

John 54 – The Man Born Blind

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 9:1-41 ESV)

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"

Some said, "It is he."

Others said, "No, but he is like him."

He kept saying, "I am the man."

So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."

They said to him, "Where is he?"

He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?"

He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."

(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner."

He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

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

He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."

He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"

Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

Sermon:

After recognizing the LORD's providential hand upon the life of this man born blind, we next consider the man himself, and his response to the miraculous work of Christ upon and within his life. Although his name is never provided, John gives us a number of details which help create a fuller picture about who this anonymous man was and what his life was probably like.

The first detail is found in verse 2, when the disciples asked Jesus, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" (Jn. 9:2 ESV). Their question should cause us all to wonder, "How did they know that the man was born blind?". Apparently, the man and his story were known well enough that even Jesus' Galilean followers knew about it. Perhaps he possessed some degree of notoriety, due to the origin of his situation.

The second detail is his occupation, which was revealed in verse 8 as a beggar. Although the Law of Moses forbade the mistreatment or exploitation of the poor (Exodus 22:25, 23:6; Deuteronomy 24:17-18), and commanded that the Israelites should provide for the sojourners, widows, and orphans (Leviticus 19:10, Deuteronomy 10:18, 24:19-22) living within their midst, the Law did not prescribe any especial care or consideration for people in such dire circumstances that they depended on begging for their provision. Instead, a person who falling into beggary, was considered to be under the judgment of God. It was a sign of wickedness.

The Psalmist wrote, *“I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.”* (Ps. 37:25 ESV), associating begging with wickedness and the consequence of sin.

During the 1st century, the Jewish attitude towards beggars was summed up in an apocryphal book, called the Wisdom of Ben Sirach, written during the inter-Testamental period, *“My son, lead not a beggar's life; for better it is to die than to beg. The life of him that dependeth on another man's table is not to be counted for a life; for he polluteth himself with other men's meat: but a wise man well nurtured will beware thereof. Begging is sweet in the mouth of the shameless: but in his belly there shall burn a fire.”* (Sir. 40:28-30 KJA). Yet, in apparent contradiction, while it was prohibited to give alms to a beggar from the community fund, established for the care of widows and orphans, it was also prohibited to send a beggar away without giving him something¹; so, while the community was disallowed from helping, individuals were almost required to.

Thus, the common Jewish attitude during the life of Jesus, was:

- that it was better for a person to die than to be a beggar (see Luke 16:3 for another expression of this attitude).
- that being dependent on others, was not a worthwhile life since the dependent could become spiritually polluted or corrupted by the sins of their benefactor.
- that people who found begging to be personally profitable or enjoyable, were without a sense of shame because they chose it as a lifestyle. Although they might enjoy its present benefit, they would eventually come to regret it and suffer for it in the future.

Similarly, that third attitude was echoed by the Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians, *“For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.”* (2 Thess. 3:10-11 ESV). Here the Apostle condemns those who would choose the wicked way of slothfulness, over the righteousness of honest work and labor, *avad*. However, the context wherein Paul expresses this attitude is not concerning people forced to beg out of desperation and destitution. Instead, his ire is directed towards people who exploit and take advantage of other people's kindness.

But those attitudes are not what our Christian attitude towards begging or beggars should be. We should consider beggars as our neighbor and therefore, love them. We should be merciful and kind towards them. We should be charitable towards them and help them as far as we are able. We should follow the example of Jesus here, as well as that of Peter and John in Acts 3. Furthermore, Christians should work to help people in need, to prevent them from reaching such desperate need (Acts 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:16; James 1:27).

Meanwhile, the Gospels testify that the practice of begging was widespread and prevalent within or around every major city (Jerusalem: John 9:8, Acts 3:2; Jericho: Mark 10:46, Luke 18:35) in 1st Century Judea because there was no social network of support and because Roman taxation had impoverished the territory².

Therefore, this blind beggar did not beg by choice, but in utter desperation. He was living on the furthest fringe of society. He would have been ostracized by everyone. Furthermore, as a blind man, he likely would not have been permitted into the fellowship of the synagogue because of their negative assumption about his spiritual state, but he may have been allowed as close as the Court of the Gentiles at the Temple (Leviticus 21:17-20). Socially, he may have been considered somewhere around a leper. He expected no kindness from anyone. Everyone would presume him to be a wicked and unclean sinner because of his affliction. He would have been publicly visible, but only as an object of pity and revulsion, while the man himself would remain virtually unseen.

