

**THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel**

Part forty - Sunday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, 10 a.m.

Teaching #1712 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

**BELIEF AND UNBELIEF AND HOW EACH GAINS MOMENTUM IN OUR HEARTS**

**John 9:6-41** - "Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud [7] and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. [8] The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" [9] Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." [10] So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" [11] He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." [12] They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." [13] They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. [14] Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. [15] So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." [16] Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. [17] So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." [18] The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight [19] and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" [20] His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. [21] But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." [22] (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) [23] Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." [24] So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." [25] He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." [26] They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" [27] He answered them, "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?" [28] And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. [29] We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." [30] The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. [31] We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. [32] Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. [33] If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." [34] They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. [35] Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" [36] He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" [37] Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." [38] He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. [39] Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." [40] Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" [41] Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."

I said in our last study that there were three issues I wanted to draw out of this wonderful account. **First**, there is the difficult issue of **why a man would be born blind**. Unexplained suffering lies at the heart of this account and the disciples are seen groping for some explanation. Don't we all? We drilled down into that issue in our last study. There are **two more**:

**Second**, there is the **strange way Jesus heals this man** ("Here's mud in your eye?"), and the **timing of the miracle on the Sabbath**. Surely Jesus knew this would cause problems. He faced the wrath of these same religious leaders before when He healed the **lame man** on the Sabbath in **John 5**. Is Jesus just a glutton for punishment?

**Third**, and perhaps most important, there is the **growing development of both belief and unbelief** as evidenced in the increasing **sight** (physical and spiritual) in the blind man and the progressive **blindness** of the religious leaders. John is true to his mission of analyzing the nature of authentic belief in Christ. This story is really a vivid account of the growing **agitation** and **conflict** between belief and unbelief. The Apostle John has already stated that the **"darkness hates the light"** (**John 3:20**). This account plays that hatred out vividly as a warning to all those who love Jesus Christ. It's going to be a tough road.

Those are the two points of study for today:

- 1) **THERE IS DIVINE PURPOSE IN BOTH THE TIMING AND METHOD OF THIS MIRACLE OF HEALING**

**John 9:6-14** - "Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud [7] and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. [8] The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" [9] Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." [10] So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" [11] He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." [12] They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." [13] They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. [14] Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes."

There is something quite unique in Jesus healing this blind beggar. There is no indication this man ever even *asked* to be healed. John is quite clear that Jesus approached *him* rather than *he* approached Jesus. A miracle is performed on a man who, as far as we can tell from the text, wasn't even interested in the miracle.

Perhaps that's why John makes a point of noting that this man had been "*blind from birth*" (9:1). If you *lose* your sight - if you can *remember* what sight is like - then you would probably be desperate to have it back. But this man never had the glory of sight *taken away* from him. His blindness was *normal* to him, if I can use that term.

I'll tell you why I think this matters from a New Testament perspective. When people *came* to Jesus or to one of His disciples the issue of the importance of *faith* frequently came up. Jesus seemed to delight in a certain *expectation* on the part of requesting candidates for divine intervention.

But what role does faith play in the recipient when he or she doesn't even express *desire* for Jesus' touch. How does faith arise in the heart of a person who might well be quite focused on something else entirely when Jesus interrupts with a healing touch. How can someone like that be *engaged* in the miracle of what Jesus is about to do?

And that's where the beauty and the strangeness of Jesus' method comes into play. This blind man can *hear* and he can *feel*. But he can't *see* anything Jesus is about to do for his healing. And there had to be something a least a bit surprising (disturbing?) when Jesus, with no invitation to do so, smeared mud pies on this man's eyes. Truly, the words "*He never saw that one coming,*" apply here!

Wouldn't this be an awkward sensation? Why did Jesus do such a thing in this one case? Because while this blind man couldn't *see* any part of Jesus' healing work, he could *feel* it. He *felt* Jesus' muddy fingers rubbing his eyes and probably upper cheeks. Jesus was up to something unusual, for sure. And Jesus was doing something unusual for *him*. And it obviously had to do with his *eyes*.

But that's only the *first part* of the healing method. The second step involved a very specific point of *obedience*. Now what would make this man obey Jesus? Remember, he hadn't come to Jesus looking for this miracle. As far as we can tell, he never even *asked* Jesus for anything. This was all *Jesus'* idea if the words of the text count at all.

So why should this man *obey* Jesus? Please notice, Jesus never even *told* this blind man he would be *healed* when he washed his eyes. It's all there in the text - **John 9:6-7** - "Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud [7] and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing."

He knew nothing about the future miracle when he went and washed. He *found out* about the *seeing* part *after* he went and washed in obedience to Jesus. This is amazing! And it all helps explain why Jesus performed the miracle the way He did. Be honest. There's something a bit gross about spit in your eyes. Let alone spit and mud. Do you see what Jesus is doing? He knows *anybody* would want to wash that muck off ASAP. He is making the condition of obedience as easy as possible for this rather passive recipient of His healing grace. He's making this blind man's *engagement in the miracle* an almost natural reaction.

