

IMPROVED EYESIGHT - JOHN 9:1-39

John had always had trouble with his eyes. He had recognized his problem of being nearsighted as a youth, but his nearsightedness had been compounded by his insatiable thirst for knowledge. John's parents noticed that his eyes were red and bloodshot in the morning certain days during the month, but they never made the connection that it was during those nights when the moon was full that John would get up in the middle of the night and read and read and memorize the books by the light of the moon that were traditionally thought to be too advanced for him, so were not made available for his use during the daylight hours. By the time John was a man, extremely proficient in his field, his poor eyesight really was causing a hindrance to his genius. And so when John heard about a British doctor named John Taylor who claimed with complete confidence to be able to cure eyesight problems, we can understand how John would be interested. Perhaps he should have been skeptical that first time he visited the office of Dr. Taylor for upon examining John's eyes, Dr. Taylor immediately not only prescribed surgery, but then went into a lengthy proclamation calling himself in his very own words "the greatest ophthalmologist of all time." But John felt desperate, so he entrusted his failing eyesight to Dr. Taylor. Before the operation itself, Dr. Taylor again launched into a speech bragging about himself and his abilities. Finally, he began the operation that involved piercing the eyeballs with a needle, without any anesthesia. History has judged Dr. John Taylor rather harshly. Not only was the operation a failure, for John completely lost his eyesight after it, but John who was rather healthy physically before the operation began, became quite ill following it,

and in about a year, John died completely blind. So it was that one of the great masters of all time had his career cut short in its prime by failing eyesight and an impudent surgeon who in his arrogance claimed miraculous healing powers over the human eye. With the music that we do possess from John Sebastian Bach, one can only speculate as to what he could have accomplished in life if he would have had perfect vision.

There are few blessings of God that are more valuable to us than our eyesight. To be able to see is a priceless commodity, and few of us would be able to function in the jobs that we now perform as efficiently as we do without our eyesight. I have been reminded just the past couple of weeks of the importance of my eyes. Actually, this is the 3rd attack I've had on my right eye during my ministry. In the first couple of years of my ministry, when I was leading a youth hay ride, I almost lost my right eye. The wagon we were riding in didn't have any tail lights so I had been commissioned to hold this 3 foot pole with a light on the top of it. When we made a very brief crossing of the road from one field to the other, this would at least give some light at the back of the hay wagon. Well, we passed another wagon of rambunctious youth from another organization, and one of those youth evidently thought it would be fun to break our light with a stone. Unhappily for me, his aim was as bad as his judgment, and the stone he threw hit me right in the eye in the darkness of the night. The doctor at the Greenville emergency room later said I was fortunate to not have lost my eye. Several years later I was playing racquetball with our now State Representative, Tom Pierce, and he hit me in the right eye in another freak accident. And again, these past 2

weeks, with this sudden allergic reaction that I experienced in my eyes, I have been reminded how important our eyesight is to the normal functioning of our lives.

As we reflect upon the indispensable nature of our eyes, we can only imagine the glory that was introduced into an unnamed man's life when Jesus gave him sight for the very first time. It is recorded in the ninth chapter of John, the 6th miracle that Jesus performed recorded by the beloved Apostle.

This miracle is a unique one in many ways, and we could spend valuable time studying it from several angles.

G. Campbell Morgan claims that this is the only miracle that Jesus performed throughout his entire ministry that healed a congenital problem. This man had been born blind. He had never seen the sun shimmering off of the waves on the Sea of Galilee. He had never seen the beauty of the multi-colored wild flowers growing on the Galilean hillside. He had never seen the deep blue sky contrasted to the puffs of pure white clouds. He had been blind from birth- all he had known was black darkness. Now Jesus undoubtedly corrected many other congenital problems, but this one is recorded for us in the Scriptures.

