

The Miracle of New Sight, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. L4080302
John 9:1-11 and Ephesians 5:8-14
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There are many issues buried in the story of Jesus' healing a man who was blind from birth. When we can see them, the story bursts into a rainbow of colors when, from a distance, all that we could previously see was a drab gray. In a few short paragraphs, we see Jesus deal with questions of divine blame and punishment, of legality, and of faith.

Jesus and the disciples were walking along, and they came upon a man who had been blind since birth. With an utterly boorish question, the disciples asked Jesus whether the man had sinned or whether his parents had sinned. Can you imagine that? What if you were a blind person sitting, begging for food, and a group of people gathered around you to discuss philosophies and legal systems while you were starving? It would be like a television crew filming a person drowning without throwing a lifeline. It makes for good news coverage, but poor preservation of life. Sometimes, we do that too. We talk about a person in their presence as though they weren't even there. We do that with children and with people with disabilities.

Behind the disciples' question was a concern of how we explain the presence of evil, pain, and suffering in world. The very wording of the question revealed the disciples' belief that this man was blind as a punishment because someone had sinned. Either he had (there was belief at that time that it was possible for a baby to sin within the womb) or the parents had sinned and their sins were being visited upon their children, which was not very fair either. Either way, we can see that people believed that disabilities were God's punishment for sins committed.

This has been a common line of thinking even to the present day. AIDS was described by some as God's punishment for homosexual behavior. Herpes has been described as God's punishment for fornication and adultery, or, in non-biblical terms, "messaging around." If that is the case, how would you like to have someone kick you while you are down with your injuries, saying they are punishment from God for some sin you committed? I suspect our primitive revulsion to people with disabilities such as blindness, deafness, mental retardation, and cerebral palsy come from that kind thinking.

Jesus denied the theory of punishment as divine retribution. He said neither did the parents nor the man sin to cause this blindness. Rather, the man was born blind so God could be glorified. God's power could be displayed in healing him. Think of that answer! It is just as boorish as the idea of discussing the causes blindness. Shall we believe that God gets glory off of the suffering of an individual? ...That God is some kind sadist?

No, that is not what Jesus had in mind. We humans tend to think of purpose— what is the purpose of this or that. We ought to disregard looking for purpose. Don't think that Jesus was implying that God planned from the beginning of creation to have this man born blind, live years of misery and stumbling, so that at this moment Jesus could come by, heal him, and therefore glorify God! The man was born blind for no particular reason, just as many people have disabilities.

It was Jesus' job, as it was the disciples' job, and as it is the church's job to see every human being is accepted, loved, cared for, and has the best opportunities to reach their fullest potential. In this case, Jesus was able to heal the man and God was glorified.

In other cases, God is glorified because people accept and aid the person with disabilities. In other cases, people with disabilities make the best of their situation, rise above adversity, and fulfill the promise within themselves. My sister Chip always thought of herself as a "special child." Her parents taught her that idea. Chip was born with Down Syndrome, but lived a life of volunteering and giving and helping others.

God loves all people, and it is up to us to try our best to love and accept them, no matter what

their condition. This is not a question, then, of who was to blame for blindness, but rather how God can be glorified through our handling of such misfortune.

The second issue here is that of legality. Jesus saw an urgency in healing this man, just as he saw a similar urgency upon other occasions. Following the idea that the sabbath was made for humanity and not humanity for the sabbath, Jesus healed this man on the sabbath which was a no-no. The Pharisees were outraged. Rather than rejoicing because the man, once blind, could now see, they dragged him in to grill him about who healed him and when. Sure, he had been blind for thirty years; what is wrong with making him wait one more day, thereby observing the laws of rest for the glory of God on the sabbath? Jesus could see no reason to wait to heal him. Once again, Jesus' answer was that God was being glorified, so it was the perfect thing to do on the sabbath!

There are pros and cons to working on the sabbath. We need to have medical and police aid on Sundays, or on the Sabbath which is really Saturday. It is nice to have grocery stores, and Lowe's home improvement centers open on Sundays to buy food or parts and supplies for weekend mechanics, but, every worker has a right to freely worship God at least one day a week whether it is Saturday or Sunday.

I said, worship God. Those who don't care about worshiping can have other days off. There is a purpose to a day of rest and that is to glorify God. If the things we do on the sabbath do not glorify God, and I can think many Saturday and Sunday activities that do not glorify God and do not further the well-being of creation, then they are not proper activities for the one day set aside for God. Our work should be to glorify God. If it means doing something good for others on the Sabbath, do it.

Finally, the last issue in relation to the healing of the blind man has to do with faith. Every step of the story reflects a growth in faith and in recognition of who Jesus is. The man blind from birth symbolizes humanity's blindness to God's love and will. It was Jesus who gave the man new sight, even though the man never asked to be healed. (Imagine that. Jesus disrupted the man's life, and the man may not have wanted healing!)

Jesus healed the man by spitting on the ground and making a clay-like paste. It was an act reflective of God's making the first human. Jesus' act symbolized a new creation. The pool Jesus told the man to wash in is named "Siloam," which means "sent." This depicts the fact that Jesus was sent by God to give us sight. Washing in the pool symbolized the cleansing of sin by the waters of baptism. This story was used in the first Century church to teach about the Christian faith, leading converts to baptism.

Some who saw the man with sight could not believe it was the same man who had been blind since birth. Later on, even his parents were dragged in to be questioned about the incident. It was the man's confession and defense of faith that convinced others that Jesus really did heal him.

So, the story of the blind man is our story. Jesus can open our eyes too. You say you can see well? Much that we have not seen, and a lot what we need to see is not seen by eyes, but by the heart. Sometimes we need a new perspective to see things the way others see them. We need "insight" to be able to see the world from God's perspective. As many times as we have come to church, we still do not fully know Jesus. Let us ask God to open our eyes and give us Christ's perspective on the world. This would be the miracle of new sight for us.