

John 9:1-41

In this passage, we see Jesus shepherding one person who has been dismissed and discarded by society. And we see in this one man the characteristics of a good sheep that learns to listen for the voice of his shepherd Jesus.

In meditating on John 9, I was so moved. I found it to carry a most timely and relevant message for us who want to follow and serve Jesus in the current milieu. It teaches us something about growing in faith in a faithless world, and how to live as witnesses of Jesus in a post-Christian society.

May God speak to each of us this morning.

Look at verses 1-2.

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?”

When Jesus and his disciples come across a man who was blind from birth, the disciples ask a question about whose sin caused this man to be born blind - his or his parents’.

The disciples express a belief here that was commonly held back then that human suffering, especially something like blindness, was always tied to sin. That’s why the question wasn’t if it was because of sin, but whose sin. The result of this belief, then, was to see people in their suffering as deserving what they were undergoing. Can you imagine? People that so needed encouragement and comfort and advocacy found themselves blamed and ostracized and excluded.

But how did Jesus see this man?

Look at verses 3-5.

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.”

Jesus declared that his blindness was not the result of his sin or his parents’ sin. Jesus said, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

Even though people saw this blind man as cursed, Jesus saw him very differently. Jesus saw someone who could be a beautiful display of the works of God. Jesus didn’t see his circumstance, his blindness, as something that disqualified him in the sight of God. It was the starting point from where God would do marvelous work in his life and bring glory to himself.

I have a good friend who grew up in a very abusive household and saw things a young boy should never have to see. To numb his feelings, he started drinking; he wasn't even ten. Even though he has remained sober these last few years, he continues to struggle inwardly because of depression. He sometimes gives into the thought that because of his past, he is too damaged for God to use him. But it's not true. God is actively working in him and healing him, and those of us who are around him see it. God is displaying his works in his life and will continue to do so.

Jesus didn't just say that God's work would be displayed in him. Jesus went on to say, "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me." Jesus said "we," meaning he and his disciples. Jesus' followers are called to participate in the work God is doing in this world.

Jesus didn't say we should, or we could. Jesus said, "we must." In John 4:34, Jesus said it in a different way: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Jesus was teaching his disciples to have the same attitude as him towards doing God's work.

And what is the work of God? In John 6:29, "Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'" The work of God is to believe in Jesus and to help others to believe in Jesus and grow in faith in him.

This work was not only a must, but it was urgent work. Jesus said, "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." What Jesus teaches us is that when the opportunity is there, we must give ourselves fully and urgently to God's work. There will be times of night when the opportunity will be gone. My kids are both in middle school, and that means their favorite phrases are, "I'll do it later," and "In a little bit." But Jesus tells us not to delay. Jesus didn't just talk the talk but he also walked the walk. He said, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Then he got to work to bring light into this man's life.

Look at verse 6-7.

6 After saying 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.

Jesus didn't just heal the man with his words, but spit on the ground to make some mud, and put the mud on the man's eyes. Jesus doesn't have just one way of helping people; he does things differently for each person, according to what is best for them. Salvia was often seen as having curative powers. Perhaps, knowing this, it got the man's faith churning. Or since he was blind, the physical sensation of having mud on his eyes helped him more fully understand that Jesus was in the process of healing him. Jesus didn't just heal the man one-sidedly but helped him participate by sending him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.

What did the man do? He obeyed Jesus; he went and washed, and came home seeing.

John points out that Siloam means “Sent”. Sent is one of John’s favorite words. This was significant to John because this man’s healing points to the fact that Jesus was indeed the one God has sent, even though this man did not yet know this.

How was this man received when he came home?

Look at verses 8-12.

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.”

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.

The neighbors couldn’t believe their eyes. It was so hard to believe for some that they said it couldn’t be him; it only looks like him.

I wonder if the man was tempted to just slide past his neighbors and not cause a ruckus. But he didn’t fail to tell the truth about what happened. He first insisted, “I am the man.” Then when they questioned how his eyes were opened, he told them all the facts as best as he could: “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.”

And when they asked him where Jesus was, he stuck to the facts, “I don’t know.”

One thing we see about this man is that he doesn’t embellish the story or hide anything. He says it like it is. He’s not interested in giving people the answer they want to hear, and if there was mounting social pressure, he wasn’t swayed by it one way or the other.

What happened next? Look at verses 13-16.

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.

The neighbors brought this man to the Pharisees. It may have been because the religious leaders were the ones to officially pronounce someone healed. When they questioned how he received his sight, the detail that mud was put on his eyes came out. That was a red flag because this happened on a Sabbath, and this was work. Now, of all the things that were before

them, what stood out? That a man born blind was standing before them with 20/20 vision? No, they were derailed by the fact that healing happened on a Sabbath. Their concern for their customs around the Sabbath overshadowed the beautiful work of God that was displayed before them.

They concluded right away, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." They missed the obvious point because they had already made up their mind about Jesus.

But there were some dissenters who thought differently, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" And because they couldn't agree, they asked the man.

Look at verse 17.

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."

We see some progression in the man's faith. At first, when his neighbors asked who healed him, he said, "The man they call Jesus (11)." But now, he began to see that Jesus was more than just a regular man. He replied, "He is a prophet."

Even though the religiously educated missed the obvious points, this man did not. In fact, the more he was questioned about what happened, the more he saw who Jesus really was.

That answer was not what they hoped to hear. What was their next move? They refused to believe he was actually born blind.

