

## 12. HAVING YOUR EYES OPENED TO JESUS

### John 9v1-41.

One of the features of John's Gospel is that miracles are "signs". They point beyond themselves. They point to Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God. Their purpose is to lead readers to faith in Jesus so that they might "have life in his name." (John 20v30,31).

In chapter 9 we come to a mighty sign - the healing of a man born blind. Jesus is the Light of the World who opens blind eyes. But on this occasion, there is something going on at two distinct levels; there are two dimensions to the sign. First, the healing of the man's physical blindness is a sign. Second, the healing of the man's spiritual blindness is a sign.

### 1. THE HEALING OF THE MAN'S PHYSICAL BLINDNESS.

On one level this is a mighty healing miracle: a man born blind is given his sight by Jesus. Franco Zeffirelli's 'Jesus of Nazareth' (shown on ITV back in 1977 with Robert Powell playing Jesus) brilliantly captures the gritty drama of this amazing miracle. (DVD Scene 33 'To give sight to those who cannot see')

#### **v1,2 . "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"**

This sounds like a strange question. How could this man have possibly caused his own blindness by his own sin when he was born blind? Pharisaic Judaism taught that it was possible for a child in the womb to sin, thus causing blindness. They taught that when the foetus was developing it had two inclinations, good and evil. If an evil impulse took control and, for example the baby kicked the mother overmuch in anger, then it could lead to some deformity or disability.

**v3a.** Jesus rejects this teaching, and with it other such explanations e.g. Hinduism's belief in reincarnation, with the sins of past lives giving you a worse "lot" in your next.

**v3b-,5.** This particular man's blindness is for God's glory. Jesus already knows He is going to heal the man. His words also indicate that what He is about to do has deeper meaning and significance because He is the Light of the World.

**v6,7.** Jesus sends the blind man to the Pool of Siloam, the most crowded place at the Feast of Tabernacles. Each day water was collected from there & poured over the alter in the Temple. When the man born blind washes he discovers he can see.

**v8-12.** The man is well known. But he now looks so different because he can see! His face must have been transformed. He is only too willing to tell all and sundry what has happened. A mighty miracle has taken place. A man born blind has been given his sight.

**This healing of the man's physical blindness is a sign.** It is a Messianic claim; an identity sign; a sign of who Jesus is.

According to Arnold Fruchtenbaum (a Messianic Jew with particular knowledge of first century Rabbinic Judaism), round about 100 BC Pharisaic Judaism

distinguished between miracles. (i) Those which *anyone* empowered by the Spirit of God could do, and (ii) miracles which could only be done by *the Messiah Himself*. These were known as Messianic miracles. If such a miracle was reported it was to be taken very seriously. It set in a motion a chain of events. The miracle was first investigated to see if it was authentic. Then a process of investigation of the healer by the Jewish leaders began to test His Messianic credentials.

The first of these Messianic miracles was Jesus' healing of a man full of leprosy. Having healed him Jesus deliberately sent him to the authorities. This set in motion the process of investigation. It led to Jesus being followed and watched and cross questioned everywhere he went.

The healing of this man also comes into the category of Messianic Miracle. This was not simply the healing someone who was blind (which would have been wonderful enough), but one who had *been born* blind. Such a healing came under the category of Messianic Miracle. This explains the strong reaction of the Pharisees. Jesus had healed a man *born blind! Someone* they were very familiar with. It created a great stir. Moreover Jesus has healed him on the Sabbath.

Once again this set in motion a process of investigation and interrogation. In **v13-17**. They cross question the man himself. Then in **v18- 23** they turn to his parents, before returning to the healed man again in **v24-34**. But their hearts are hard and their minds are made up. They have already rejected Jesus.

The healing of the man's physical blindness was a sign. A sign that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Messiah. He was the One who had been Promised by the Jewish prophets. He was the One who, for centuries, had been prayed for, and longed for. The sign pointed very clearly to Jesus

## **2. THE HEALING OF THE MAN'S SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.**

This is also a sign.

The Bible says that all men and women are spiritually blind, and need their eyes opening. **2 Corinthians 4v4**. "The god of this age (satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." This blindness keeps men and women in "the dominion of darkness". (Colossians 1v13)

Here we see *this* man's spiritual eyes being opened; and we see this taking place in stages. This is very important. Each person must make their own journey to faith. For some it can take years, while for others their eyes are opened in a matter of hours (as with this man). But there is still a journey with definite stages. There is a process involved in salvation, which continues after you are born again, and doesn't stop until you depart this life and see Christ in all His Glory face to face.