This is also one of the few miracles in which Jesus used a means to bring about the healing. Normally, Jesus brought about the healing immediately. He spoke, and it was accomplished. Yet, in this case Jesus made a little mud pack to put on the man's eyes. And then he commanded the man to go and wash the mud off in the pool of Siloam. It was only upon his obedience to the instructions of Christ that he actually received his eyesight. The patristic writers had interesting

discussions of this means which Jesus used in light of the fact that man was originally created from the dust of the ground. Was this Christ's way of demonstrating his creative act in making the eyes whole by using this mud from the ground?

Further, there is the whole question of suffering and why people suffer which is introduced by the disciples in verse 1. Their view was basically the same as Job's friends- all suffering comes directly as the result of some specific sin. In most of the miracles that Jesus performed, there was no problem to them with this viewpoint. But in this one, the man had a congenital defect, blind from birth. How could that be the result of his sin- did he sin before he was even born in some pre-existent state? Or perhaps was he suffering because of his parent's sin? The disciples' view was the prevailing view of the time, and it must be noted carefully for the Pharisees are going to refer to this line of thinking later in the account (vs. 34), but Jesus takes this opportunity to broaden their concept of suffering. He does not deny that suffering sometimes occurs as the result of sin- for it surely can and often does. But there are far more reasons for suffering than this simple, narrow reason. The Bible indicates that suffering sometimes occurs so that we might learn lessons- Jesus learned obedience through the things he suffered according to the author of Hebrews (5:8). And this same author also says that he was made complete by the things he suffered (2:10), so suffering sometimes is for the purpose of our character development, our maturity. Paul was given the thorn in the flesh lest he might be puffed up in pride (2 Cor. 12:7), so sometimes suffering is for the purpose of making us more humble. There are many reasons

for suffering. In this specific case, Jesus said this suffering was so that the works of God might be displayed in his life at this very moment- so that Jesus might be seen to be the Messiah in all splendor and glory. So Christ expands their narrow concept of suffering in this miracle.

And so you see, one could look at this miracle from many differing vantage points, and all would be profitable to some degree. And perhaps we can view it again at a later date and examine some of these questions more fully. But this morning, we must focus our attention on the major thrust of the miracle- the primary reason why John included it with the other 6 to demonstrate the fact that Jesus Christ is the Messiah the son of the living God.

The nature of this specific miracle brings this out clearly, for while there are many other examples of physical healings in the Bible, there is no story of the giving of sight to the blind recorded anywhere in the Old Testament, nor by any of the apostles or Christ's followers anywhere else in the Bible. The closest that we have to it in the Bible was when Ananias laid hands on Saul's eyes after he had been temporarily blinded by the brilliant light on the road to Damascus- but even that was hardly in the same class as what Jesus did here. And when you consider the fact that no one else brought sight to sightless eyes, and that in the gospels there are more recorded miracles of Jesus giving sight to the blind than any other healing in any other category, we begin to be curious about this specific miracle as to its Messianic significance.

With all of the miracles performed by great servants of God empowered by the Holy Spirit throughout the Old Testament, we might wonder how could the people

recognize the Messiah when he would come and distinguish him from the other prophets of God. After all, Moses brought about the great plagues with the rod of God, Elijah and Elisha healed the infirmed even bringing back the dead to life again. What would distinguish the Messiah from all of the other prophets of God?

The answer to that question is given clearly in the prophetic writings in the Old Testament. Let me read one of the several passages for you:

"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy. Isaiah 35:1-6.

One of the unique signs of the Messiah, the son of David, was that the eyes of the blind would be opened. That is the reason for Christ's very unique answer to the disciples of John the Baptist when they approached him in Luke 7. You will recall that John the Baptist was in prison, very close to death. He was discouraged. He had anticipated a great Messianic kingdom, and now he was in prison awaiting execution. And he began to have some doubts- was Jesus really the Messiah or not? And so he sent some of his followers to Jesus to ask him- are

you really the Messiah or should we look for another? Luke records that Jesus in response to their question gave sight to many who were blind, and then said to them, "Go back and report to John what you have seen, how that the blind have received their sight." Luke 7:22

Christ knew that with his knowledge of the Old Testament, John the Baptist would be able to discern the Messianic signs which Christ was fulfilling.

