

**2021 THEME: EMMANUEL**

**Unit 1: Encounter**

**John 9**

**February 28, 2021**

Last week, we began looking at John chapter 9, which is the story of Jesus' healing a man who had been born blind. I shared with you last week that we would look at the miracle itself last week – which we did – and then this week we would look at the “fallout” from the miracle, as the religious authorities investigated what had happened. Next week, we'll look at John chapter 10, which is Jesus' commentary on the miracle and the response of the authorities to it. So turn in your Bibles, please, to the Gospel according to John, chapter 9, and in a moment we'll begin reading with verse 13.

As you're finding the passage, let me remind you that these events took place in the immediate aftermath of the Festival of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. There would have been a great number of people there for the Festival, because Tabernacles was one of the three “pilgrimage feasts” for which Jewish men were required to travel to Jerusalem. I also reminded you last week that light was one of the major themes of that Festival, and in chapter 8 verse 12 Jesus began a discussion with the people who were present by declaring himself to be the light of the world – a statement which he repeats in chapter 9 as he is talking with his disciples. That's important, because the subject of light relates directly to the subject of vision – the light enables us to see clearly, while darkness makes it difficult for us to see. And, as we've already seen in some of our passages from John's Gospel, Jesus uses the concepts of light and vision in two different ways – speaking of both physical light and vision and spiritual light and vision. So keep those thoughts in mind as we read together our passage for today, John chapter 9, starting with verse 12 and continuing through the end of chapter 9.

*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. **Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.***

*Therefore the Pharisees asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."*

*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 perform such signs?" So they were divided.*

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

*The man replied, "He is a prophet."*

*They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"*

*"We know that he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."*

*A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."*

*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!"*

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

*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?"*

*Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."*

*The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*

*To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.*

*Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*

*"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."*

*Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking to you."*

*Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.*

*Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."*

*Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind, too?"*

*Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."*

## I. “We know this man is a sinner”

This part of the story involves an inquiry by the religious leaders into the circumstances surrounding this man’s healing. Why, you might ask, would there need to be an inquiry into his healing? Excellent question! There are two parts to the answer: the official reason, and the unofficial reason. The official reason is that the healing took place **on the Sabbath day**, and that meant that the religious leaders needed to investigate to make sure that nothing inappropriate had taken place on the Sabbath. The unofficial reason was because Jesus was involved, and the religious leaders were looking for any reason at all to get rid of him. The official reason and the unofficial reason came together in their inquiry into the healing.

Some rabbis taught that it was a violation of the Sabbath law to heal anyone on the Sabbath, because healing involved some sort of “work” on the part of the person doing the healing. It does not appear, however, that this group of religious leaders were taking that position. Their problem was with the fact that Jesus had violated their interpretation of the Sabbath laws by making mud out of his spit and some clay. You might think that to be a very nit-picky interpretation - and you’d be right – but the fact is that there was some precedent in Jewish law of that day to hold that very thing. By spitting on the ground and mixing his spit with clay to make mud, Jesus was performing the act of kneading – like kneading bread dough – and that was a violation of the Sabbath rules.

But we must not lose sight of the unofficial reason they were investigating this – because they were desperate to find any reason to accuse Jesus and either get rid of him or, better yet, have the Roman government get rid of him. As far back as chapter 7 we read that the Jews in Judea were “waiting to take his life.” But they couldn’t just arrest him and execute him; they did

not have the authority under Roman law to do that. The “worst” punishment they could impose was a whipping – with a whip that had pieces of metal tied to the ends of the cords. That was a serious punishment; they were limited to thirty-nine lashes, because forty lashes was considered to be a death sentence. But they weren’t content just to punish Jesus; they wanted him dead and gone.

