

The 7 Signs/Miracles of John: Jesus heals a man born blind 9:1-41

John's Gospel features seven signs that point us toward Jesus' identity. John 20:31 states that these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name. We are to remember that these miracles are not ends in themselves but are there to reveal and point us to something of much greater significance.

To recap, the signs that we have covered so far are:

- turning the water into wine- the wedding at Cana, Galilee **John 2**
- healing the Galilean official's son **John 4**
- healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda **John 5**
- feeding the 5,000 **John 6**
- walking on water, the Sea of Galilee **John 6**

Today's miraculous sign is the healing of a blind beggar.

Jesus performed more miracles of this kind than of any other.

And why might this be?

Giving sight to the blind was a prophesied miracle for Israel's Messiah to perform. Here are two examples from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah,

29:18 In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll,
and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

35:5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

So this miracle and those like it were additional evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Our story today of Jesus healing a man born blind as Jesus' sixth sign in the Gospel of John, begins with a person who could not see the Christ walking past him because he is blind, but Christ saw him and knew him already, that he was blind from birth. And if we consider this in relation to our own lives, if we know or understand anything of Jesus Christ, it is because we were first known of him just as Jesus knew this poor blind beggar. I bet he even knew what it was that his disciples were going to ask him about the man as they walked along and saw him. Their question about the cause of this poor man's blindness becomes the catalyst for this next miraculous sign performed by Jesus. Theirs

however is only the first question which leads to the next and then another five after that. This story is actually a series of seven scenes with questions. Scene by scene questions and answers follow on from each other, and as they do two things become increasingly apparent, firstly, on the one hand the fear of the Pharisees' rises while secondly, the faith of the former blind man increases.

To the first question asked v.2, “**Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**” Jesus answers his disciples: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; but this happened that the works of God might be displayed [or revealed] in him” v.3. Jesus in his answer to the disciples immediately shifts the discussion from the cause of blindness to the much more important facet of what God can do with it. He hints at the symbolic significance of this healing.

In Jesus’ day, despite having the Book of **Job** which demonstrated to those Godly people who suffer, that their suffering provides an occasion like no other for exemplifying what true Godliness is for human beings, and **Ezekiel 18:20** which states,

“The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.”

The religious teachers, rabbis and Pharisees had developed the belief that “there is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity”. They held the theory of a direct relationship between sin and the cause of sickness and would cite **Exodus 20:5** [“You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me”] to explain that God visited the sins of the fathers on their descendants for several generations.

So where there is suffering, there must be guilt. In fact some of the rabbis even believed that babies could sin in their mothers' wombs.

So Jesus makes mud from his own spit and the dirt of the ground to put on the eyes of the man born blind, to restore his sight, once he has gone as Jesus told him to wash off in the pool of Siloam. But there is always

the naysayers, the unbelievers, in this case the people who then doubt this man's identity.

In the second scene the formerly blind man's neighbours ask one another, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some thought he was and other's said, "No, he only looks like him." The now healed man has to be very insistent saying that he is the one who was born blind. In order to prove his identity to his astonished neighbours who want answers, "**How then were your eyes opened?**" they asked. So he answers them, "The man they call Jesus made some mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'" v.11.

At this point, the formerly blind man hasn't gotten any further than simply reciting the factual physical dynamics of his healing. Siloam means "one who has been sent" which is a sign to the hearer or reader of Jesus' true identity as the one sent by God who says, "We must do the work the of him who sent me" v.4. John wants us to make the connection between Jesus and the healing pool of Siloam, that he is sent from God.

In Scene three the Pharisees call the formerly blind man in for questioning and they doubt Jesus' identity too. In V15 they ask, "**How have you received your sight?**" To which the healed man answers "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see". Here he is still at the stage of simply reciting the physical facts of the healing while the Pharisees view Jesus as a Sabbath breaker, which included the work of performing unnecessary miracles that could wait till the next day, like congenital blindness for instance. You could only do a miracle on the Sabbath if it involved saving someone's life. This one wasn't so which led some to say that Jesus was not sent from God and ask the next question: "**How can a sinner perform such signs?**" v.16

The healed man answers the Pharisees, who were divided on the issue, "He is a prophet" v.17. Do you know it was the Pharisees' annoying questions that served to move the man from merely reciting the physical facts of his healing, to reflecting on the spiritual identity of his healer. Prophets in the Old Testament were associated with healings. The closest parallel in this case is with Elisha's healing of the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5. The prophet tells Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan River, and his leprous skin is restored to health. The Pharisees just can't seem to get their minds around how Jesus, a sinner who heals on the Sabbath, could do such a miraculous sign. It just wasn't allowed according to their regulations, especially when you consider his double sin of kneading, yes even kneading was

one of thirty-nine types of work forbidden on the Sabbath, and Jesus kneaded the mud before he spread it on the man's eye to heal him.