So it does not surprise us at all to see this miracle, Jesus giving sight to this man who had been blind from birth, at this point in John's progression- just one step away from the climax. These signs have been given so that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God- and this miracle is one of the specific ones prophesied that the Messiah would perform.

We would expect then that this miracle would conclude with the healed man believing in Jesus as the Messiah, and we are not disappointed. But there are three stages that this man goes through in his acceptance of Jesus Christ as his savior and Lord. We would like to look at these this morning, for they show the growth of this man's faith. Each step is taken only with courage, as this man is willing to stand against the flow of public opinion and pressure. But each step is necessary if he was to be not only healed physically, but also healed spiritually on the inside as well.

1. The first stage was his acceptance of Jesus Christ as a healer. READ John 9:6-11

JN 9:6 Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

JN 9:8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

JN 9:10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

JN 9:11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

Now this was a significant first step. It required a measure of faith and trust. This man had to accept this mud paste on his eyes, obey the directions of the Lord, go to the pool of Siloam and wash the mud from his eyes. This would have been somewhat of an inconvenience for him being blind to find his way to the pool of Siloam. However, if he had not been obedient to the instructions which Christ had given, he never would have been healed. And more importantly than even his physical healing, he would not have taken a step in faith that would open him to further revelation concerning Christ, for it is as we respond in faith and obedience to the revelation that we have that God gives us more insights through the Holy Spirit. Notice with me that he did have a mild confrontation right after his healing.

There was a disagreement about whether or not he was the man who had been blind. Some wanted to immediately dismiss the possibility of a miracle by changing his identity. But he stood up and said, "I am the man", and in this statement he identified himself with the healing and, therefore, with the healer, Jesus Christ.

Now this first step was a small one to be sure, for he had everything to gain,

and nothing to lose. But it was a step, nevertheless, and it opened the possibilities for the next step.

2. The second stage was his recognition of Christ as a prophet. As a result of his healing, questions began to be raised concerning the power that Christ had exerted. And it was through these questions that this man came to the place where he identified the power of Christ as coming from God, and Christ therefore to be a prophet of God.

READ 9:13-34

JN 9:13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

JN 9:16 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 do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.

JN 9:17 Finally 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."

JN 9:18 The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

JN 9:20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹ 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." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that

anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

JN 9:24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

JN 9:25 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!"

JN 9:26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

JN 9:27 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?"

JN 9:28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

JN 9:30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

JN 9:34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Isn't it fascinating to see the growth in the thinking of this healed man in contrast to the spiritual blindness and irrationality of the Pharisees. In fact, the Pharisees end up where the disciples began. Why listen to this blind man- we know that blindness is always the result of sin, so he is just a sinner anyway. It didn't matter that he had been healed. They were so blinded in ignorance that they weren't about to believe the truth. And the irrationality of their position is incredible.

Even if he were blinded because of his sin, he must have received sight because of some righteousness. Yet they don't want to consider such a possibility, because that might lend credibility to this one who was fulfilling these Messianic signs. "And we know that this man (Christ) is a sinner." (9:24) Their minds had already been made up.

Now we must not overlook the courage that this man demonstrates at this point- far more courage than even his parents are willing to exercise. He is under official pressure now. The consequences are very heavy indeed, for he risks being excommunicated from the temple area. And all because he was willing to admit that Jesus was a prophet of God. Family pressure, societal pressure, religious pressure is placed upon him to conform to the popular thinking of his day. Yet he had experienced an act of kindness from Jesus, and he could not believe that he was an evil, corrupt man. Therefore, the only other alternative for one demonstrating such divine powers was that he was a prophet. And this man was honest enough to confess this fact publicly in the face of opposition. And this is significant because this confession lead him to the possibility of taking the next step.