The problem that they had was that Jesus was very popular with the people, and the religious leaders were afraid to do anything out in the open. That’s why they wanted to hand him over to the Romans to be crucified – because then the Romans would bear the blame. But as you probably realize from your prior reading of the New Testament, the Romans weren’t going around executing people just because the Jewish leaders wanted them to; the Romans’ attitude was that as long as things were quiet, they weren’t going to get them stirred up. So the Jewish leaders needed to find a way to accuse Jesus of something to turn the crowds against Jesus, and then they’d figure out a way to get the Romans to finish him off.

## **II. “We know that God does not listen to sinners”**

So the religious leaders haul in the man who had been blind and asked him what Jesus did to heal him, because they needed to come up with some hard evidence to use against Jesus. That’s why they said in verse 24 that “we know this man is a sinner.” They were thinking back to his healing of the paralyzed man on the Sabbath, as well as what they considered blasphemy in calling God his Father. But there was one problem with their theory: all the miracles that Jesus did made it hard to believe that he was really a “sinner.” And that’s why the man who was healed answered them by saying, “*We know that God does not listen to sinners.*”

Now, just as a side note, let me say that's not exactly true. God is always reaching out to sinners, so he's certainly listening to see if any of them respond to him. But what the man who was healed was saying is that no one who is a "sinner" can invoke the name of God and have God work through that person in power the way that Jesus was working. Okay? If a sinner asks God to have mercy on him or her, God will listen and will answer that prayer. But if a sinner prays and tells God to do some miraculous work, God's not going to do that because it's practically impossible for a "sinner" to discern God's will well enough to be able to pray effectively and have God answer. It's hard enough for people who seek God faithfully to have a full enough understanding of God's will in any particular situation to be able to pray for God to do a miracle; God's certainly not taking direction from people who don't acknowledge him as God.

And that brings us to an important point that I need to remind you: in John's writings – the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Revelation – "sin" is rarely if ever a matter of action or failure to act; "sin" is a matter of belief. That's why we talked about sin and belief in chapter 6, when Jesus told the people who were following him that the work God requires is to believe in the one whom God has sent. In that sense, Jesus could not be a "sinner" as John uses the term, because Jesus certainly believed that God had sent him. And that understanding of sin really characterizes this passage, because the man who had been blind believed in Jesus – believed enough to follow Jesus' direction to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. The religious leaders, on the other hand, "believed" in God, but they certainly did not believe that Jesus was the one whom God had sent.

So when the man who had been healed said that "God does not listen to sinners," what he was saying is that Jesus could not be doing the things that he did if he were not in tune with what God wanted.

That fact is emphasized even more by what the man says toward the end of his discussion with the religious leaders: *“Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”* This wasn’t just “any old miracle”; it was a miracle like no one had ever heard of before! Even in the Old Testament, people were sometimes brought back to life – but no one had ever heard of giving sight to someone who had never had it. Until now.

### **III. “You were steeped in sin at birth!”**

Well, the Pharisees took that about as well as you would expect them to – they fought back. *“You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!”* And they threw him out.

The inquiry started from the presumption that Jesus was a sinner. Now that the man has demonstrated some belief in Jesus, the religious leaders attack him and call him a sinner, too. I mentioned before that they considered Jesus to be a sinner because they viewed him as a Sabbath breaker. Their judgment of the man who had been healed was apparently based on the fact that he had been born blind. Remember, the disciples assumed that either the man or his parents had sinned because they associated his blindness with punishment. The religious leaders were all too ready to jump on that bandwagon, too. In their minds his blindness was proof of his sinfulness, and the fact that he was now claiming to be a disciple of Jesus made things even worse.

John tells us that they *“threw him out.”* This refers back to something he said earlier, in verse 22: the Jewish leaders had already decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be thrown out of the synagogue. That was why his parents had told the religious leaders that he was of age and could speak for himself.

The interesting thing is that the religious leaders have decided that anyone who believes in Jesus is a “sinner” and is thrown out of the synagogue, when in John’s Gospel Jesus makes it clear that those who don’t believe in him are guilty of sin. The tables have been turned; the religious leaders think that they’re condemning Jesus, when in fact they’re condemning themselves.