¹Geoffry Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 1 p. 451

²Geoffry Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 1 p. 451

The third detail is the blind man's age. Although it is not specifically stated, two points help us to be confident and understand that the man was actually a younger adult.

- The first point was the fact that both of his parents were still living and present.
- The second point was their testimony “*Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.*”. He was surely a younger teenager, likely somewhere between thirteen and fifteen, since otherwise, there would have been no need to mention his legal status or age.

The fourth detail also relates to his age. The responses to his healing: people not recognizing him as the same person, expressing disbelief in his story, or even doubting his blindness altogether; implies that he was not considered a credible witness. This likely a consequence of his age, since neither women nor children were accepted as witnesses.

Together, these details produce a picture of an unfortunate person struggling to survive; a young man, barely an adult, who had grown up without even the hope of hope. But, when Jesus saw this blind man and spoke to him, the man experienced a kindness that he had forever been denied. When the man heard Jesus's command to “*Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.*”, he obeyed and went, filled with a hope that he had never before dreamed of or imagined.

But, how did he respond to this wondrous miracle that Jesus had done for him? How did the people around him react?

“The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some said, ‘It is he.’ Others said, ‘No, but he is like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’”

Many people doubted the miracle. They questioned whether or not the man had been blind at all. They thought he was either an impostor or a fraud. When they asked him how the miracle happened, they did not like his answer when he told them plainly, “*The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.*”. Jesus put mud on his eyes and told him to go wash, nothing fancy or showy. Then, when they asked him where Jesus went afterwards, he did not know. It is unreasonable to expect that a blind man would know where someone had gone but, it is also reasonable to think that a miracle worker should wait around to see the result of his handiwork.

They clearly did not know what to think about the formerly blind man, so they took him to the “experts”. They brought him to the Pharisees: the men with expert knowledge and understanding about Scripture and the Law of Moses; to be judged. When the Pharisees interrogated the young man, he gave them the same answer, “*He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.*”. But, the Pharisees were more interested in the healer than the healed. They were more concerned with what Jesus did than they were about the providential wonder that this young man had experienced, especially after they discovered that he was healed on the Sabbath like the disabled man at Bethesda in John 5.

Deliberating among themselves, ignoring the young man, the Pharisees debated the subject of Jesus, once again. “*Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them.*” The Pharisees were not of one mind concerning Jesus. Some were beginning to believe Him and to believe in Him, but few were willing to openly admit it and we are beginning to see why.

The Pharisees asked the man, “*What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?*”. They asked this young man, someone who possessed less theological knowledge than they, for his opinion about Jesus. Since his lack of knowledge was supplemented by experience, he was able to confidently answer them, “*He is a prophet.*”. Answering the Pharisees, he made a credible profession of faith about Jesus. He demonstrated a

degree of understanding that they did not yet have. While his answer was based upon the experience of faith, rather than just his limited bible knowledge, the foundation he had gained in the Scriptures surely formed the lens that interpreted his experience.

The man did not know Jesus, *ginosko*, but he experienced Jesus. An earnest faith, *pisteuo*, was shown already growing within him. When Jesus told the blind man to “Go wash.”, he trusted Christ's word and obeyed His command, even though he had no rational reason to do so, except for faith. This is evidence that the Holy Spirit was already working within the blind man, giving him the faith necessary to believe and obey Jesus against all worldly wisdom. Jesus simply walked into this man's life and found that the soil of his heart was already prepared and ready for Him by God. Both his healing and his apparent regeneration are examples of the miraculous and providential works Christ was sent into the world to do (9:4) by God the Father.

But, the Jewish religious leaders and elite did not believe the man or his story. They did not believe that he was born blind, so they summoned his parents to confirm it. The Pharisees asked them, “*Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?*” His parents answered, “*We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.*” Although the testimony of his parents should have removed their doubts about the young man, their answer was also problematic for their son.

John provides us a parenthetical, explaining that “*His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.*”. It was becoming socially dangerous to express a positive opinion about Jesus. Confessing Jesus as anything more than a Rabbi, saying that He was a prophet or the Christ, deserved immediate excommunication. A person that was “*put out of the synagogue*” did not merely become a social pariah, they were total outcasts; culturally executed, as far as everyone was concerned. Being “*put out of the synagogue*” was the worst thing that could happen to a Jew because being “Jewish” was their core identity. It was their ethnicity and it was their faith. Being “*put out of the synagogue*” removed them from fellowship with the LORD and God's people. They lost access to their spiritual hope. Yet also, an excommunicated Jew, as far as the Gentiles were concerned, was still a Jew. Therefore, they would be utterly alone; cut off entirely from their family, their people, and their God. So, it is understandable why a person might not want to risk that. No one would risk losing everything they have and abandon all that they know, for an unproven hope. Even if a Jew thought that Jesus might be everything that He claimed to be, the odds were not in their favor.