3. That was to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah. READ John 9:35-38.

JN 9:35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

JN 9:36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

JN 9:37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

JN 9:38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

Here we have a beautiful conclusion to our story. Just hours before, this man had been physically blind without any hope of seeing. He had never known the privilege of seeing a sunset, nor did he ever expect to having been blinded from birth. All he hoped for was to receive enough alms to be able to buy food to eat for the day. But then a man named Jesus came by with some of his disciples. And he received a gift which he could have never bought no matter how many alms he had gathered. Now he could see- the scales of blindness had been lifted from his eyes. And he responded properly with thanksgiving and respect for this man who had given to him his sight. But Christ was not through with him yet. As this man responded in obedience to the instructions of Jesus Christ, Christ provided more and more spiritual insights to him. And now, as great as the gift of physical sight had been, Jesus Christ is going to give to him an even greater gift. The scales of spiritual darkness would be lifted from his spiritual eyes, and he would see the one who had been sent to be the Savior and Messiah for the world for the very first time. And this man continued to respond in obedience to this new revelation, and received the most priceless gift of all, the gift of eternal life.

Jesus had performed one of the unique miracles which had been designated to demonstrate that he was the Messiah- that of bringing sight to blinded eyes. He then claimed to be the Messiah sent from God - "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." The result among those who chose to continue in their spiritual blindness was that they either denied that this healed man was the same one who sat by the gate begging alms which was totally irrational in light of

the clear evidence or that they attributed this kind and benevolent act to God's enemy shutting their minds to the truth as the Pharisees did. But some, including this healed man, received the truth and with it eternal life.

Now this scene has been multiplied millions of times down through the past 2,000 years, because ever since Jesus came to earth with his claim to be the Messiah, everyone has had to make a personal judgment on that claim. And this very day, every single person in our country must have a belief with regards to who Jesus Christ is. Many, in fact most, are willing to accept Jesus as a good man. Certainly his desire to heal and help people, and the many benevolent organizations which have come from his teachings- churches, orphanages, hospitals, city missions, clinics, etc- give ample evidence to the sincerity of his motives. Fewer people accept Jesus Christ as a prophet, a spokesman for God himself. And those who do accept Jesus as a prophet have to battle some opposition. It is not strong opposition because this belief is not that much against the majority opinion, but it is some opposition. Fewer people still are willing to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Savior of the world. These, like this healed man, face much greater opposition for they stand against the entire flow of the majority who feel that they somehow will be able to save themselves through good works, and sincerity.

But strangely in our day, there are many who have stopped at stage number one, and who linger on that plateau. They accept Jesus Christ as a good man, a healer, but not as a prophet or as the Savior Messiah. And you noticed with me that this did not occur in this passage, didn't you. It didn't occur with anyone.

Christ's Messianic miracle of healing the blind forced a decision. The Pharisees, other religious leaders and their followers came to the conclusion that Christ was a sinner, that he was serving God's enemy the devil, and they threw Christ's followers out of their religious fellowship. This healed man and others like him came to the conclusion that Jesus was the Savior Messiah sent from God to die for their sins. And there is really no middle ground between these two beliefs if one is to be true intellectually to himself. And if you see nothing else at all from this message, I would trust that you would see that point.

One of the great thinkers to recent centuries, an English agnostic turned Christian named C.S. Lewis put it so well in a in his book entitled "Mere Christianity" that I would like to read his paragraph in closing. "I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic- on a level with the man who says he is a poacher egg- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Jesus came in John 9 publicly presenting himself to be the Messiah sent from

God. He did this by performing the Messianic sign of giving sight to the blind according to the prophets of the Old Testament. All who obtained knowledge of that sign had a choice to make. As they observed the healed man, they could either accept that claim that yes, indeed, Jesus Christ was the Savior Messiah, and in accepting that claim they could become his followers. The man who was healed made that choice. Or if they refused to accept Christ as the Messiah, they could attribute his claim as the deceptive work of the enemy and his miraculous power as coming from Satan himself. They really didn't have any other choice. The Pharisees and other religious leaders chose this path, and they began to plot his death.

Christ has presented himself as the savior Messiah. Have you received him as healer, prophet and Messiah. If so you can also know the blessing of having those spiritual eyes that have been blinded from birth opened to see the glorious truth of God's wonderful privilege of eternal life.