

Jesus' encounter with the man born blind

Duncan McLea – Christ Church Kenilworth

John 9:13-38

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We are at a crucial time in our life as a church.

- We are going through a process of change on the staff team as John leaves the team to study full time next year.
- Building plans have been approved by the Church Meeting and Parish Council and work will begin in the new year and we are preparing for a fairly major upheaval in the first six months of the year as work is done on St Ann's.
- We trust that all will be complete as we come to our Centenary Celebrations beginning in August.
- Some who had the opportunity to go to the *Living Free* conference in Tacoma have experienced healing and new freedom in Christ with a desire to go further and deeper with Jesus.
- Others have had similar stirring coming from other experiences like the Willow Creek Leaders Summit satellite conference here in Cape Town, or from attending the Men's or Women's weekends, or through the "Behold the Man" or OT courses.
- Last Sunday we heard some amazing testimonies of what God has been doing in the lives of many in Christ Church.

There is a lot happening. That phrase from C S Lewis' The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, springs to mind

The ice is melting, and Aslan is on the move.

I have been drawn back to the gospels and spending time with Jesus, reading the gospel accounts of his encounters with different people, and asking the question, not so much, *What Would Jesus Do*, as ***What Is Jesus Doing?***

What is happening? What is God up to?

I have be drawn again to this encounter Jesus has with the man born blind in John chapter 9. Lets turn to it.

John Chapter 9

Vs 1-2

9:1 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?"

The scene is set – a man blind from birth. Would you note that for those closest to Jesus their automatic reaction is, **"who sinned?"**

Who sinned – this man or his parents?

The theology that was prevalent in that day, and is alive and well today as well, is that **if something is going wrong in your life it must be because you have sinned.**

It does not necessarily have to be an illness. It could be a bankruptcy or a failed business, or what ever. But the basic assumption is that if something is going wrong in your life it is because you sinned, and are being punished. God must be punishing you for some sin you have committed, or your parents have sinned and because of their sin you are now punishing you.

That was the prevailing world view and understanding of God.

Now we may want to respond and say poor delude people how misdirected they were. But, while we may want to dismiss that notion, there is a seed of truth there.

Some times that is appropriate question. You see **sin will always lead to a crisis.** Some time or later if we allow sin to remain in our lives, if there is no repentance, if there is no putting it right with God, if there is no forgiveness, sin will lead to a crisis. Some times it will be a private crisis and no one else will know. But some times it will erupt in a family, community or congregation. Then it is appropriate to ask, where is the sin? Lets deal with it. And praise God through the cross we can deal with sin ... it does (as the writer to the Hebrews says) so easily entangle us, but we can be set free and run the race with perseverance.

So some times sin does lead to a crisis and to suffering. But Scripture is also clear that you **can't draw a straight line backward** and say that if there is a crisis that person or their parents must have sinned. There may be other causes.

The whole book of **Job** challenges the assumption that if something bad happens to you it is because you have sinned.

Job you must have been a terrible sinner that all this happened to you.
The whole book challenges that assumption.

Jesus disciples jumped to the conclusion that this was about sin. And Jesus says this one is not about sin. Some times it is about sin, but not always and this is one of the “not always” cases.

So picking up the narrative in verse 3.

3-7

*3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.
4 As long as it is day, we must do the work 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.**"*

Note that. This is one of the seven great “I AM” statements in John’s Gospel.

*6 Having said 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.*

There we have the miracle. But this chapter is not essentially about the healing – there are 41 verses in this chapter and we have hit verse 7 and its over already! This chapter is about much more than the healing, as significant and wonderful as that was.

Jesus uses this as a spring board to teach about something very relevant for us today. **It is about seeing for more than just seeing physically.** It is about who really sees. Who really sees when God is at work. Who sees what God is up to in the world? **Who has the spiritual eyes** in this chapter. That is what this is about.

8-9

*8 His neighbours 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."*

This is a most wonderful day. We are ready for a party. But human nature is so evident.... *No it can't be him.*

This not a sinful unbelief. This is **understandable unbelief** because it was a miracle. Miracles are by definition unbelievable. That is makes them miracles.

I can't believe it! God is smiling. The angels are smiling.

10

10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

A natural enough question. How did it happen? Tell us more.

11

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."

Notice this man's pilgrimage. The one day he does not know Jesus. The next day Jesus walks into his life and heals him and he receives his sight. But he still does not know Jesus. He refers to him as "The man called Jesus".

He does not say, "My friend Jesus" or even just "Jesus". He just says "the man called Jesus". He draws no attention to himself or his relationship with him. He is just says "The man called Jesus".

He could have made a lot of mileage out of this. He could have got on to TV. Jesus did this for me. What has done for you?