Sadly, that seems to have been the opinion of this young man's parents. They were more concerned with their social status, their place within society, than with positively responding to what Jesus had done for their son. Instead of standing with their child, they cut him loose and socially abandoned him. They did not want to be associated with him or his profession of faith.

People were already disassociating from friends and family when they came to faith in Jesus Christ, two thousand years ago. It should not be any wonder that, more often than not, this still happens to Christian today. However, then and now, it is important for us to recognize, understand, and remember that when we come to Christ (John 3:3); when we begin to better obey Him; when we are being conformed to His image, away from the image of the world, through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2); those who belong to the world and this present age, are the ones who step away from us. As we become more Christ-like and sanctified, the holiness growing within us repels the worldly wicked (Isaiah 6:1-7). They abandon us, but we do not abandon them.

Although they may abandon or forsake their existing relationships with us, since we do not belong together (2 Corinthians 6:5; 1 John 2:19), we do not have the luxury to abandon them. They remain a field for us to evangelize for Christ, until they either prove themselves to be too hardened or they separate themselves from us, utterly. But, even then, we should not close the door on them. Do you recall the old style of adjoining hotel

rooms with the two doors between them? Their door may be closed, but we should leave our door open so that when Christ calls them to Himself, they may open it and find us ready and waiting to welcome them back.

After confirming the truth of his blindness with his parents, the Pharisees turned their attention back to the young man. They commanded him, *“Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.”*. They rightly encouraged him to give the LORD glory for this wonderful miracle. But then, they wrongfully and unjustly passed judgment against Jesus, who was not even present, by naming Him *“a sinner”*. Yet this young man stood confidently on his own, alone, without anyone's support and asserted what he believed and knew to be the truth about Jesus Christ. He answered the Pharisees, *“Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*.

Yet they continued to badger him, pressing him and pushing him, demanding to know, *“What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”*. Naturally, the man became confused. How was he to know “How”? If he knew how Jesus gave him sight, then would he not be helping other people to see? Or, since the young man had already told them his story multiple times, perhaps they were starting to believe him, so maybe they wanted to hear it again to write it down. So, he questioned them back, asking about their intention, purpose, and motivation, *“I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? **Do you also want to become his disciples?**”*. But, he was not being sarcastic. I think he was being earnest with his question. This was more evidence for his regeneration and of having received the gift of saving faith. Their response to this young man and his faith, which John tells us was that *“...they reviled him...”*, says far more about them than him. But, we will consider their response later on.

This young man demonstrated a degree of understanding that greatly exceeded the “wisdom of the wise”, when he answered their scorn, declaring *“Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.”*. He rebuked the Pharisee's disbelief. He pointed out how they were missing, ignoring, or suppressing the obvious truth, that only the most godly person: that only someone sent by the LORD and empowered by Him, (as Nicodemus had confessed in John 3:2 and Peter confessed in John 6:68-69); could do what Jesus was doing. Then he pointed out the greatest evidence affirming the miracle's divine origin, *“Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”*.

That fact, aside from being evidence that despite being blind he was at least minimally educated in the Scriptures, should have caused these religious leaders to stop, think, and remember. The young man was correct, search your Bible and you will not find another example of a man born blind receiving sight. Any similar examples you might find were of sight being restored, not sight being originally given. This miracle was not a wondrous healing. It was a miracle of creation. Jesus had done something new. It was even different from all His other miracles as well. Since the man was speaking to a group of Pharisees: men who believed in the resurrection, who believed the Word God gave to the prophets, and who hoped for a messiah; their minds should have been turned to the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah wrote several relevant prophecies, concerning the day of Israel's deliverance when the Christ would come:

- *“In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.”* (Isa. 29:18-19 ESV)
- *“Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.” Then the eyes of the blind shall be*

opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” (Isa. 35:4-6 ESV)

- *“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” (Isa. 42:6-7 ESV)*

We would also be wise to recall from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus's response to the envoy's sent from John the Baptist, asking whether He is truly the Christ. Jesus answered them, *“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” (Matt. 11:4-6 ESV).*

