

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Bringing Light to the Blind

by Dan Trygg

“The man answered and said to them, ‘Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes.’ ³¹ We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. ³² Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.’ ³⁴ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?’ So they put him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ³⁶ He answered, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ ³⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.’ ³⁸ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him.” John 9:30-38

One of the interesting facts to observe is that the account of **the healing of the man who was born blind only comprises the first seven verses, about 20%, of the chapter.** The remaining 80% is about what happens when the man returns home. The healing accounts in this fourth Gospel tend to include this added dimension of what happened to these people once they left. Some experiences were *not* positive. In Chapter 5, for example, we saw how the man who had been healed by the pool was confronted by the Jewish leaders for carrying his mattress on the Sabbath (5:10-13). He got in trouble as a direct result of his obeying the One who had healed him. Later on, in chapter twelve, the religious leaders determine to kill Lazarus because his resurrection had drawn so many away to follow Jesus (12:9-11). John seems to be interested in pointing out that healing doesn’t mean that we will no longer have difficulties. **Oftentimes, being the recipient of God’s healing power may put you in the center of unwanted controversy.** This account of the blind man is the most in-depth treatment of this phenomenon in the Gospels. The *consistency* and *practical wisdom* of the healed man, throughout his interrogation, and the *unimpeachable fact* that the miracle had occurred, add to the power of the sign’s impact.

“And as He passed by”. The Greek indicates that *this incident happened right on the heels of Jesus’ departure from the temple in 8:59.* There is no indication of a break in thought or in location. Thus, **this healing of the blind man, and his report of the event to the Pharisees, served as another powerful sign to substantiate the claims of Jesus** from chapter eight. “He saw a man blind from birth.” The setting for the demonstration of power. “We must work the works of Him who sent Me... **While I am in the world, I am the light of the world**” (vss. 4,5) -- **This latter phrase harks back to 8:12,** the beginning of His dialogue with the Pharisees that continued through the end of the chapter. This was undoubtedly on Jesus’ mind as he saw the blind man. **This particular “work of Him who sent Me” was meant to demonstrate in action what had been communicated in words.**

“He made clay... and applied the clay to his eyes” (vss. 6). The Greek for “applied” is *epechrisen*, meaning “He anointed *upon*, rubbed *on*, or smeared *on*”, from the same root word as “Christ”. The Anointed One made an anointing mixture from his own spittle, and then anointed the eyes of the blind man with this clay-like mud. **Jesus not uncommonly used means such as this in healing, probably both to set apart the afflicted area and to symbolize the working of the Holy Spirit** (e.g., Mk. 7:31-37; 8:22-26). *It certainly would have helped the recipient focus their attention on what was taking place in their body, and help them to expect and notice the working of God.* There was also an element of Jesus’ identification with that person, and with what He saw that the Father was doing. **His actions dramatically indicate what He was expecting, as well.**

“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam,” Jesus told him (vs. 7). In order to go to the pool of Siloam, *this blind man would have to travel through the city almost a half mile!* Obviously, **this was a test of the man’s faith.** Cf. II Kg. 5:1-14. “He went away and washed, and came back seeing.” By this time, Jesus would have been long gone.

In vss. 8-12, we have the former blind man’s testimony to his neighbors. From vss. 8 & 9, we can see that **he did not look exactly the same as he had,** for there was some difficulty in being convinced that it truly *was* him. Remember, he had been *born* blind, something easily recognizable at a glance. **He must have had an obvious facial disfigurement from birth that was now gone!** There was enough similarity that some quickly recognized him. Others thought he just resembled the man. We also discover from their dialogue that he had been sitting by the temple in order to beg alms from people passing by. (Now he will *work* for his living.) “He kept saying, ‘I *am* the one.’” **It took repeated, emphatic insistence by the man to convince them of his identity. Having established that, they ask him what happened.** He related the story. “The man who is called Jesus...” Unlike the lame man by the pool, he knew who had healed Him (Cf. 5:13). Being by the temple gate, he would have been more aware of what people talked about, and may have even heard Jesus teach in the temple courts, whereas the man lying by the pool had been more isolated. “Where is He?” *In response to the neighbors’ inquiry, he had to say that he did not know where Jesus had gone.*