**FIRST STAGE** . This man's level of understanding is very basic. **v11**. "**The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes.**" But when he is interrogated by the Pharisees their antagonism towards Jesus and their brusque

treatment, rather than scaring him off, pushes the healed man through to the **SECOND STAGE** of his journey to faith. When asked “what have you to say about him?” The man replied **v17. “He is a prophet.”** He has moved on from regarding this Jesus as an ordinary man. He is now a prophet, someone very special.

When the Pharisees return for a second interrogation of the man, he is at first tactful then irritated and finally reckless. This brings him to the **THIRD STAGE** of his journey. **v32,33. “Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”** It is not yet personal faith, but it is very close. The bad treatment he receives pushes him nearer faith rather than away. It is a mistake to imagine that people need everything to be just perfect in order to come through to faith in Christ. This is more a marketing perspective. The truth is the gospel is responded to more readily in the midst of severe persecution. This is mighty evidence that the Gospel is indeed the power of God.

**v34.** They declare he has been “**born in sin**” (a sideswipe at being born blind) and cast him out of the synagogue. It is difficult for us to imagine what this meant. According to Jewish Oral law, there were three different categories of misdemeanour which might result in expulsion. (Edersheim p184 Vol 2)The first meant a short expulsion, the second a 30 day expulsion, and the most serious an indefinite expulsion. It seems that the authorities now regarded following Jesus in this third category. It had serious repercussions. Not like being banned from a particular church! Huge social implications. According to Rabbinic literature this banishment was accompanied by curses, he would be treated like a leper (people walking at 4 cubits distance from him), & on his death the usual funeral honours were denied. To follow Jesus was truly to take up your cross.

**v35-38.** The spiritual healing of the man. He has had his physical eyes opened, now his spiritual eyes are opened too, and he comes to the **FOURTH STAGE** of his particular journey. **v38. “ ‘Lord, I believe’ and he worshipped him”.**

Here is a list of various stages a person can go through in their journey to faith.

1. No awareness of God
2. Some awareness of God
3. Contact with Christians
4. Interest in Jesus
5. Decide to investigate Jesus
6. Grasp the truth about Jesus / the Gospel
7. Understand the implications of this.
8. Accept that the Gospel is true.
9. Accept the personal implications.
10. Surrender to Christ.

It is rarely exactly like this. People start at different points. They may get stuck on one for a while and move quickly through others. But it is helpful to look at the list and trace the progress of those you are praying for. The thing to remember is this: different people & circumstances play a different part in each person making progress through the stages. You may feel you have never led someone to Christ, but you will have played your part on many occasions. But whatever the stage or

part we play - it is always God who is at work. (Remember 1 Corinthians 3v6. "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.")

**The healing of this man's spiritual blindness is also a sign.** There is something even worse than being born blind - being born spiritually blind. As wonderful as the man's physical healing had been, it could not be compared to the eternal significance of the removal of his spiritual blindness.

**v39-41. Signs work two ways.** They point us to salvation but they also may turn out to be signs of judgment, when they are ignored. On this occasion the man is a sign of judgment to the Pharisees who have not believed, but have rejected Jesus. Bruce Milne writes: *"Jesus did not come specifically and primarily to condemn or to effect damning judgment. He came primarily and specifically to save sinners in this lost and fallen world. But his coming results both in salvation and in judgment. The light shines in the darkness. Those who welcome it are delivered into the light, but those who refuse it turn away into a deeper darkness."* ('The Message of John' The Bible Speaks Today. IVP. 1993)

**John Wilthew. April 2005.**

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.**

- 1. What struck you particularly from this passage on Sunday?**
- 2. In what ways was the healing of the man's sight and his coming to faith in Jesus a sign?**
- 3. We saw how the man's spiritual eyes were opened in stages. Talk together about your own experience of salvation. Was there a process / a journey in your case? Describe it.**
- 4. Talk about those you are praying for at present. Can you see where they are on their journey? Have they made some progress recently? Pray for them, and if someone seems to be stuck at a particular stage, pray for God to move them on further.**