

March Week 3

Sunday, 21 March 2010

St Mark's Sunday School – Years 7 & 8

Healing of the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)

Introduction

- Read John 9:1-41 together.
- Let's revise the 7 miracles in the gospel of St John:
 1. Turning water into wine (John 2:1-11)
 2. Healing the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54)
 3. Healing the 38-year paralytic at Bethesda (John 5:1-18) (we covered this last week)
 4. Feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1-14)
 5. Walking on the water (John 6:15-21)
 6. Healing the man born blind (John 9:1-41) (we'll cover this week)
 7. Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-57)

1. What do you need to know about this story?

- This is a miracle which only appears in the gospel of St John.
- This Sabbath miracle can be divided into 5 sections:
 1. The *suffering* of the blind man
 2. The *question* of the disciples
 3. The *answer* of Jesus
 4. The *cure* of the blind beggar
 5. The *division* among the Pharisees
- The man was born blind – the only blind person in the gospels referred to in this way.
- The man probably begged near the Temple because beggars were found near temple gates to ask for alms (see Acts 3:2).
- Back then, many Jewish people believed that if someone was born with a handicap, then someone in your family must have sinned. Either you sinned in the womb, or one of your parents did. For example, the “Midrash”, a book of traditions where the rabbis tried to elaborate on the Scriptures, said that a married man should not look at another woman, and even if he looks down at her heel, there's a chance that his children could be born retarded.

- The Lord's response to the disciples that neither the man nor his parents sinned (John 9:3) was a declaration that not all sickness is the result of sin.
- Another example is Lazarus. Lazarus' sickness was not the result of sin but was allowed by God so that Christ, the Son of God, might be glorified: *This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it (John 11:4)*.
- Some fundamentalist Christian groups on the fringes of mainstream Christianity teach that sickness is only from the devil and that if you are sick, then you have committed sin. That is totally unbiblical. Do not believe it! In fact, sickness can become an occasion in which people grow in perseverance and maturity leading to wisdom and obedience in God (Heb 5:7-9; James 1:2-8). In sickness, we learn to trust and depend on God (2 Cor 12:9) and renew our appreciation of God's faithfulness.
- The man born blind *never* requested a cure, nor was he brought by others to Jesus to be healed. How surprised he must have been when Jesus began to cure him of his blindness!
- Back then, saliva was used as a remedy for the eye. An ancient writer once said, "We are to believe that by continually anointing each morning with fasting saliva, that is, before eating, inflammation of the eyes are prevented". However, the startling aspect of the healing was the clay.
- The clay is a symbol which can be traced back to creation when man was formed of the dust of the earth – the Lord Jesus exercised the same creative power as that which made Adam.
- 2 reasons for placement of the spit and clay on the man's eyes:
 1. To evoke hope and expectation in the man. The sufferer had to be made conscious of the fact that it was Jesus, whom he could not see but could feel, who was the Healer.
 2. To show that virtue was not so much in the use of the means but in the Healer Himself. For example, Jesus was able to manifest His divine power without means, as in other cases of blindness (See Matt 9:27-30; Matt 20:30-34).
- It seemed useless that for a man who had been born blind to do such a simple thing as go to a pool to wash but having obeyed, he was cured. Blessing comes by way of obedience.
- The pool of Siloam = the Holy Spirit and the waters of baptism (1 Peter 3:21) which give us sight from the blindness of our sin.

- Note the man's progress of faith and knowledge – he believed Jesus was a Man (v 11), a Prophet (v 17), from God (v 33) and then finally, the Son of God. Are we getting a deeper knowledge of Christ?
- In summary, here is the meaning of the whole story.
- Man is blind. Father Adam put out our eyes. We cannot see spiritual things. Christ comes into this world and his gospel is despicable in man's esteem, even as spittle. The thought of it disgusts most men. He puts the Gospel on the blind eye – a gospel which like clay, would seem to make men more blind than before. The Holy Spirit comes like Siloam's pool. We go to him or rather He comes to us; sin is washed away by the cleansing influence of the Divine Comforter and we who were once blind begin to see things clearly and in a heavenly light.

2. What causes spiritual blindness?

- *One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see (John 9:25)*
- It is possible to have our sight and yet be blind to what is going on around us.
- In the story, we see 3 things that cause us to be spiritually blind today.
- Are you letting these things blind you?

(i) The disciples were blinded by judgment

- The disciples saw in the blind man a theological debate, and Jesus saw in the blind man someone in whom the work of God could be made known. Are you tempted to judge others?
- As a matter of fact, listen to what Jesus had to say about this issue: *Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Matt 7:1-2)*
- It is easier to *judge* (what the disciples did) than to *heal* (what Jesus did). We should not let judging others blind us from the fact that we are to be instruments of healing and not finger pointing.
- The traits that bother us in others are often the habits we dislike in ourselves. Our untamed bad behavior patterns are the very ones we want to change in others. Do you find it easy to magnify others' faults while excusing your own? If you are ready to criticise someone, check to see if you deserve the same criticism. Judge yourself first, then lovingly help and forgive your neighbor.

(ii) The neighbors were blinded by unbelief

- What happened when this man returned to the people who knew him? Some didn't believe it was him. Others demanded him to tell how this happened.
- Some of them may have even wondered for the rest of their lives, "Was he really blind, or has he been doing this in order to be a beggar?"
- **Illustration:** A man was walking along a narrow path, not paying much attention to where he was going. Suddenly, he slipped over the edge of a cliff. Realising that he couldn't hang on for long he called for help. *Man:* Is anybody up there? *Voice:* Yes, I'm here. *Man:* Who's that? *Voice:* The Lord. *Man:* Lord, help me! *Voice:* Do you trust me? *Man:* I trust you completely Lord. *Voice:* Good. Let go of the branch. *Man:* What?? *Voice:* I said, "Let go of the branch". *Man:* [After a long pause] Is anybody else up there?
- Do you sometimes feel like the man in this illustration? Are there areas of unbelief in your life where you think God has not been faithful?
- Don't be blinded by lack of faith in the power of your Lord.

(iii) The man's parents were blinded by fear

- When the Pharisees wanted answers they were not getting from the man himself, they called his parents in. How did they respond? Well, they wanted no part of it - they were afraid. What were they afraid of? Being thrown out of the synagogue.
- In our culture, if someone is removed from the church, they can go to the church down the road. However, in the Jewish culture, once you were removed from the Synagogue, you were out. You couldn't go down the road to the other Synagogue. Not only that, the other people were not allowed to speak or do business with someone who was removed from the Synagogue.
- Do you have specific fears? How are you handling them?
- *Afterwards, God spoke to Abram in a vision and this is what he told him: Don't be fearful Abram, for I will defend you. And I will give you great blessings (Genesis 15:1)*
- God gave him 2 good reasons for courage: (1) he promised to defend Abram and (2) he promised to give Abram "great blessings".
- When you fear what lies ahead, remember that God will stay with you through difficult times and that he has promised you great blessings. Just remain faithful to Him.