There is none of that. And remember that at this point he still hasn't seen Jesus. He does not know what he looks like.

12

12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

That is a recurring response in this passage. Look out for it. "**I don't know**". He does not know much. He does not know Jesus. Does not know where he is or even what he looks like. He does not know who he is. He is no theologian. He is has no knowledge about who Jesus is.

13

*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.*

That is significant because making clay was work and that was forbidden on the 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."

That is all he knew. He told what he knew. No more and no less.

16

16 Some of the Pharisees said,

Do you note that he says "some" – not "all". We have a tendency to rubbish all the Pharisees as devious hypocritical people. But remember there were Nicodemuses amongst them too.

16

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 do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.

So they are **divided**. Now remember that this chapter is about **who can see and who can't see**, and the Pharisees were meant to be the people who could see. They were the leaders. The trained theological spiritual scholars. They were the people who were supposed to be able to discern where God was at work and lead the people. But they were divided about what was going on here.

"This man" (Jesus) had broken the Sabbath. Now **breaking the Sabbath was a very serious offence**. You were only permitted to break the Sabbath if it meant saving life, or if at the time you believed that you were saving a life even it turned out later that the person's life was not in danger.

In such cases you were not only permitted to break the Sabbath, it was required of you that you did. You had to do what ever it took to save that person's life. Saving life was more important than keeping the Sabbath. So if some one's life is in danger you make the telephone call – you drive the person to hospital. But if their life is not in danger you don't break the Sabbath.

This man's life was not in danger. He had been blind from birth. He was not going to die now. So if Jesus was from God he would not have broken the Sabbath. Why did Jesus not wait one more day? He can't be from God. So we can put him in a box and not have to deal with him. Whether he did the miracle or not it does not matter. He broke the Sabbath and so he is not from God, he must have done this through the power of the devil. This is something that must be stopped.

Others were saying, hold on its not that easy. How can a sinner do a sign like this? So they are divided.

This was a bunch of Jewish theologian after all.

Some say and some say that.

On the one hand and on the other hand.

Dwight Pryor's story of the rabbi with two students.

They came to him separately and the one stated his hypothesis and then argued very eloquently and convincingly from the scriptures and made his case. The rabbi listened and said to him, "You're right!" He went away pleased as punch.

Then the second one stated his hypothesis which was completely opposite to the first. He argued his case very eloquently and convincingly from the scriptures. The rabbi listened and said to him, "You're right!" He went away pleased as punch.

The rabbis wife had been listening to all of this in the kitchen and she came through and said, "Rabbis what is going on? They can't both be right. The one argues this way and you tell him he is right. And the other argues the other way and you tell him he is right.

The rabbi listened to her, thought for while and then he said, you are right.

We face situations like this don't we.

OK so the Pharisees were divided. What tends to happen when leaders are divided? **They look for a scapegoat.**

17 Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

They are divide so they turn on this poor guy.

It is all your fault. If you had not been around this would not have happened and we would not be divided. It is all your doing. What have you got to say for yourself and all this trouble you have caused?

17b

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

He is making progress. In **verse 11 he was "that man"**. But he knows his scriptures. He knew the prophets healed. He was healed so he must be a prophet. He was starting to work things out. He was doing theology. But he was not theologically trained. He was a blind beggar. He was a despised non-entity and he was suddenly coming up with a theological opinion.

18

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

What is going on here? Well one way of dealing with the problem is to say that Jesus was from the devil. You can then parcel it up and say good riddance – that's it.

The other way is to say, this was not a miracle at all. This is just normal and quite explainable – don't hassle.

This man was a professional beggar. His job was begging and part of his act was to be blind. That was good for the business of being a professional beggar. He could feed the family this way. Blindness helps if you are a beggar. But one day he decides he is fed up with being blind. His cousin can be the blind guy, and he says, "Glory hallelujah I can see!"

So they call his parents. Three questions.

19

19 "Is this your son?" they asked.

That is easy enough. Yes.

"Is this the one you say was born blind?"

That they can answer too. Yes. Two out of two. But then comes the tricky question.

How is it that now he can see?"

20

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.

There comes that recurring phrase again. We don't know

Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."

This is a strange reaction, is it not. The man's parents are backing away from their son.

We don't know. Ask him.

Strange. This should have been the most glorious day in any parent's life. Their child who has suffered all his life with this affliction has been healed. This is something you want to shout from the roof tops and throw a party!

Why did his parents behave in this strange way? Well in the narrative John the gospel writer tells us in verse 22.

22

22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews 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."

Here is the reason. They were afraid. The consequences of acknowledging that God was at work here was just too big. The ramifications were huge.

It may not strike you as very significant. So you are chucked out of the synagogue you can join another one. That reflects our culture not the culture of this family in this gospel account.

