

John 9:1-41

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?'

³ 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works 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.'

⁶ After saying this, he spat 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 neighbours 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.'

¹⁰ 'How then were your eyes opened?' they asked.

¹¹ He replied, 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.'

¹² 'Where is this man?' they asked him.

'I don't know,' he said.

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a

Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. 'He put mud on my eyes,' the man replied, 'and I washed, and now I see.'

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 perform such signs?' So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, 'What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.'

The man replied, 'He is a prophet.'

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ 'Is this your son?' they asked. 'Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?'

²⁰ 'We know he is our son,' the parents answered, 'and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.' ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. 'Give glory to God by telling the truth,' 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!'

²⁶ Then they asked him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?'

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?'

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 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 person 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.'

³⁴ To this they replied, 'You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!' And they threw him out.

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 worshipped him.

³⁹ Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.'

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, 'What? Are we blind too?'

⁴¹ Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.'

Despite the length, I quite enjoy when we read an entire section of Scripture like this. Sure, there's a lot of different pieces here and we could spend hours with this sermon today...but this also gives us the chance to look at the context of an entire chapter of John.

And what do we see in this chapter? We see a blind man. And this man has an encounter with the incarnate God. But that's just part of the chapter. The blind man encounters a few other groups of people. And in all these encounters we see some drastically different understandings about God and about sin.

But that's not where we're going to start. The first thing I'd like to ask is...why this man? Why is he the focus of this narrative? What's so special about him? He's blind! He didn't call out to Jesus for healing, or try to get his attention. So why is he even part of the story of Jesus' life? Our first verse gives us the clear answer: because Jesus saw him. That's it. Our incarnate God observed someone. To be fair he was also knit together in his mother's womb by God, and sustained each and every day of his life by God...but here in this moment God came to him in human flesh and cast his gaze upon this man.

And the disciples of Jesus notice him looking. Let's remember here that they've seen Jesus in action. Jesus has healed diseases, fed thousands, and even walked on water. They've never seen or heard of anyone healing blindness, but here Jesus is looking at a blind man! So, of course they do the polite thing of getting into a theological debate about sin because of the man's blindness. They see a blind man – someone blind from birth, who clearly must be blind because of sin...and what is peaked within them? Emotion? A need to help? No. Curiosity, perhaps. They want to understand who is at fault!

I wonder, perhaps at the shame that blind man felt at being an object lesson for discussions from a rabbi. What an awful implication – am I sinful just because I was born a certain way? Did my parents sin so greatly that they were *burdened*

with me? I am just...punishment...for someone else, or even for myself somehow?

Jesus has something to say about all this, but let's leave that aside for a moment. This blind man has his sight given to him. I wonder if the crowds thought him drunk at first, perhaps staring wide eyed at all the things he's never seen before. Some people don't even recognise him as the same person, and I can't blame them. I imagine his entire demeanour changed. And then he tells this amazing story, of a man mixing dirt and spit and covering his eyes...and then he goes to the pool at Siloam and washes as he was directed...and behold, now he can see.

The crowd's reaction is somewhat mixed, and they take him before the Pharisees. Why would they do this? Well, the Pharisees tell us one good reason – there's concern about whoever did this healing, because he didn't keep the Sabbath. Rabbinical Law has quite a number of things you're not allowed to do on the Sabbath, and kneading two things together was one of them. Granted, that rule was meant for bread, but mixing spit and dirt is the same action. It's work! And you're not allowed to work on the Lord's Sabbath Day. The Lord rested from his labours in the seventh day and he commands his people to do the same.

I must admit I adore this conversation between the blind man and the Pharisees. His years as a beggar must have toughened him up because he's got a strong backbone. He's been given sight and he refuses to call the man who did this miracle a sinner. He even backs the Pharisees into a corner by saying that Jesus must have come from God because he has opened the eyes of the blind, and surely 'if this man were not from God, he could do nothing'. To this the Pharisees pull out their trump card: this man was born blind. Clearly he's a sinner, and so he has no authority to try to talk about such things...least of all to the Pharisees.

What's so striking to me as I read this text is how alike the Pharisees and the disciples are. Where do their thoughts go when they see a blind man? They think of sin and condemnation. They both assume that there is sin involved with this physical malady, and they search to figure out who is guilty. Sure, the

disciples might just be curious or looking for knowledge while the Pharisees have a more sinister view in mind...and yet they come to the same conclusion.

Except, of course, that the disciples are corrected. Let us be corrected now as well. Because I'm afraid that we can be just like the Pharisees and the disciples all too often. It's easy to judge without knowing the full story, isn't it? It's easy to decide that someone must deserve their lot, because that means there's a good reason for it. It's supposed to be that way! Yes, surely that homeless person did something to deserve being on the street. Those parents whose children don't go to church? They probably didn't teach them about God enough. Did you hear how much Sally is struggling with hardship right now? Must be because she's lacking faith and isn't trusting in God.

These sort of statements are exactly what the disciples and Pharisees were saying about the blind man. Thank heavens that Jesus was there as well. I told you we'd get back to him. Jesus wasn't worried about the guilt or the shame of this man. He didn't try to rub salt in his wounds and tell him where the sin was, and how it could be dealt with, or anything silly like that. No, Jesus pointed away from sin toward the glory of God. 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.'

This is a moment for rejoicing! Praise God that Jesus points the disciples and all those who would follow him to rejoice in the work he does, and not to get caught up focusing on judgement, on guessing the reason for suffering or sin. The plans of God, the reason for suffering, that's not for us to discover! Except for discovering that we can be part of dealing with that suffering, just as Jesus was teaching his disciples to do.

And what did Jesus teach with his actions? He came to this man in his lowly state, and in his weakness. He didn't treat this man according to his apparent sin. He didn't treat him as an outsider. He didn't approach this blind man according to the judgements of the world. Jesus worked with this man, spoke to him, touched him, gave him good directions and healed him.

And Jesus didn't just leave him alone after that. When the man had recovered his sight and was sent off by the Pharisees, Jesus came and opened his eyes.

This man had received grace already, but he didn't understand that this was just the beginning of what was to come. He had been healed, but he hadn't *seen* Jesus. Right after the miracle of being given his sight, he was given the miracle of the presence of God. This man is given the gift of sight twice in one day.

The majority of this chapter focuses on the sin of one man. The blindness that he has. But when Jesus speaks to him, right there at the end, only one thing matters: 'do you believe?' Do **you** believe? No, this isn't your baptism or confirmation coming back again – I'm being serious. Do you believe, that even though suffering exists in this world...that Christ comes to save you? Do you believe that everyone, even the lowly, the sinful, the despicable...that they are exactly who God comes to save? Do you believe that when you suffer, it's not a punishment for your sin, but that it's something that is happening so that the works of God can be displayed?

The man given sight twice in a day said "Lord, I believe." May we not get distracted by sin and judgement like the Pharisees. May we not be tempted to look for blame like the disciples. May we be given eyes that see only a cross and the love of God flowing freely from it. May we pick up our cross, that the works of God might be displayed through us.

Amen.