

The Sighted Grow Blinder, The Blind Gain Sight

The disciples' question assumes that suffering is caused by sin. And it is true that sometimes the consequence of sin is suffering. But not all suffering is a result of a sinful act. This thought seems to escape the disciples. They have been taught that the sin of the parents can affect suffering in their children. Exodus 20:5 points to punishment of children for their parents' sin to the third and fourth generation. They were also trained in a culture that believed children could sin in the womb and thus the subsequent suffering was their own fault. This teaching was based in part on the struggle that Jacob and Esau experienced in their mother's womb. So the disciples came to the most known conclusion – this man was blind because someone had sinned.

This was not the first time the blind man had heard this question. Probably since birth he has been hearing over and over again that somebody had sinned to cause his blindness. His parents' answer had to be, "Well, it wasn't us..." leaving the world to believe, and more importantly, their son to believe it was his fault. He must have sinned in the womb.

What a self-image he had to have. Bearing the guilt and condemnation from society, from his parents, and from his own belief that he was guilty. The disciples' question was not new. If they had waited for an answer from him, he probably would have told them, "it was my fault." But Jesus did not wait for his response. He answered them. Immediately Jesus responds and the healing process is begun. Jesus proclaims, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned."

Can you sense the relief this man must have felt just hearing those words? After all these years someone has said what he could never hope to believe. He was not the cause of his blindness. He did nothing in the womb so hideous to warrant the punishment of being blind. No. what he suffered was simply a birth defect. He was born blind. And now, after all these years, Jesus says that Jesus will use his affliction to show the works of God, for God's glory. God will take this man's lemon and make it into lemonade, so to speak.

This is so like God!! Most of us suffer some sort of affliction in our lives – sickness, unemployment, poverty, loss of a loved one. And under the pressures of these afflictions we begin to feel miserable. Sometimes it goes so far that friends and acquaintances begin to ask Why? What did you do wrong? Friends and relatives' comments and questions chip away at our self-esteem. This in addition to the problems which have already gotten us down. But God does not leave us there. God witnesses to our inner being that we belong to God and God doesn't make junk. God lifts us up from the inside. God restores our soul. Jesus restores the blind man's soul.

Now that Jesus has freed the blind man from false guilt and condemnation and restored his soul, Jesus turns to the physical problem at hand. He bends over, spits on the ground, makes mud and puts the mud on the blind man's eyes. This practice was not unheard of in those days. Spit was considered medicinal. And using the mud reflects the creation story of God created Adam from the dust of the ground. This is important because the healing that Jesus is doing is not restorative. This man never had any sight. No, this healing was a creative process. As in the creation, God created out of nothing, ex nihilo, here Jesus is exercising his position in and power as God by creating sight ex nihilo – from nothing.

These neighbors were not just simply refusing to believe when they said they weren't sure of his identity. These people genuinely did not recognize him for certain. For years the blind man had been sitting by the side of the road. The people had stopped looking at him with any intensity long ago. And when they had noticed him, they saw a man with dead eyes. The Bible tells us that our eyes are the window into our soul. The blind man's gaze was absent of any life. This man that was before them now actually looked different. This man's eyes were clear and vital. They could see beyond his face and see life in his soul. Was this the same man or not? The people hesitated. The man answered, Yes he was.

They brought the man to the Pharisees to show himself to them. Rather than celebrating the healing miracle, they jumped on the fact that it was done on the Sabbath. They failed to recognize Jesus as God. God who made the Sabbath. God who perpetuated God's activities every minute of every day including the Sabbath. God, who sustains life on the Sabbath; God who ends life on the Sabbath; God who heals on the Sabbath. God is God of the Sabbath and Jesus is God. They didn't recognize Jesus as God so the only other conclusion they could embrace was that Jesus was a sinner. Their spiritual sight got dimmer. At the same time the blind man, when asked, proclaimed Jesus was a prophet and his spiritual sight got brighter.

Now the story turns to the parents. The Jewish authorities wanted to hear their side of the story. The parents affirmed he was their blind son and that he now was sighted. But they were afraid if they acknowledged Jesus' role in the healing that they might be excommunicated from the synagogue and the community. Instead, they side-stepped the issue. And the Parent's spiritual sight got dimmer.