You see for us if you are chucked out of the church you can join another one. Church is for the most an add on luxury. If you fall out here you can go else where or start your own church.

But in this community to be put out of the synagogue means the end of your place in the community. If you owned a shop and baked bread, and were put out of the synagogue, no one would come and buy from you. You were finished. That is why this man's parents were too afraid to get involved.

24

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," 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!"

I love this man. I love his' "I don't know"s. They come up all over the place. *I am not making a judgement call on his sin status. I am not the theologian. But what I do know I will speak about. I was blind but now I see.*

He is not theologically articulate. He has a very simple testimony and he is not going to be pulled away from it.

26

26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

Look at his gudspa

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?"

Is that great, or is that great! He is really winding them up. Or perhaps he is discerning and this is a genuine question as he sees from their body language that perhaps there is some doubt here and there is an inkling of their guards coming down and interest being ignited.

Do you want to become one of his disciples? He is into evangelism before he has even got his theology sorted. Heavens above.

To be an evangelist you don't need theological training.
You need a story to tell and a question to ask.

28

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."

They are beginning to come on very heavy with him.
Does he back down? Not a chance.

30

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 man who does his will.

"We"! "We know"! Who is this guy. The Pharisees are the ones who are those who know. They are the ones who see where God is at work and what God is doing. This fellow is a theologically untrained beggar, how dare he link himself and his opinions with the professional scholars!

32

32 Nobody has ever heard ...

What a lovely expression. It sounds very professor like and authoritative.

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.

This was the most glorious day of his whole life and it had suddenly all gone wrong. His parents had backed off from him. The religious leaders reject him and he is thrown out of the community.

What is he going to do? He has not got a trade or a profession. Besides he has been thrown out of the synagogue so no one will hire this man. He can't even going back to being a blind beggar anymore. What is he going to do?

One could almost believe that he was better off when he was blind. He then had has family and he belonged. Now he has got nothing. He is going to have leave the town and go and beg some where else and he can't even use his blindness.

And he is beginning to think, where is Jesus? He got me into this and he has disappeared. I have not seen him in the last 26 verses.

But would you notice that Jesus comes and finds him.

35

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him,

Any time we make a stand for Jesus and face the consequences of such a stand, Jesus comes and finds us.

You recall Jesus said in Matthew 10:32

"Whoever publicly acknowledges me, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

So Jesus finds him and asks him -

"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

What does that mean? He still does not know. He is still theologically ignorant of what that term meant. So he answers ...

36

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.

I can see you Jesus. You are the one. You are the one I have been waiting to see all my life.

He moves from seeing Jesus as "the man" in verse 11 to seeing him as "Lord" in verse 38 and he responds accordingly and worships him.

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."

It is never a mistake to confess spiritual blindness. That is not a sin. We may find ourselves in a place where we don't know which way to go. The way ahead seems murky and confusing and you may feel blind. You do not need to feel guilty about that.

It is when we say, ...

no don't worry, don't help me, I can see alright. I know the answer.

... when we don't. That is when we are guilty.

There is no shame in saying, Lord, I can't see the way ahead. I can't see the way out. Help me. Give me light. Give me sight. Help me to see.

This chapter is about who can see when God is at work.

And the message is that it is the guy who is blind, who is theologically untrained, who is abandoned and rejected, whose repeated expression is, "I don't know" ...

but who speaks of what has revealed to him and done in his life with unshakeable conviction, that is one who actually sees what God is doing, falls at the feet of Jesus and worships.

I don't know how you will manage this physically, but this would be a good time to get on your knees.

NOTHING IS AN ACCIDENT

By Eugene Peterson.

In running my church, I typically wanted to seize the initiative, take charge. To take responsibility for motivation and recruitment, for showing the way, for getting things started. Because I knew that if I didn't, things would drift. I was so aware of the tendency to apathy, the human susceptibility to indolence, that I consciously used my leadership to counter it.

But I was missing the point! The 'cure for souls' to which I am called is actually a cultivated awareness that God himself has already seized the initiative! The traditional doctrine defining this truth is known as *prevenience*: God everywhere and always going before us and seizing the initiative. He gets things going. He had and continues to have the first word. Prevenience is the conviction that God has been working diligently, redemptively, and strategically before I appeared on the scene, before I was aware there was something here for me to do.

So nothing is an accident. Pay attention to what the Father is doing, lest you act in futility.

We need to cultivate a disciplined, determined conviction that everything, and I mean precisely everything, we do is a response to God's *first work*, his initiating act. We learn to be attentive to the divine action already in process so the previously unheard word of God is heard, the previously unattended act of God is noticed.... What has God been doing here? What traces of grace can I discern in this life? What history of love can I read in this group? What has God set in motion that I can get in on?