

A Life That Displays the Works of God

John 9:1-12

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, by your Word, which is light, drive out whatever darkness still remains in us. Heal the blindness within us by every word that comes from your mouth. In the name of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.

Jesus and his disciples are walking through the streets of Jerusalem when they see a man who has been blind from birth. The original Greek word for "see" also carries the meaning of "to know." We come to know things through what we see, don't we? In Jesus' case, anointed by the Holy Spirit, when he looked at this man, he saw everything about him: who he was, what kind of life he had lived, and what God's plan was for him.

The disciples ask Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

What assumption is hidden in that question? Whether it was the man's sin or his parents' sin, the underlying belief is that all sickness comes from sin. But what personal sin could a baby possibly commit inside his mother's womb? Perhaps the disciples assumed that someone among his parents or ancestors had sinned and that this was the result.

So they expected Jesus to say it was because of the parents' sin. But Jesus gave an unexpected answer. It was neither this man's sin nor his parents' sin. And then he added something even more startling, something his listeners had never heard before. He said that this man was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Was it true that they had no sin at all? The Bible testifies that "there is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10, Psalm 14:1-3). And throughout Scripture, sickness is often connected to sin. Doesn't that seem to contradict what Jesus is saying here? The point is not that these people didn't sin. The point is that Jesus is looking at this situation from a different angle. His focus is not on sin, but on what God is about to do in this man's life.

So what is it that God does? In Acts 2, people from fifteen or sixteen nations have gathered in Jerusalem, and the disciples are declaring the mighty works of God in the languages of those nations. These mighty works of God are the same as the works of God as mentioned in John 9. And what are those? They are the story of redemption that God sent Jesus Christ to redeem and save humanity. This man was not born blind because of anyone's sin. He was born blind so that God's salvation could be put on display.

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We need to change the way we look at our own sickness and our difficult circumstances. Even if our situation is the result of something our ancestors or we did wrong, Jesus' perspective is this: God wants his salvation to be revealed through it. Of course, if there is sin, repentance is absolutely necessary. But do not stay stuck in the consequences. Instead, look to Christ, who gives "a beautiful headdress instead of ashes" (Isaiah 61:3), and walk in obedience. That is how your life becomes one that displays the works of God.

Then Jesus says that it is still daytime. The day refers to the time before he goes to the cross. He says that while it is day, we must do the works of the one who sent him, that is, the works of God. The night he mentions refers to his death on the cross. And what is the night for us? It is when we die, or when we no longer have the strength to do the Lord's work.

When Jesus says "we must do," he is including his disciples, but because he is saying this in front of the blind man, he is including the blind man as well. We will soon see how this blind man comes to take part in the works of God.

Then Jesus says, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." We might simply understand this as Jesus being the light that shines into a dark world. But for the Jewish listeners, this was a direct declaration: I am the Messiah.

The Gospel of John talks about light quite a lot. The theme of light appears as early as John 1:5. In John 1:9, the Messiah is described as "the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world." And in John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." In the Gospel of John, life is synonymous with salvation and eternal life.

Isaiah 9:2 introduces Christ this way: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."

Isaiah 42:6 contains this prophecy: "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." This too is speaking about the Messiah. "A covenant for the people" refers back to the covenant God made with Abraham: that through one offspring, Jesus Christ, a great nation would come, and through Christ, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed.

"A light for the nations" means that the light of salvation, which began in Israel, would spread out to the Gentiles as well.

Then in the very next verse, Isaiah 42:7, we see the Messiah's unique mission: "to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Only the Messiah can pull people out of sin and give sight to the blind. So when Jesus stands before the people of Israel and says, "I am the light of the world," and "a great light has shone on those who sat in darkness," they understand exactly what he is claiming: this man is the Messiah.

The words Jesus speaks in front of this blind man are the gospel being preached to him. To summarize that gospel: Was this because of someone's sin? No. This happened so that God's salvation could be put on display. I am the light of the world while I am in the world. It is still daytime, and as the Messiah sent by the Father, I am about to do his work. Jesus preached all of this to one person, this blind man.

Starting in the next verse, we see what the blind man or anyone who receives the gospel must do. The response to the gospel is to believe and obey.

After Jesus finished speaking, he spat on the ground and made mud. The climate in Israel is dry, so the soil is loose and dusty. He made mud with his saliva, spread it on the man's eyes, and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam.

Use your imagination here. This man has been blind from birth, and blind people in that culture were almost always beggars. Verse 8 actually calls him a beggar. In Jerusalem, the best spot for a beggar was near the temple, where large crowds passed by. This man was probably sitting near the temple begging when he encountered Jesus.

From the temple to the pool of Siloam is roughly half a mile, and the path down to the pool was a steep downhill walk. This was either the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles or just after it, so the streets would have been packed with worshipers. Picture this blind man making his way through all of that. He had probably never been to Siloam before, so he may have asked people for directions, and perhaps someone guided him part of the way. With mud spread over his eyes, he must have looked quite strange to those who saw him. He probably bumped into many people along the way, and on that steep slope, he likely fell more than once, but he went forward in faith.

The pool of Siloam is not just a pond by the side of the road. It is a pool fed by water flowing beneath the City of David, and to reach it, you have to enter a tunnel under the city. Isaiah 8:6 speaks of "the waters of Shiloah that flow gently," and this Shiloah is the same as Siloam. The name means "sent." Earlier, Jesus referred to himself as the one sent by the Father, pointing to

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himself as the Messiah. So the pool of Siloam carried that symbolism: it represented the Messiah. Jesus was sending this blind man to a pool that pointed to himself.

In other accounts of Jesus healing blind people, he healed them on the spot, either with a word or by touching them. But with this man, he did not heal him right there. He sent him to Siloam. Why? It seems Jesus wanted to test whether the man truly believed the gospel he had just heard. It was a test of faith. But at the same time, by choosing to obey, this man was being given the chance to participate in the display of God's works.

The blind man made that difficult journey, and the moment he washed, his eyes were opened. He immediately ran back to where he had met Jesus, wanting to worship him. But Jesus was no longer there. The people who recognized him asked how his eyes had been opened, and he gave his testimony: "The man called Jesus" told him to do this and that, and when he did, he received his sight. Since no blind person had ever received sight from the beginning of creation until that moment, his testimony was essentially saying: Jesus is the Messiah.

Because of that testimony, he was expelled from the synagogue by the Sanhedrin. But he met Jesus again and worshiped him. He was a brand new believer, but because he had experienced Jesus as the Messiah, his testimony carried real power. It carried so much power that it was written into Scripture and is still speaking to us today. The people who witnessed his healing and kept his words in their hearts likely came to faith when the Holy Spirit came upon Jerusalem in Acts 2. In this way, God's work of salvation unfolds in stages, and it may well be that this formerly blind man played his part in that unfolding.

So how can we find healing and resolution in our own sickness and struggles? Do not fix your focus on the problem itself. Instead, pray and ask Jesus to use it to display the works of God. Keep in your heart the gospel Jesus spoke, that the works of God might be displayed in him, and view everything through that lens, walking in obedience to his word. As you do so, may your very life become a testimony that points to Jesus as the Christ. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we receive for ourselves the same word you gave to the blind man. Change the way we see our sicknesses and our problems. We receive the mud of your Word upon our eyes. Thank you for washing us in the water of your Word, our Siloam. We believe that our pain and our illness are meant to display the works of God. Help us not only to believe, but to obey, to keep coming to you, our Siloam, and to experience healing and restoration, until our lives are transformed and we are sharing the grace we have received with others. In your name, we pray. Amen.