**IV. “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind”**

After the man is thrown out of the synagogue, Jesus re-enters the story. Jesus has been absent during the entire inquiry by the religious leaders, but now that the inquiry is over, he returns to speak to the man whom he healed. (As a side note, isn’t it interesting that the religious leaders do an inquiry about Jesus’ actions and never talk to Jesus himself?)

Well, Jesus comes back and asks the man, “*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*” The man answers, “*Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.*” Here’s what that means: he believes that there is a “Son of Man” coming, a “Messiah” that the prophets have spoken about and that the people have been waiting for; he just doesn’t make the connection that Jesus is the Son of Man. So when he asks Jesus who the Son of Man is, Jesus says, “It’s me.” Now, that’s not exactly how he says it; he says, “*You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking to you.*” Now, that seems a rather cumbersome way to say “it’s me,” so that’s why I interpreted it for you. But there’s a reason Jesus said it the way he did. *You have now seen him* is a recognition of the fact that although the man knew that it was Jesus who had healed him, he had not actually seen Jesus before; he was still blind when Jesus sent him to the Pool of Siloam to wash the mud off his eyes. And just to make it clear that Jesus is talking about himself – because the man was seeing everyone for the first time! – he says, “*in fact, he is the one speaking to you.*”

Well, that was good enough for the man; he said, *“I believe,” and he worshiped him.*

Jesus then explains that this is a demonstration of his mission: *“For judgment I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”* We need to recognize that Jesus is talking about more than physical sight now; he’s talking about spiritual sight. *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.* He has come to make God known to those who really want to know God – those who have been groping around in the dark, trying to find their way to God but having no clue how to get there. The man that Jesus healed was literally physically blind, but he was also spiritually blind – until he came to belief in Jesus.

And in the same way, those who think that they can see – who think they’ve got all the answers that they’re spiritually secure – well, Jesus says that his judgment means that they will become blind. And when he says that, some of the Pharisees who were there with him asked him, *“Are we blind too?”*

**V. “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains”**

Well, Jesus responds by saying, in effect, *“Yes, you are.” “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”*

Have you ever heard the phrase *“walking in the light you’ve been given”*? It means that you obey God and live the way he wants to the best of your knowledge. There may be things that God will reveal to you later on that will cause you to change your actions or your attitudes, but at any point in time what God expects of us is that we obey what we understand his will to be.

When I first got saved, I was in my senior year in college. God did not tell me at that point that his plan for me included becoming a pastor, so the fact that I didn't become a pastor did not mean that I was disobedient. I was walking in the light that I had. I made a point of praying before going to law school and telling God that if that wasn't his plan for me, I was okay with that – but God confirmed for me that it was his plan. Fast-forward almost ten years, and now he's calling me to preach. At that point, it would have been disobedient for me to refuse to respond to God's call – it would have been sin. As long as I was "blind" to God's call, I wasn't disobedient by not responding to it, but once I knew that God was calling me, the only choices I had were to obey or disobey. I was now able to "see," and to refuse to acknowledge what I was "seeing" at that point would have been sin.

Well, the point of all of this is simple: God is speaking to you, to each one of you. Whether you're here in person today or watching this on Facebook, God is speaking to you. God has something that he wants you to do, and you know it. If you're doing what he wants you to do, GREAT! God will bless you and equip you to do exactly what he wants you to do, no matter how inadequate you may think you are. (Believe me, I'm living proof.) But if you're not doing what you know God wants you to do, I have to be honest and tell you that you're guilty of sin – because you're ignoring what you know God has commanded you to do. And no matter how much you try to cover that disobedience up by trying to do "good things," the fact is that God demands our obedience. It might be something big, like a call to ministry; it might be something small, like sharing your faith with your neighbor. It might be something that you think isn't "fair" or "logical" – like God's command to honor him with your finances, or to forgive those who have wronged you. It doesn't matter what it is – what matters is that you do what God desires.