Pharisees could not accept it because of the hardness of their hearts towards the Saviour.

I remember hearing the story of a drunkard who was saved, giving his life over to the Lord Jesus Christ. It had made an immediate impact on his lifestyle, especially at home and his friends didn't like it. He hadn't learned much about the Bible but gave this reply when asked mockingly by his former friends to tell about the time when Jesus turned water into wine at some man's house. He said, *"I don't know what took place at that man's house, but I can tell you what has happened in my house - Jesus has turned beer into furniture!"*

What an encouragement to all of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our own, personal Saviour to witness to what we know He has done for us. Perhaps we feel that we don't know much about the Scriptures but if we know that Jesus has washed away our sins, then we have a powerful message to give. Nothing anyone could say or do could change the blind man's testimony or cause him to doubt what had happened to him. In John 9:25 he said with complete assurance, *"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see"*.

Reading on in the chapter we see that as well as the physical sight the man had received, he was beginning to understand something of the One who had opened his eyes. We have already quoted from John 9:11 where he said it was *"a man that is called Jesus"* who had healed him. When we come to John 9:17, he had perceived that Jesus *"is a prophet"*. From what he said in John 9:33 we conclude that he believed that Jesus was *"of God"*, and at the end of the chapter, when Jesus asked him if he believed on the Son of God, he said, *"Lord, I believe and he worshiped him"* (John 9:35-38). The Pharisees were so enraged that they cast him out of the synagogue, but in that 'outside place',

Jesus "*found him*" (John 9:35). If we desire the fellowship of the Son of God, we will find it outside the systems of men, whether religious, political or social.

Today there are still many people who are blind to who Jesus is. It is tragic to hear men and women speaking in unbelief having been brought up in a country where once the Bible was so greatly esteemed. As a nation we have embraced false doctrines like evolution, and have largely replaced God with materialism. We read in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that "[Satan, who is] the god of this age hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them". Contrast this with what follows in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".

The Seventh Sign: The Raising of Lazarus from the Dead (John 11:1-44)

Now let us look at John 11:1-44 and the story of Lazarus. As we have already said, these signs were recorded by John to prove that "*Jesus is the Christ, the son of God*", (John 20:31). What could be greater than giving sight to a man who was blind from birth? What miracle could Jesus perform that would prove beyond any doubt who He was? We have the answer in this chapter. Not only was Lazarus dead, but he had been dead for four days and decay had set in (John 11:17, 39). The power which Jesus demonstrated in raising Lazarus from the dead left the Jews in no doubt as to Who He was, but while there were those who believed, the chief priests and Pharisees sought to kill Him (John 11:45-57).

Jesus often went to Bethany, to the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus (see Luke 10:38-42). He was a welcome guest in their home. He loved them individually (see John 11:5) and they each loved Him. This is emphasised in the shortest verse of the Bible, John 11:35, "*Jesus wept*", the only time where this Greek word translated 'wept' is used in the New Testament. It means 'to shed tears'. What a wonderful demonstration of the compassionate heart of the Lord Jesus Christ! The chapter has been summarised in five lovely couplets taken directly from the text:

- "Jesus heard" (John 11:4)
- "Jesus loved" (John 11:5)
- "Jesus came" (John 11:17)
- "Jesus wept" (John 11:35); and
- "Jesus said" (John 11:39)

When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He didn't rush to get to Bethany (John 11:4-6). He knew what was happening and was in complete control of the situation. All through His public ministry He had healed the sick that were brought to Him, but now He was going to demonstrate openly that He had power over death.

There is an interesting conversation between the Lord and His disciples in relation to sleep (John 11:11-13). Jesus said that Lazarus was sleeping and the disciples thought that this would help make him better (John 11:13), but Jesus was using the term in relation to the death of the believer. In John 11:14, He plainly said, "*Lazarus is dead*". This is very instructive. The Apostle Paul uses the same expression when writing to the believers in Thessalonica, where in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 he speaks of those who had died as "*asleep in Jesus*". In writing to the believers at Philippi, in Philippians 1:23, he said that "*to depart [this life was] to be with Christ; which is far better*". There is no contradiction in these statements, both are true. When Christians die, their spirit and soul are "*absent from the body ... present with the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 5:8). I believe the moment believers close their eyes in death, they are in the present enjoyment of the Saviour's presence. I believe this is what Jesus meant when He said to the repentant thief, "*Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*", Luke 23:43. The body is "*asleep*" and is buried in view of the resurrection day. The Scripture only speaks of the resurrection of the Christian's body - the spirit and the soul are not subject to death.

It is worth saying at this point that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is never referred to as sleep. He bore the full terror of what death is (separation from God) and it is because of this wonderful fact that we will not die. "*Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*", John 11:26. Does this mean that Christians won't die physically? Of course not, but they will not experience the terrors of death! The Apostle Paul was in such a spiritual condition that he could say that for him "*to die is gain*", Philippians 1:21.

So after two days Jesus made His way to Bethany with His disciples (John 11:5). Martha and Mary knew that if He had been there Lazarus would not have died (John 11:20). They had full trust and confidence in the One who said, "*I am the resurrection and the life*", (John 11:25). Looking around and seeing the devastation which sin had caused in His fair creation, it is recorded that Jesus "*groaned in the spirit, and was troubled*" (John 11:33). I believe that in His sinless humanity, the Lord Jesus felt the sorrow of His own in the deepest way. His empathy with them was so real that He shed tears. What a wonder, "*Jesus wept!*" What a comfort for believers today who are passing through difficult and distressing times to know that we have a Great High Priest who is "*touched with our infirmities*" (Hebrews 4:15) and who "*careth for us*" (1 Peter 5:7).

The stone was removed from the cave and Jesus *"cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth"* (John 11:43). Then we read *"And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said, 'Loose him, and let him go'"* (John 11:44). Two wonderful things physically but even more in a spiritual sense - Life and Liberty! *"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"*, John 8:36.

And so in recording these two wonderful signs, John puts on record the power and glory of the Son of God. What was the response of the chief priests and Pharisees? They sought to kill Him (John 11:45-57). If we read in John 12:9-11 we will see that they sought to kill Lazarus too. In John 15:18, Jesus warns His disciples, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you"*.

May the wonder of these signs assure us of the Person of the Christ, and strengthen our faith and witness for our Saviour and Lord, as we await His soon return!

May God bless you all.

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