

Clinging to Jesus

John 9:1-41

So, is an individual saved by the supernatural work of God or by knowing doctrine? Is it by clinging to Jesus, or clinging to a preconceived theological system? Or to put in very simple terms, are you saved by knowing Jesus, or by knowing a lot about God?

John 9 answers these questions. Here, Jesus heals a man born blind, and in a second encounter with the same man, opens his spiritual eyes. In the interim, confronted by hostile Pharisees, the man clearly is no theologian - nevertheless he gave a forceful and accurate testimony on behalf of Christ. Yet he was unregenerate, having not yet come to full faith in Christ. In fact, though Jesus had healed his sightless physical eyes, he was still in the dark about who Jesus was (v. 25). But when Jesus finished opening his spiritual eyes, he worshiped Christ as Lord (v. 38). It was not a theology lesson that brought about this transformation, but a miracle of divine grace.

The Physical Miracle

At the end of John 8, Jesus was engaged in a confrontation with the religious leaders in the temple, where He made a dramatic proclamation of His deity: "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). The Jews were so incensed that they tried to stone Him. Amid the confusion, Jesus was able to get out of the temple.

V 1 Even though He was dodging bloodthirsty men, He had time to stop and minister to a blind sinner. This man was born blind. This is an important detail for there was no way for skeptics to dismiss this miracle as a psychological healing or any kind of trickery on Jesus' part. Everyone who knew this man knew he had been blind from birth. His blindness was a birth defect, not a temporary affliction from which he could hope to recover.

We might expect the witnesses to this healing to say, "That settles it! This must be the Christ." But they didn't. They were locked into unbelief.

This man was a beggar. Yet, he did not initiate contact with Jesus. He didn't ask Jesus to heal him. It seems unlikely that he even knew who Jesus was. But the Lord saw him. *Sovereign grace had chosen him to receive a miracle.*

V 2 The common assumption was that suffering and illness were always traceable to an individual's specific sin.

Vs 3-5 In a matter of months, Jesus would be crucified. What our Lord could do by healing this man would speak volumes more than a discourse on the theology of sin and suffering. The blind man had been selected in eternity past and specially prepared for Jesus to pass by him and manifest His glory through this miracle.

V 6 There is nothing special about Christ's choice of healing. It was His prerogative.

V 7 The blind man obeys and finds His way across Jerusalem to the Pool of Siloam. His obedience healed Him.

The Inquisition

Vs 8-10 When the man returned and the people realized who he was and what had happened to him, they were understandably perplexed.

V 11 The crowd wants an explanation, but all he could provide was a reciting of the events.

V 12 This man was unsure who Jesus was, did not know where He was, and had no logical or theological explanation for what had happened to him. After questioning the man at length, his neighbors bundled him off to the Pharisees.

Here, the story turns nasty.

Vs13-16 These militant unbelieving Pharisees were not about to let up. They will go to everyone they could find, arguing desperately that Jesus had sinned by violating the Sabbath, furiously looking for evidence to justify their unbelief.

The beggar, devoid of any theological explanation or rationale for what had happened, simply rejoiced in what Jesus had done. The militant Pharisees, fat with theological information, wanted only to deny what had obviously happened, because they could not harmonize it with their predetermined system.

Vs 17-18 This was a challenge. The Pharisees were trying to intimidate him, but even though he was not theologically informed, he would have nothing to do with it.

They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents.

V 19 In questioning the beggar's parents, the Pharisees keep asking the same questions over and over, not looking for answer, but rather seeking some way to dismiss the unwelcome miracle

Vs 20-23 The parents acknowledged that this was their son and that he had indeed been born blind, but they dodged the second question. They were afraid of the Pharisees, who had threatened to put anyone out of the synagogue who affirmed that Jesus was the Christ. Excommunication was a terrible thing. The synagogue was the center of the Jewish community. Those who were excommunicated were cut off from everything. They could not buy or sell, and they were excluded from religious life. They became total outcasts. And when they died, they were given no funeral. This man's parents were not taking any chances.

V 24 The Pharisees ask the beggar a second time about his healing, since they are convinced that Jesus is a sinner. They don't care what the beggar has said because *they had already passed judgment, using their artificial standards to justify what they had already concluded. Exposed to all the evidence, unbelief always remains resolute.* Their minds were made up, and they were not going to be confused with the facts.