Behold the wisdom and grace of our intervening Lord. And the lesson is He can still orchestrate circumstances in our lives that can make it *inconvenient not to obey Him*. There are times when He *prepares us for listening*. He helps *prompt* our obedience. He graciously helps us along in yielding to His voice when, left to our own comfort and convenience, we might prefer to do something else. Sometimes Jesus' *uncomfortable grace* shuts off other options for us and causes us to listen to only His voice. No doubt this man understood our Lord's hidden agenda *after* those dark, confusing moments of muddy, dark confusion.

## 2) THE PROGRESSION OF BELIEF AND THE REACTION OF UNBELIEF

John majors on this healing of the blind man because he gains sight on a couple of different levels. He doesn't just receive his miracle from Jesus *passively*. He *processes* who Jesus must be to do such a work in his life. He starts out recognizing Jesus as an ordinary *man* - verse 11 - "...*the man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes....*" But this explanation hardly seems adequate to deal with the fact. Upon being pressed, he considers Jesus must be a *prophet* - verse 17 - "So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet.'"

Then there is more processing by the healed beggar - John 9:30-33 - "The man answered, 'Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. [31] We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. [32] Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. [33] If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'"

Jesus then explained Himself to the healed man using His favorite Incarnation title, "*the Son of Man*" - John 9:35-38 - "Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' [36] He answered, 'And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?' [37] Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.' [38] He said, 'Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him.'"

The account is important on the subject of authentic belief because this man *has to believe for himself*. He has to apply what *he* has come to see in Jesus. All of the other players in this story are *against* his discovery of Christ Jesus. They are all pushing in the opposite direction of belief. He has to dig his own faith out of the dirt - quite literally. No matter what, he follows the evidence of his enlightened heart. And he holds on to it. And I think John *means* for us to understand that's the way belief will often be in this hostile world.

While the beggar's belief *deepens*, the religious leaders grow increasingly *blind*. They are getting *worse*, not *better*. The text is long and involved but the *pockets of stubbornness* can be lifted out quickly:

They blindly reject the evidence of the miracle at hand because Jesus performed it on the Sabbath - John 9:13-16 - "They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. [14] Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. [15] So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.' [16] Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath....'"

I will come back to the Sabbath discussion in just a minute.

These religious leaders actually *silence those who might endorse Jesus as the Messiah* - John 9:20-22 - "His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. [21] But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' [22] (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)

We all have our ways of *not hearing* when the truth crowds our present thinking. That's why Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath. There is always going to be an *out* for those who don't *want* to believe. This was theirs. These are unbelievers striking out at the light. They're fighting Jesus and they're fighting themselves. Unbelief has to turn *stubborn* if it is to survive long term with the light.

The beggar sticks with Jesus. Notice, when the healed beggar won't change his story, they throw him out of the synagogue as well - John 9:34 - "They answered him, 'You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?' And they cast him out."

## 3) THE PRESENT, INVISIBLE JUDGMENT OF GOD

John 9:39-41 - "Jesus said, For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." [40] Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" [41] Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."

All I have time to look at is that incredible first sentence - **"...For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind" (39)**. Those are very hard words to hear from Jesus. And the reason they're hard is they seem to contradict some other very comforting, beautiful words He spoke earlier in John's account - **John 3:17** - **"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."**

Notice both texts deal specifically with the **Son coming into the world** and the **reason** for His coming. And the reasons are totally opposite. So what's going on here? Which is it? Did the Son come to judge or didn't He?

The difference in these texts is a crucial one to remember. In **John 3** Jesus is talking about His **purpose** of coming into the world. He came to die for it. **All** of it. In our text in **John 9** Jesus isn't talking about the **purpose** of His coming, but the **result** of His coming when it's met with **stubborn unbelief**. Something **happens** in the presence of the Son that is sad beyond telling. It happened in John chapter nine and it happens in churches and Bible studies and family devotions and prayer times all over Canada.

Here's what happens. Whenever people **cling to their own opinions** in the **face of God's divine, redeeming truth** they come to believe their own foolish opinions more and more deeply. I couldn't think of a clearer way to say it.

If there's one thing I know for sure it's that the Holy Spirit speaks to people through their conscience and through the Word of God about their need to listen to obey Jesus Christ. We're called to **believe**. We're called to **re-believe**. And the inward deception we're being cautioned against in this text is the deception that everything will turn out just fine whether we listen or not.

And Jesus says there's kind of inescapable **judgment** - a **silent, inevitable blindness** - that works in our hearts like yeast whenever He is present. Hearts that had some measure of light can go dark. And those who, even though weak and stumbling - press through the darkness to what they know to be true about Jesus Christ - **light comes**. They begin to see everything more clearly. And the glory of Jesus, the light of the world, starts to shine with increasing power.