

24. Healing the Blind Man

Jesus did many miracles. The apostle John calls his miracles “signs.” They signify something. Today we will examine a miracle of power and of compassion. It is also a miracle that shows the light, in more than one way.

“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.” (John 9:1-7)

A MIRACLE OF POWER AND COMPASSION

This miracle is impressive. It is already something extraordinary to give sight to a blind man. But as the healed man himself said, “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind” (John 9:32). For the One who formed the eye of man, of the eagle and of every living being, it was not a difficult thing to heal a blind man, but all the same, it is a demonstration of Jesus’ divine power. For the blind man who was healed, it was a proof that Jesus was from God. The miracles of Jesus and of his apostles always had this goal: to confirm the identity of Jesus and the message that his apostles brought as his spokesmen. Mark 16:20 says that the apostles “went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.”

But this miracle shows more than the power of Jesus. Like many of his miracles, it also shows his compassion. Compassion is being touched, moved by the problems and suffering of another; a feel-

ing of pity and a desire to help or relieve pain. Its opposite is insensitivity, hardness of heart or indifference.

Very often, the miracles of Jesus were motivated not only by his desire to create faith in others, but also by simple compassion. Before multiplying the loaves of bread and the fish to feed the multitude, he said in Matthew 15:32, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” When a leper, a man for whom all contact with other humans was prohibited by the Law, presented himself to Jesus, the Lord showed his compassion not only by healing him, but also by the manner in which he healed him—he touched the untouchable.

Mark 1:41-42 says, “Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.”

Still another example is found in Luke 7:11-16:

“Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen up among us’; and, ‘God has visited His people.’”

Faced with a person having an illness, a misfortune or any kind of suffering, the Jews wondered

what sin was its cause. The case of a person born with an illness or handicap posed a problem that the disciples of Jesus brought up: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). They were so certain that suffering always comes from sin, that they even admitted the possibility that a person may sin before birth.

Many people in different countries believe in reincarnation or karma. According to these beliefs, a person who dies returns in another body in order to be rewarded for good deeds or to suffer for the evil done in previous lives. Such a belief would not motivate anyone to act to relieve another's pain. After all, the suffering person did something to deserve this penalty even if it was in another life. An Arab proverb speaks of God rather than karma but the spirit is the same. It says, “If you see a blind man, give him a kick. Why would you be kinder than God?”

By his actions and his words, Jesus taught instead that it is necessary to have pity on those who suffer and to show mercy instead of trying to determine who is at fault. It is not always for us to know the exact reason for a sickness, but we must, as he did, seize every opportunity to show the works of God, works that show His love and compassion.

In his teaching, Jesus—like the Old Testament prophets—always insisted on the importance of mercy and compassion. In Matthew 23:23, he criticized the Jewish leaders because they scrupulously gave to God the tenth part of their income, even from the spices in their gardens, but they neglected what was most important in the law: justice, mercy and loyalty. In Luke 14:12-14, he recommends to his disciples that they invite to their feasts not their friends and rich neighbors, but the poor, the disabled, the lame and the blind who could not give anything back to them. God would reward them in the final judgment. In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches that one criterion used in the final judgment will be the compassion that we showed or failed to show toward others. In verses 41-45, he says:

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was

thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’”

The teaching of Jesus was not without effect on his disciples. They wanted to be like him. From the beginning of the church, we see a spirit of love and generosity which led many to sell their property and land in order to help those who were in need. This attitude continued to show this. About a hundred years after the establishment of the church, an author named Aristide wrote this on the subject of Christians:

“They love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit... And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food.”

To return to the healing of the blind man, Jesus did not blame the blind man or his parents. He simply used this occasion to demonstrate the great power of God and at the same time His compassion. But as with many of his miracles, there was, in addition, a lesson to be found, and we find in verse 5 of our text in John 9 the clue that allows us to guess what that lesson will be: “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

A MIRACLE WHICH SHOWS THE LIGHT

Light reveals. It shows things as they are. It shows their true nature. Light guides. The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. The darkness represents the state of those who do not love the good and who fear the light may expose their sins. The darkness represents life without Christ. We also find there the idea of ignorance, but especially of voluntary ignorance.

The rest of the story of the healing of the blind man shows all the efforts of the Jewish leaders to avoid recognizing what Jesus had done and what it meant—all their efforts to avoid seeing the light. First they said that Jesus could not be from God because he violated the Sabbath by healing the man on a Saturday. Actually Jesus had only violated their erroneous interpretations of the law of the Sabbath. Next they tried to say that the man had not really been blind, or at least had not been blind since birth. But the parents of the healed man confirmed that he had been born blind. The miracle was confirmed. The problem was that the Jewish leaders did not want to admit that Jesus was from God. As we see from John 9:22, “The Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.”

The healed man confessed his faith in Jesus, and he was, in fact, cast out of the synagogue. We read from verse 35-41:

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you

believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him.

“And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.’ Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, ‘Are we blind also?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, “We see.” Therefore your sin remains.’”

CONCLUSION

The miracle of Jesus allowed a man to see the light, first in a physical sense. He gave him sight. Afterward, this man, in his simplicity and humility, was able to see spiritual light, the light of the world. He believed in Jesus Christ. The Jewish leaders, in contrast, pronounced judgment on themselves in not seeing the good in Jesus and in not wanting to come near him, the true light. The first step toward salvation is the humility to recognize that we have not directed our steps well, that we need the light of Christ to arrive safe and sound. If one says: “I see already,” one will remain in the darkness, far from the God of love, compassion and light. Come to him while you still have the opportunity. Contact us if we can help you in this.