

Session 12

May 17, 2020

Unit 2: Jesus Encounters . . .

The Man Born Blind

Jesus offers sight to the spiritually blind.

The Word

John 9:1-12, 34-41

Session Outcome

To be open to a spiritual eye examination by the Holy Spirit.

Discover:

Illustrated Bible Life describes the history and archaeology of the Pool of Siloam, and provides verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

Last Week:

We discovered that Jesus offers a two-fold response to sin: forgiveness followed by an invitation to walk forward into new life with God.

This Week:

We will discover the way Jesus offers healing to the spiritually blind.

Listen:

This week's Illustrated Bible Life podcast on FoundryLeader.com explores the fascinating history of the Pool of Siloam.

Discover:

In one of the most memorable healing accounts in the Gospel of John, Jesus granted the gift of sight to a man born blind (9:1-12). Jesus applied mud to the man's eyes and then told him to

wash himself in the Pool of Siloam. This pool, located at the southern end of the ancient city of Jerusalem, has a fascinating history that stretches back more than a thousand years before Christ. Let's dig into "The Pool of Siloam" in this week's Illustrated Bible Life article.

Engage the Word

SICKNESS AND SIN

John 9:1-3

The man born blind was "of age" (9:21), which could indicate he may have been a beggar in Jerusalem for years. The disciples' question suggests that some then thought prenatal sin possible. Also, did the sins of the parents bring punishment on a child while still in its mother's womb? Both positions present a skewed sense of God. Does God bring judgment on an unborn infant before the child can know right and wrong? Do physical limitations derive from the sin of another (e.g., the parents in this case)? Jesus quickly and firmly rejected this assumption. So how to understand verse 3? Was this blind man kept in reserve for many years to become an exhibit of some sort to achieve God's purpose in this reported encounter? Or did the meeting of Jesus and the man become included in John's gospel because of the result here reported? The Greek text may be taken either way. But the second, the "result" sense, provides some space for understanding God (and Jesus) as acting in healing ways in the flow of life, rather than one who orchestrates, or even manipulates, events.

DAY, NIGHT, LIGHT

John 9:4-5

Jesus called the disciples to a deepened shared ministry with Him. The Greek text can be read as "we must work the works." ? Forms of the word translated as "work" or "works" occur four times in these verses. The time to do the works of God, Jesus stated, was during the "day." Times of "night" would come when ministry would become even more challenging. Does John point readers to a later statement in the gospel, perhaps foreshadowing 13:30? There the betrayer, Judas, left the evening meal. John reports the tragic reality, "Judas...went out. And it was night."

The enduring hope of Jesus' coming into the world appears in the declaration "I am the light of the world" (also John 8:12). The word "light" occurs 25 times in 16 verses in John's gospel. Almost always it is a reference, directly or indirectly, to Jesus.

GO, WASH, WHO DID THIS?

John 9:6-12

This healing came soon, but not directly at the touch of Jesus. The healing came as the man obeyed Jesus' commands to "Go" and "wash." Jesus sent the man to the Pool of Siloam, about a half-mile south from the temple. After this trek and washing in the pool, the man could see. John

reports confusion over the man's identity. Some claimed this was the same man who had been blind, others that he only looked like that man. But the man who now could see insisted emphatically, "I am the man."

John reports an uneven response as to how Jesus was understood. The healed one first called Jesus only "the man," but when pressed declared Jesus "a prophet" (v. 17). Some affirmed Jesus as "Messiah" (v. 22) "from God" (v. 33), though the Pharisees deemed Him "not from God" (9:16). Jesus, in a later discussion with the man, refers to himself as "the Son of Man." These titles are impressive. But others spoke of Jesus as "a sinner" (vv. 24, 25, 31). This mixed review depicts the faith of the crowd and the healed man as moving in opposite directions. Three times the healed man confesses his ignorance (vv. 12, 25, 36), yet he is, ironically, growing in his knowledge of Jesus. At the same time the Pharisees, confident they know who Jesus is (or isn't), ironically and tragically descend further into ignorance.

John 9:34-41

The Pharisees embraced their ignorance while increasingly rejecting Jesus. The once blind man is thrown out of the proceedings. The outcome for the Pharisees and those who followed them was a deepening rift between the synagogue and those who affirmed Jesus as Messiah. Blindness that comes unbidden is tragic. Spiritual blindness that is chosen is more tragic still, especially when the spiritual darkness develops from one's claims to see.

John presents Jesus as the pursuing Savior. When Jesus heard that the former blind man had been expelled by the Jewish leaders, Jesus searched until He found the man. Jesus comes in grace to find and invite people to himself, to come to faith.

The closing scene of John 9 demonstrates the man increasing in faith in Jesus. Three times the word "believe" spoken by, or to, the once blind man, seems also to draw the reader into the matter, challenging us to believe. Proper faith will lead to worship of Jesus (v. 38). Sadly, entrenched refusal to believe in Jesus comes with a price. By claiming to see, yet being spiritually blind, people can move deeper into "guilt [that] remains."

Did You Know?