The Pharisees, scene four, then call in the man's parents for questioning who quickly pass the buck back to their son. **“Is this your son, the one you say was born blind. How is it that he can now see?”**

To which the man's parents answer, "We don't know how it is that he can see now... Ask him. He's old enough to speak for himself" v.21.

I would say that they answered in this way so that they would not be kicked out of the synagogue for good, cut off and excommunicated from what was both their religious community as well as their social group by suggesting the obvious, that Jesus is the Messiah.

Getting no where with the parents, in our next scene, the Pharisees call the formerly blind man back in for a second round of questioning to see if they can get something more out of him. **“We know this man is a sinner...what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”**

The healed man questions their questions by once again stating the facts of what he knows to be true. “Whether he's a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see. I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples too?" vv 25, 27.

And the Pharisees are not happy because their response is to insult him and drive him out of the synagogue. All that their harassment of the formerly blind man served to do was to actually embolden his faith. As the Pharisees level of fear increases, so does this man's faith.

In scene six Jesus hearing that the man had been excommunicated from the synagogue seeks him out and when he finds him asks the question **“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”**

To which this Former Blind beggar after some further discussion answers, "Lord, I believe" and he worships Jesus v.38.

In the story so far the two titles for Jesus of Messiah and prophet have surfaced which now give way to one associated with his role as coming judge, the Son of Man. It is this man's confession of faith that sets the table for Jesus' summation of the significance of this "sign."

For he tells the man, with some Pharisees listening in on the fringes, "For judgment I have come into the world, so that the blind will see, and those who see will become blind" v.39

Which leads to the exchange between Jesus and the eavesdropping Pharisees in the final scene where they are quick to sound a plaintive or

lamenting note of self-doubt, **“What? Are we blind too?”** This note of self-doubt, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" is as close as they come, at least in this scenario, to the formerly blind man's confession of faith. It could be the beginning of spiritual sight for these Pharisees... if they get the role reversal that has been going on since the disciples asked the very first question, "Rabbi, who sinned . . .?" (9:2).

The Pharisees came into this story of restored sight assuming they could see and the man was blind. They "saw" that people who were blind, ill, or poor were that way because they had sinned against God. They "saw" that their laws and stipulations were the path to life. Therefore, healings were not to take place on the Sabbath. They "saw" that Jesus could not be a genuine prophet or healer because he did not abide by their Sabbath regulations. They "saw" that, since Jesus was a sinner the healing could not be genuine—the man must have been able to see already. They "saw" that because this man had been born blind, he was a sinner and therefore, could teach them nothing (9:34).

There is a story of a woman blind from birth who was asked by a friend, "How do you sing 'Amazing Grace'? When we sing it in church?" We all remember the words: *"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."*

The blind woman answered, "When we get to that verse, I straighten my shoulders, and sing with gusto, 'Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, and I still can't see! But . . . praise God from whom all blessings flow!" she finished.

Which proves that a person can be physically blind yet have 20/20 spiritual vision. And also, that a person can have perfect 20/20 physical vision and be spiritually unable to discern a thing. Which is Jesus' assessment of the Pharisees at the close of this scene. Their sin he says "remains" as long as they refuse to recognise his identity as God's Son and believe in Him as their Saviour, which the miracle directly points to him as one huge Messianic sign. So, the guilt of their sin "remains," for as long as they claim that they can spiritual see and discern the truth, whilst their beliefs and actions remain opposed to the truth.

I conclude with this challenge:

I say we take a page out of the discipleship book of this stubborn, outspoken formerly blind beggar. He allowed everyone who sought to suppress his faith to actually do the opposite and fan it into flames.

He became a force to be reckoned with. He refused to cave in or fold up when his faith was challenged. So let's end by asking ourselves his question "Do you also want to become his disciples?" and answering in the affirmative with a resounding "Yes!" I do!

It was John Wesley who said of this man "So had God opened the eyes of his understanding, as well as his bodily eyes." And it is my prayer that it would be the same too for each one of us as we open our spiritual eyes to believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son and Saviour and become his disciples.

So can you say "yes" to Jesus? And then remain firm in your resolve to know, believe and stand for this truth in you life- no matter what?