They brought him to the Pharisees, the respected religious leaders who ought to know about this event (vs. 13). **“Now it was a Sabbath...”** (vss. 14-17). Jesus had also healed the lame man on a Sabbath. **This had violated the Pharisees’ sense of propriety.** The claims that He had made at that time (5:16ff.) had stirred up a resentment of Him which had not been forgotten (7:1,19-24). Jesus had only aggravated this outrage by His encounter with them earlier in the day (8:12-59). Thus, upon hearing the testimony of the healed man, **it should not surprise us that some concluded, “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.”** For others, however, the impact of the sign was too much to lightly dismiss, **“How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?”** Thus, they began to be divided. **“What do you say..., since He opened your eyes?” Asking the former beggar for his opinion, he replied reasonably in light of the evidence: “He is a prophet.”**

The attempt of some to discredit the man’s story proved futile (vss. 18-23). His parents corroborated that he was, indeed, their son and that he had been born blind. They refrained, however, from making any statement about the healing. Not only had they *not been present*, but *their son was an adult* and able to answer for himself. **“...they were afraid of the Jews...”** These religious leaders were not people who could be trusted with one’s honest thoughts and observations. It was already known that they had taken a stand against Jesus. This older couple was not willing to risk saying something that could be misconstrued or twisted by them as being pro-Jesus. ***It is a sad state of affairs when those who publicly represent God are seen as so repressive and vindictive as to be unsafe people.*** **“...put out of the synagogue...”** This was a disciplinary measure designed to control aberrant behavior and teachings. It could either be for a temporary period, or for an indefinitely long time. For those permanently excommunicated, it meant being shunned as a leper. **No one would have anything to do with you, nor even acknowledge your presence.** It would mean the loss of any business or family relationships, as well. **In the case of an old couple, the loss of these connections could result even in death.**

In their second interview with the man who was healed (vss. 24-34), **the Pharisees encourage him to give the praise to God, not to Jesus, because “we know this man is a sinner”.** “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; *one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.*” The man bravely refrains from endorsing their conclusion, appealing to the unquestionable miracle that was worked in his life. As they pressed him again for details, undoubtedly trying to find some way to discredit Jesus, the one who had been healed began to lose patience with them. “You do not want to become his disciples, too, do you?” The Greek construction shows that he was expecting a negative response. Clearly, he was being sarcastic with them. “They reviled him...” In return, **they resort to name-calling.** “We are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.” They were claiming to be faithful to Moses (cf. 5:46,47), and were saying that they were rejecting Jesus because it was not evident that God was with Him. “Well, *here* is an amazing thing...” The Greek is a little *more* pointed: “In *this* is the amazing thing, that you do *not* know where He is from, ...and He opened my eyes.” In other words, **the incredible thing was that they could be so dense as to miss the enormity of what had happened, and what it had to mean!** His logic is formidable: “We know that God does not hear sinners...” -- The Greek is not saying that God is not aware of what sinners pray. Obviously, that could not be true if God is omniscient. Also, many times people come to God *because* they see prayer answered. God shows His interest in them, and they respond. Literally, the man said, “We have observed/know [that] of sinners God does not give heed”. The meaning is that God has given no indication that He regularly complies with the wishes of people who are not devoted to Him. “...but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him.” Literally, “...if ever anyone might be God-devoted/revering/ worshipping (*not* the word for ‘fear’) and he might be doing the will/desire of Him, of this [one] He hears/gives heed to.” The point is that **people who are in touch with God tend to have a more effective prayer life, than those who are evil** (Jas. 5:16b). **“Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not of God, He could do nothing.”**

The Pharisees’ response? Anger, name-calling and expulsion. They were unwilling to be taught anything by anyone who was an uneducated beggar.

Having heard what had happened, Jesus sought out the man (vss. 35-41). Finding him to be of a *willing heart*, He revealed to him His identity, i.e., that He is the Son of Man, the Messiah (Dan. 7:13). **The man expressed his faith verbally, and by prostrating himself before Jesus in obeisance.**

“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.” A statement with double meaning, illustrated by this entire episode. “The Pharisees ...said..., ‘We are not blind, too, are we?’ Jesus answered, ‘If you were blind you would not have sin; but since you say, “We see”, your sin remains.’” Their spiritual pride had not only effectively darkened their minds to obvious spiritual truth, but their *professed expertise* actually made them *more accountable*. Their *attitude* made them *unteachable*, and *they* were responsible for that.