Virtually every chapter of the Gospel of John contains one or several names or titles for Jesus. All four gospels consistently address the key question about Jesus, "Who is this?" Some of the titles, like "Lord," "Savior," and "Son of God" were used of Roman political leaders. These same titles being ascribed to Jesus could have been viewed by Rome as subversive.

Think About It

Chapters 9 and 10 are a unit, and so are best considered together. The giving of sight to the man born blind not only illustrates the shining Light into darkness (1:5), but also becomes the occasion for the beginning of the new community (9:34). The community is composed of those who believe in Jesus as Lord (9:38), and those whose Lord is the Shepherd of the sheep (19:2).

[Beacon Bible Commentary: John, Acts (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1965), 113.]

Reflect

In what ways do you need God to touch your spiritual eyesight this week?

Rick Williamson

Discussion Guide

Insight

In the Old Testament, restoring sight was an activity exclusively attributed to God (Exodus 4:11; Psalm 146:8). However, in Isaiah, the healing of the blind comes to be associated with messianic activity (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7).

Connect to My Experience

Share with the group that during the reign of Queen Victoria, Buckingham Palace was updated and transitioned from candlelight to gaslight. The change required significant renovation. When the great moment arrived and light flooded nooks and crannies that had been dark for ages, formerly invisible problems became apparent, including a rampant rat problem. After the initial shock and discomfort introduced by the light, the problems were addressed and changes made.

In what ways does light bring clarity?

In what ways is spiritual blindness a form of darkness people experience?

Transition:

Jesus came that God's work might be displayed through Him, which included healing of the blind (see Insight). In today's passage, we will see how Jesus heals physical and spiritual blindness.

Connect to the Word

Invite someone to read John 9:1-3, then discuss the following,

The disciples ask: Who bears the blame for this man's blindness? The question might seem foolish to our modern ears, but gets at the heart of the human experience: Why does suffering exist? Who is culpable?

Why were the disciples so eager to attribute fault to someone for the man's condition? (They believed that a physical disability like blindness was caused by sin.)

What does this reveal about their understanding of God? (They saw physical suffering as a punishment from God.)

Jesus rejects the disciples blame game, and declares that the blind man's condition will ultimately display the works of God.

Is Jesus attributing the man's blindness to God's will? Why or why not? (No. Jesus is saying God will receive glory through this man receiving both physical and spiritual sight.)

What is the difference between God causing suffering and God working in the midst of suffering?

Invite someone to read John 9:4-5, then discuss the following,

First, Jesus makes clear that the works of God are for us to do alongside Him, not His alone to accomplish. We are invited into partnership with God in God's redemptive work in the world.

Second, Jesus' presence illuminates the darkness. He is the light of the world.

There is an expectation that followers of Jesus participate in God's work. What work might Jesus be referring to?

How does the light of Jesus enable and empower us to cooperate with God in the works of God?

Invite someone to read John 9:6-12, then discuss the following,

Immediately following Jesus' declaration that we are invited and expected to participate in the works of God, Jesus invites the blind man to participate in his own healing.

Discuss this parallel. How does the healing demonstrate Jesus' point?

While the man knows little of Jesus, he does not hesitate to testify to Jesus' work and will continue to do so, even when bullied by the religious leaders later.

How is his testimony a continued participation in the works of God?

In what ways do our testimonies impact others?

Invite someone to read John 9:34-41, then discuss the following,

Mercifully, Jesus seeks the man out and identifies himself as the Son of Man, inviting belief. The healed man responds in true faith, "Lord, I believe." Jesus highlights the great reversal at hand:

the formerly blind man sees both physically and spiritually, while the religious leaders stumble blindly, claiming to see.

The religious leaders felt threatened by the healed man's persistent testimony and punish him through exclusion. Why? What did they hope his excommunication might accomplish? Following the healed man's traumatizing experience in the synagogue, Jesus gives him the gift of revelation.

How does this revelation and the man's faithful response complete the healing?

The religious leaders continue to deny their blindness, inciting Jesus' declaration that they are yet in their sins.

Why are they so insistent that they can see?

How does their posture ensure continued blindness?

Why do some people refuse to acknowledge their spiritual blindness?

Connect to My Life and the World

God does not cause suffering. He transforms it for His glory and our good.

How can this perspective change our experience and understanding of suffering? How can we be a voice of hope to those struggling with hurt and tragedy?

Jesus invites the blind man to join Him in the works of God by participating in his own healing. Jesus extends the same invitation to us.

What would it look like to actively join the Spirit of Jesus in doing the works of God, for our own good and for the good of the world?

In spite of his initial incomplete understanding, the healed man testified to Jesus' work in his life. In what ways do fear or feelings of inadequacy prevent us from sharing what God has done in us? How might we faithfully testify to God's saving action in our lives?

In this story, those who should see are blinded by pride and stubborn disobedience, while the one who was literally and spiritually blind now enjoys full sight.

In what ways do we fall into the same sin of the religious leaders? How might we instead model the humble, believing obedience of the healed man?

Close in prayer, inviting God to perform a spiritual eye exam in our lives.