

I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE I AM *fearfully & wonderfully made*

CHANGING  HEARTS

Opening Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for creating us and calling us Your own. Thank You for giving us opportunities to study Your Word. Help us see others through Your eyes and love others through Your heart. Your Son Jesus shows us how important it is to be healed and made whole through His love and grace. Help us recognize His compassion for us and share it with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

During our last session, we drew a distinction between the concepts of *curing* and *healing*, noting that the removal of an impairment or disease does not necessarily make the person *whole*. Jesus cured the man in John, chapter 5, even though the man did not recognize Jesus for who He was. Jesus warned the man about the consequences for disbelief, eternal separation from God.

We now turn our attention to another Sabbath healing in the book of John, the healing of the man who was born blind. (ch.9) It is markedly different in both its context and end result.

Note: Because this text is both lengthy and complex, we will work our way through it by dividing it into several segments, hoping to reassemble the key concepts at the end of the discussions. If time permits, reading though the entire chapter would be beneficial. It will provide a better sense of the overall content and purpose.

Read John 9: 1-5

- How are the disciples defining sin?
- Is there an alternative meaning for sin?
- What persistent wrong-headed teaching does Jesus debunk? (cf. Luke 13:1-5)
- Discuss the difference between impairment as a punishment for sin, and impairment as a consequence of sin.
- What works of God do you see displayed in this account?
- How does Jesus use the man's physical blindness to teach a spiritual truth?

The disciples limited sin to individual actions, either those of the man or his parents. In doing so, they address only the symptom of sin. Sin is more correctly seen as a condition which all humanity shares; our sinful actions show this condition. Clearly, the disciples saw only the man's impairment; his blindness was merely a topic of discussion. There was no empathy on their part, and had Jesus not changed their focus, they would most likely have continued on their way.

Scripture often uses *darkness* as a metaphor for our sinful condition, and John's Gospel follows this practice. Before Jesus addresses the man's impairment, Jesus gives purpose to the man's life. Jesus uses the man and his blindness to teach a very diverse group of people the truth about God's kingdom. Jesus also uses the contrast between night and day to emphasize He is the *Light of the World* (cf. John 8:12).

Read verses 6-7

- How is this healing different from other miracles Jesus performed?
- What do Jesus' methods tell you about how He viewed the man?
- Think back to the account in John 5 (lesson 3), concentrating only on the cures. What do they have in common? What is different?

Jesus could have cured the man instantly, as he had others. Yet, the method in this case suggests Jesus did not consider the man an object of pity. This is a stark contrast to the way in which the man at the pool of Bethesda is portrayed. Remember how his response to Jesus dripped with self-pity and helplessness? In this case, Jesus sends the man, while still blind, to wash in the pool of Siloam to affect the cure. John gives us no indication this was a hardship for the man; we are told simply *he went and washed*.

Continue with verses 8-12.

- What does the reaction of the neighbors suggest about their attitude toward the man and impairment in general?
- Do you find anything ironic in their actions?

Like the disciples, those who knew the man focused on his impairment instead of his personhood, remembering him as a *beggar* while denying his identity. These typical, sighted, people would not "believe their eyes" when confronted by a seeing man who had previously been blind from birth! This refusal persists to the point of being called before the Pharisees to give account for himself.

Unlike the man in chapter 5 (lesson3), this man becomes a disciple of Jesus. As you read through the rest of the account, notice how he refuses to be intimidated by the Pharisees. He calls Jesus a prophet and affirms Him being *from God*. Unable to accept this "heresy" from a man who once had a disability, the Pharisees excommunicate him. Although the man stood before them as a sighted person, the Pharisees spurn him with words that would remind him of his former impairment, *You were born in utter sin...* (v. 34).

- **What in this series has given you something to reconsider or ponder?**
- **Has this series helped you see the Bible accounts in a different light? Why or why not?**
- **The disciples were an example of how we often focus on a person's disability. What in this series will help you be an example of *People First* language? i.e. John who is blind.**
- **For further review of *People First* language, see Bethesda's *Wonderfully Made* series, *Communicating for Success*. (cph.org)**