What the Pharisees should have recognized and understood that all of the miracles Jesus was performing were evidence that He is the Christ. The miracles were fulfilling divine prophecy. Yet the Pharisees, who should have known best, could not see it, while this uneducated young man, who grew up blind, saw the truth which they could not see. Instead, they proved themselves to be the other people whom Isaiah spoke about, whom the LORD had also sent the prophet to, *“Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” (Isa. 6:9-10 ESV).*

Although they saw with their eyes, the Pharisees were spiritually blind. Therefore, they judged and condemned this young man, saying *“You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?”*. Then, they excommunicated him. He was cast out of the synagogue: exiled from the community of Jewish fellowship. He was further away than when he was blind, and even his parents had disowned him. He was utterly alone.

But, when Jesus heard that the young man had been cast out, Jesus sought him out. Jesus asked him, *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*.

The young man answered Jesus, *“And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”*. Although everyone knew about a coming Messiah, whether or not they actually believed in Him, this man probably understood very little about Him. The narrative seems to suggest he did not immediately recognize Jesus as the man who healed him.

“Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.’”.

Suddenly understanding flooded the young man's mind. What he first knew by faith was now confirmed by sight. His spirit recognized his Savior and healer. Though blind, he had believed and trusted Jesus. After he received the gift of sight, he believed it even more strongly because his belief and hope had been proven true. His faith gave him the confidence to stand firm against those who stubbornly refused to believe his testimony or to believe in the man who had healed him. But now, once again confronted by the living Christ, he was asked, *“Do you believe? Do you trust me?”* and *“He said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”*.

This formerly blind man confessed his faith and then, he responded to Christ and what He had done for him by worshiping Him. Even though the conviction of his faith had already cost him everything, he worshiped and praised God in joy and with gratitude, because it also had given him everything. Meanwhile, Jesus had again claimed and proven His divinity through this sign and by His acceptance of worship.

This formerly blind man's story is a good analogy for what a Christian's spiritual experience is ordinarily like.

- Like him, we are all born spiritually blind. We are so bound by our sin and held captive in darkness that we do not even know what the light looks like. We are completely helpless. We are utterly unable to help ourselves, because we do not even understand what we need.

- Like him, we were not looking for Jesus. We did not know that He could help us. We did not know where to find Him. We did not know that we could even ask Him for help.
- Like him, Jesus walked into our life, uninvited. His Holy Spirit worked upon us without asking for our permission.
- Then, like him, we were each faced with a choice, ignore His command or obey Him, immediately and without question. Do we respond to Him with a heart filled with hope, trusting Him against all worldly reason? Do we respond with faith?
 - Yes, we each have responded with that faith, because who can disobey the voice of our King, especially when He gives us the ability and desire to do what He commands.
- Then, once we were healed like he was, once we were changed and made unrecognizable to those around us, what did we do and how did we react?
 - Our right response should be to tell others about what Jesus has done for us. We should not be shy about proclaiming the wonder of His miraculous power.
 - Like him, we cannot answer either how or why Jesus chose to make us whole. But, we may remain steadfast and sure, confident in what He had done to us, because it is our testimony; it happened to us. It is one of the few things in life that we can really be sure about.
- Then, when those around us revile us for our faith in Jesus, as the Pharisees did him, how should we respond?
 - Like him, we should remain steadfast, confident, and sure. We should answer their charges and accusations with the truth: that Jesus has changed us, and that it has nothing to do with who we are or what we have done, and that is in spite of who we are and what we have done.
 - Like him, we should tell them about Jesus and offer to help them become disciples of Christ, to lead them to follow Him.
 - Like him, even when we are persecuted and cast out for our faith in Christ; even when our friends or family abandon us because we are standing with, and standing for, the truth of God, we may remain steadfast in hope and joy because we know that Christ will come for us.

We know and therefore, we can stand confident in the expectation that everyone who believes and confesses that “Jesus Christ is Lord” before the world, will be acknowledged Him by Jesus before our Father in heaven and will be forgiven of their sins and justified by the blood of Jesus Christ.

But we also know that everyone who denies Christ to the world: everyone who denies that they belong to Him; everyone who denies that He is the LORD God; everyone who denies the Jesus is; will be denied by Christ before His Father in heaven and will be judged and condemned by their own sinfulness.

So, “*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*”. Do you believe in, is your whole faith and confidence placed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God the Son?

AMEN