Look at verses 18-23.

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."

They brought in the man's parents. Now, these parents were not like their son. They were very sensitive to social pressures. They were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who would excommunicate anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. So they didn't even want to confirm that their son was healed, only that he was born blind. They didn't want to be seen as portraying Jesus positively. We would have thought these parents would be out of their minds

happy about their son's healing and would be looking for Jesus to hug him and thank him. Really, they should have seen who Jesus was through such a personal experience so close to home. But they didn't want to rock the boat. They were ruled by the fear of rejection.

With that, the Jewish leaders turned back to the man, to coerce him to give the answer they wanted.

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!"

They pressured the man, "Give glory to God by telling the truth." They were telling him, if he wanted to be on God's side, he needed to be on their side. They wanted him to agree with their statement: "We know this man is a sinner."

But like before, he responded by sticking to the facts. He said, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

The Jewish leaders wanted to avoid thinking about how this man was healed and instead focus on Sabbath regulations. But to this man, he could only think about how Jesus had healed him. He was blind, but now he could see.

We can learn something important from this man. We live in a time and city (both NYC and Austin) where our Christian faith is not received positively. Especially because of recent political events, our Christian witness may meet more resistance than ever. How can we continue to be the salt of the earth and light of the world Jesus called us to be? What we can learn from this man is that no matter what the spiritual environment is out there, we must hold onto God's grace to us in our hearts. We must have a clear testimony of God's grace burning in our hearts. We must be newly and deeply touched by the gospel message. Then like this man, even before the most resistant audience, we can tell our personal story of how Jesus has changed our lives. We can tell them how we were once blind, but now we see because of Jesus; how we were once so lost, but how Jesus found us. Most of the time, the greatest apologetics and arguments won't convince someone who doesn't believe in Jesus. But a genuine personal story of how Jesus has worked in our lives just may open up that person's heart.

The religious leaders pressed the man further. Look at verses 26-34.

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.

When they kept questioning, the man fired back, “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?” I really like him!

At this, the religious leaders started insulting the man. Their retort was that they are disciples of Moses since God spoke to Moses, but that they didn’t even know where Jesus was from.

The man saw through their weak excuse. Basically, they weren’t truly open to the truth. They wanted to believe what they wanted to believe despite the evidence. He said, “Now that is remarkable!” It meant their stubborn unbelief was incredible to him, maybe even more than the healing of a man born blind. For him, it was so simple. The logical decision was to see that God was with Jesus. He concluded, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

What the religious leaders intended was to break this man’s faith down. But the exact opposite thing happened. Like a diamond that is forged under high pressure, this man’s faith began to form all the more in this pressured environment. Things became all the more clear for him about Jesus.

As a parent, I worry about my kids growing up in this post-Christian world. I worry for the people I pastor, too. There are many competing voices out there, and it can get really confusing. Our society postures itself as enlightened - and to be sure, there are many good elements. But it is ultimately in the dark because it’s teachings are founded on the idolatry of the self. It’s not unlike the unbelieving environment in which this man found himself. But what we learn from this man’s example is that God can use this kind of environment to clarify and strengthen our faith all the more - not despite, but through the environment in which we live. I get nervous, but God does not.

The religious leaders had enough. In their pride, they saw this man as beneath them. They got defensive and tried to hurt the man, saying, “You were steeped in sin at birth.” And they threw him out. As this formerly blind man’s faith is revealed more and more, the ugly hearts of these religious leaders are also revealed more and more.

Even though the man was thrown out by the religious leaders, he was sought out by Jesus. Look at verses 35-38.

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.

When Jesus first encountered the man, Jesus worked to open his physical eyes. When Jesus found him again, Jesus worked to open his spiritual eyes.

The man surely recognized Jesus’ voice. It was the man ... no, the prophet, that healed him. He knew God was with him, and that because of him, he went from being blind to being able to see. He knew he could trust this Jesus. So when Jesus asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man,” he was ready. He answered, “Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

Then Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Suddenly, it all made sense. That’s why Jesus was able to heal him. He was the Son of Man, the Messiah. His spiritual eyes were opened, and he realized he was seeing the Lord. So he worshiped him, saying, “Lord, I believe.”

We see how Jesus helped this one man go from seeing Jesus as a man, then as a prophet, then as the Lord. We saw that this man could grow in faith because he held onto the grace of God. He held onto what Jesus did for him. But not everyone was like this man. In fact, some got worse as a result of this miracle. So Jesus said in verse 39:

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.”

Jesus tells us his coming is for judgment. In what sense? Jesus is the light that gives sight to the blind, but at the same time, reveals the blind people for who they truly are. The Pharisees claimed that they could see because of all their spiritual knowledge, but in rejecting Jesus, they showed that they were truly blind and guilty of sin. They showed how blind they were when they could not see the work of God in the healing of a man born blind.

Let’s read verse 3 together: **3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.**

By the end of this passage, we realize that the greater miracle, the greater work of God here is not this man receiving his physical sight, but him receiving his spiritual sight. He saw Jesus as the Lord despite everyone around him doing the opposite, and he crossed over from death to life.

Jesus is doing this work today! He who began the good work in us is working to bring it to completion. He works in us so that the dark world only helps to clarify the gospel all the more and cause it to shine more brightly in our hearts. And he is working in the world to call disciples of Jesus in all the improbable places, even where people have dismissed any work of God can happen. May we answer his call to join him there, as he says, "**As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me.**"