The Pharisees, unhappy with the interview of the parents, return to the blind man and try to cajole him into admitting the healing man was a sinner. But the man was having no part of it. Jesus had set him free from the false guilt and condemnation he had lived with his whole life. Jesus had given him sight. He may not yet fully know who Jesus was but he knew he had become Jesus' disciple. And his spiritual sight got brighter.

The Pharisees, however, clung to their belief in Moses and rejected Jesus. They failed to realize that Moses came to point the way to the Messiah, Jesus. The religious leaders' spiritual sight got dimmer still.

And now the formerly blind man turns and begins admonishing the authorities. Given what has happened, my sight was given to me and given the character of God, it doesn't even make sense for you not to believe Jesus was from God. He tells them to Get Real. And his spiritual sight is keener than ever.

But the Pharisees weren't having that! They reminded him of how guilty and worthless he had been and rejected his words. For the Pharisees it was getting darker. And now we have the great encounter with Jesus. Jesus goes and finds him and reveals that Jesus is the Son of man. He responded believing Jesus' words and worshipped him. HE SAW A GREAT LIGHT!!

Each day we face the same decision that the Pharisees, the blind man's parents, and the blind man himself, as well as Jesus' disciples faced that day. Is Jesus God? If he is then that changes things for all of us immensely and many of us as well as many in the Bible account today, choose to turn away and keep the status quo. As long as we do not recognize Jesus as God, we are not compelled to live our lives in accordance to his commands and his teachings. But once we give Jesus his rightful due as God, as Lord, then we are required to respond to Jesus as such.

The Pharisees were far from wanting to do that. They chose to reject this man's testimony and in it Jesus' true identity. So they went off, spiritually blind, walking in the darkness, and refusing to see the great light which was right there in front of them. Likewise the man's parents, afraid of losing their status in society – a religious society albeit – refused to take a stand, refused to acknowledge Jesus, and they continued to walk in darkness. Even Jesus' own disciples were not sure and questioned him. Fortunately, they did believe and they and this newly awakened soul, blind from birth, but now both physically and spiritually able to see, saw a great light.

The Pharisees refused to see even their own blindness. They just wanted to keep the status quo. But Christ has redefined them. The Pharisees objected, saying they were NOT blind. Jesus' response to them was packed with meaning, "If you were blind, you would not have sin." But you could not be blind . . .

- You were not blind, so you saw that I healed only as God could heal, Ex nihilo and you closed your eyes and chose not to see.
- You were not blind, so you recognized that the Sabbath belongs to God and only God can perform God-work on the Sabbath, but you closed your eyes and chose not to see.
- You were not blind to the fact that Moses taught about me the Messiah, but you closed your eyes and chose not to see.
- You were not blind to the fact that I am the Son of Man but you closed your eyes and chose not to see.

- You were not blind so you saw the man worshipping me and me receiving his worship as only God can receive worship but you closed your eyes and chose not to see.

Since you say you are not blind, you have cooked your own goose! Your sins remain.

In our Epistle today, we learn that we are not only to see a great light, we are to be a great light. It is our lives that now illuminate God for the rest of the earth. You may say, "What have I ever done to illuminate someone's way?" Well, perhaps you returned a kind word to a cashier who snapped at you for something you did or did not do in line. Perhaps you took the time to bend over and pick up something someone else had knocked on the floor and returned it to its proper place on the shelf. Perhaps you were able to give someone a meal, or a room for a night, or some other gesture birthed in your heart by the love of God for God's own creation. We are the light, no matter how small of a light we may think we are. When you are in a dark place and light a tiny match, that small flickering wooden stick can illuminate a whole room. So we need not be concerned how much of the light we think we shine. As long as we realize that we are God's own disciples and choose our steps as God illuminates our path, we will walk in the light and we will become light to all. And if the spiritually blind get a glimpse of that light, they may be drawn to it like a moth to a light bulb. And then we, like our Master, can show the way, the truth and the light to them and to others around us.

Jesus did not force belief on either the blind man or the authorities. He acted in a way that revealed God's glory and allowed the people to choose. The blind man responded by believing and the authorities responded by not believing. They both saw the light -- The light that shines and the light that blinds. Let us choose this day to see the light, embrace the light, live the light, be the light. In Jesus Name.