V 25 The beggar challenges their certainty that Jesus was a sinner. The Pharisees have no response. It is hard to argue against the simplicity of the obvious.

Vs 26-27 Frantic, they repeated the same questions the man had already answered.

Vs 28-29 The Pharisees are infuriated at the beggar's suggestion that they should become Christ's disciples. They insult and belittle him with their supposed superiority.

Vs 30-33 The calm, simple, obvious logic of the blind man vanquished their attack. Clearly, he was in control of this debate. As they became more and more antagonistic, he became more and more convinced that Jesus was from God! The more they challenged him, the clearer his testimony became.

V 34 Finally, the Pharisees have no more to say and turn to mocking the healed beggar. They physically throw him out of the synagogue and excommunicate him. This is the first person recorded in Scripture to be excommunicated for Christ's sake.

The Pharisees' inquisition was over. They had heard the testimony, they had seen the miracle, and still they were not swayed. They possessed a hardened, vicious, determined unbelief. Ultimately their hatred of Christ would ascend to such a fever pitch that they would sell their souls to put Him to death. Meanwhile, the beggar's faith was still incomplete. He had responded positively to Christ, even defended Him against the Pharisees. But he was yet unregenerate. His physical eyes were healed, but his spiritual blindness still needed to be removed.

THE SPIRITUAL MIRACLE

When Jesus heard that the man had been put out of the synagogue, He sought him out. Again, the Lord made the overture; the beggar did not come looking for Him.

This episode perfectly illustrates the working of divine sovereignty. Salvation always results because God first pursues sinners, not because sinners first seek God. John 15:16; Luke 19:10

Romans 3:10-11 - No one seeks God unless God has first seeks that person. Salvation is first a work of God and in no sense the result of human enterprise or individual longing. *Spiritual sight depends on God's initiative and God's power, offered in divine and sovereign grace.*

No one comes to faith in Christ because of any prior knowledge. Only when God gives them a new heart, will they believe. If salvation is a work of God, then the recipient's behavior will be changed. Phil.1:6

Vs 35-36 Contrast his attitude with that of the Pharisees, who thought they knew it all and were not about to take direction from Jesus. *They were learned in the Word of God, full of theological knowledge, but their hearts were blinded by willful unbelief. The beggar did not yet believe, but he was open. Faith is the necessary complement to the sovereignty of God.*

Vs 37-38 The beggar did not hesitate. He did not ask for proof. Christ had given sight to his spiritual eyes. And the moment they were opened, he saw Christ and responded to Him in faith. Like the physical healing, this was a divine miracle. It was a gift from God.

V 38 When his spiritual eyes were opened, *he saw Christ as sovereign Lord.* He then worshiped him. It was not a question of "making" Christ his lord; when the scales fell off his spiritual eyes, he saw Him for who He was, and the only possible response was to sink to his knees.

The Closing

Vs 39-41 It is a tragic thing to be spiritually blind, but it is more tragic still to be blind and not know it. These Pharisees thought they could see. After all, in terms of theological knowledge, they were far beyond this beggar. But unlike him, they had never had the blindness removed from their spiritual eyes, so they could not recognize Jesus for who He was. They knew doctrine, but they could not even recognize the Messiah. They were blind, and they didn't even know it.

The result of spiritual sight is a surrendered, worshiping heart. The result of spiritual blindness is more blindness, more sin, and ultimately certain doom. Mere doctrine is no help for spiritual blindness; light cannot cure blindness. The only hope for those locked in the darkness of spiritual sightlessness is a miracle of God to open their eyes. That is what God does through His Spirit in salvation (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Those who would be saved do not require in-depth theological instruction to know that Christ is Lord and that they should obey Him; the truth becomes self-evident when their spiritual blindness is removed.

Salvation is a supernatural, divine transformation- no less than a miracle that takes place in the soul. It is a true work of God, and it *must* make a difference in the life of the one whose eyes have been opened. The believing person will see Christ for who He is- sovereign Lord of all- and that revelation, to one who formerly could not see, will inevitably provoke worship, adoration, and a heart that desires to do the will of God. None of that is the result of theological tutoring; it is the work of God's Spirit in the heart of the redeemed.

So, I leave you with the question that we began the morning? Are you clinging to Jesus, or to a belief or theological system? Are you blind, or do you see?