

BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

The story of the blind beggar receiving the gift of sight is one of the most remarkable miracles of Jesus Christ and one that especially marked him as God's Messiah. There are no stories of the healing of the blind in all the history of God's people in the OT although there was an expectation that God could heal the blind and that he would heal the blind when his messiah was finally revealed. To his Messianic servant God says ^{Isa 42:6} "I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Notably Jesus did more miracles of giving sight to the blind than any other, not only from compassion but the whole purpose of the Messiah was, and is, to return light to a world of darkness. John begins his Gospel ^{Jn 1:1} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. Jesus said to Nicodemus ^{3:19} This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

The blind beggar's remarkable healing is the 6th of 7 signs in John's Gospel that signify Jesus' identity & purpose as God's Messiah, the Light of the World.

^{Jn 9:1} As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ^{9:3} "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

The poor fellow suffers a congenital blindness and therefore he is a symbol of the whole human race for we are all born into spiritual darkness and we're all ignorant of God until we receive the light of Christ in our hearts. Which is not to say the story is a parable for the beggar's misery and healing are real enough.

It is a popular notion ancient and modern that misfortune is deserved. The TV show *My Name is Earl* is about a drongo who after a series of disasters tries to change his karma by making amends for his sinful life. We all know there are consequences to our actions both for ourselves and others. However, Jesus corrects the view that suffering is always the direct result of sin.

The human race is afflicted with suffering and evil through our collective rebellion against our creator, but the suffering of a particular person may have no casual connection to their own sin or that of their family. Besides, we're all in this world together and we all contribute to its darkness in some measure so it behooves us to show pity and compassion on anyone of us who is suffering.

Whatever the actual cause of the blindness, God's purpose for the world will be revealed in the beggar's healing for this is why Jesus has been sent. When the Lord speaks of the Day he seems to mean his messianic mission and the coming night as his withdrawal to heaven. In the Day, then, he must fulfill his purpose as must we all for he includes us as well – we must do the work of him who sent me – so whatever time God has given us we must be diligent in fulfilling God's purpose for us. In our lifetime we are all to be light to the world in Christ.

⁶ Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. ⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." Spit was thought to be therapeutic and Mark's Gospel records Jesus twice doing a similar thing to heal the blind. The beggar is not healed instantly but as he obeys in being sent to a pool called sent. Healing can often come in our obeying our Lord; not as a reward but as a blessing.

He goes home seeing and the neighbours are flabbergasted! 'Isn't this the blind beggar?' they ask, hardly believing their own eyes. I am the man! He says. Some agree others argue; they all demand answers, How? Who? Where? But all he knows is What! What happened was Jesus put mud on his eyes told him to go wash and ¹¹ So I went and washed, and then I could see. End of story? Not quite!

As with many of Jesus' miracles the healing happened on the Sabbath so the religious conservatives who were absolute sticklers for the letter of the law were outraged at such behavior while others were impressed that a blind man was healed at all. 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 do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. They asked the beggar who pronounced ¹⁷ "He is a prophet." - no doubt the highest form of divine servant he could think of.

Controversy raged so they dragged in the beggar's parents to shed some light. Now I admit I've been pretty down on the parents. They show no joy in their son's healing and are more worried about the social and religious ostracism if they offend the religious leaders. But I suppose we ought not to judge. We don't know their situation and at least they confirm that he had been born blind. There is an obvious contrast between their buck-passing timidity and their son's courage. Twice they say ²³ "He is of age; ask him." which is what they do, again, and the second interview is more an interrogation, even an inquisition.

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." ²⁵ 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!" They put him in the dock and make him swear to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help him God! And demand he agree with their verdict that Jesus is a sinner. However, the beggar takes the Give glory to God very seriously so even though he's alone and is subjected to high-handed intimidation he tells them the truth.

He cannot make any judgment on Jesus' moral character because he doesn't know him, so all he can say is what happened – I was blind. Now I see. The most powerful thing in the world is a person's personal testimony of what God has done in their life. It may be disbelieved but it can't be refuted; in particular someone who was blind all their life and suddenly isn't. Praise God!

His courageous testimony adds fuel to their indignation and they demand he prove the miracle and give detailed evidence, not so that they can make a reasoned judgment on the truth of the matter but so they can ridicule and debase God's act of mercy in his life. Now here comes the really good bit.

Rather than be cowed by the coercion, their bullying actually serves to bring out the metal of his character. At this moment he is transformed from a pitifully vulnerable beggar into a true Servant of the Lord. ²⁷ 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?" He starts to resemble his Healer who he doesn't yet know but who would often turn the mockery of mockers back on themselves.

The authorities are infuriated! They accuse him of being a disciple of Jesus. Now maybe if they hadn't accused him it may not have occurred to him that he was behaving like Jesus' disciple but once they do he seems to embrace being a disciple wholeheartedly. The authorities are making their own monster – if they'd have just accepted him and his sight maybe all this would have faded away. If only they'd leave well enough alone but No they press on regardless

²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

Remarkable is a word usually associated with miracles. ‘Your ignorance’, he says, ‘is more miraculous than my miracle!’ The logic of his argument is irrefutably sound: 1. God does not listen to sinners but only those who do his will. 2. Only God can give sight to the blind which is impossible for human beings and certainly sinful human beings. 3. Therefore God must be the source of Jesus’ power otherwise he could not do any miracle at all. Snap! Amazingly the Pharisees last word actually confirms his argument that he was born blind! ³⁴ “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

At a time when religion was the very fabric of society and family and employment his ostracism must have made him feel alone and abandoned but we are never alone as God’s servants, are we. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” ³⁸ Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. Note his journey of faith: v11 the man they call Jesus; 17 he is a prophet; 30 he opened my eyes; 33 he is from God; 38 Lord, I believe and he worshipped him. His healing from blindness to sight is complete.

³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Tragically the Pharisees are left in darkness and blind to the light of Christ. The Lord came to bring the light of salvation to a world of darkness, but as people reject the light they bring judgment upon themselves. The story comes full circle. It begins with the disciples wrongly assuming that the beggar’s physical blindness was caused by sin and it concludes with Jesus revealing that indeed sin is the cause of spiritual blindness as people reject the Light. When such folk demand answers to satisfy their disbelief, we can only respond. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.