

## Miracles of Jesus - 5

# The Blind Man at Siloam

We do not know the name of the blind man, but we do know he had begged for years by the Temple steps. We know also that by Saturday evening he could see as quickly and sharply as the best of us.

John is the only gospel writer to record the unusual circumstances surrounding his healing. He is emphatic that the man had never been able to see – he was already blind when he was born. Like other disabled people in the capital city, he had a favourite pitch near the magnificent Temple of Herod, where he could call on passing visitors to spare him a coin. Most of us feel inclined to be generous close to our place of worship. He had become a regular part of the scenery, and the disciples must have walked past him many a time when they went up to Jerusalem each year for the feast.

### Why was he Blind?

It was a Sabbath day, and Jesus had just had a heated debate with the Pharisees. He had claimed to be able to set his disciples free from the power of death, but they had first mocked then threatened him. The disciples, not too tactfully, had stopped him on the steps outside and pointed to the blind man to ask if he would settle an argument about him.

Jewish tradition held that all suffering is the result of sin. If you fell under an ox cart, or went down with leprosy, you must have done something wrong to deserve it. This simple linkage was inclined to break down, however, in



the case of a man who had been born blind, because a baby is too young to do anything wrong. Should the blame for his condition, then, be laid at the feet of his parents? That in turn would contradict the teaching of the prophet Ezekiel that God does not punish the son for the sins of his father. It was a nice point of logic, and they wanted to hear Jesus' view.

At a stroke, he demolished the foundation of their argument. *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned"* he said (*John 9:3*). It is true that in a general sense illness is the result of sin, because suffering and death are both part of the curse that came into the world with Adam's sin, and illness is one of the causes of death. But we cannot assume that a particular disease is a punishment for a particular sin. Suffering affects good people as well as bad, as Job found when he was put to the test by the things which happened to him.

The reason this man had been born blind, Jesus went on, was so that he could be made better in a way that would bring men to think about God. With a cryptic phrase, he started them

on that road. “As long as I am in the world” he said “I am the light of the world” (v5). Whatever did he mean?

## **An Unusual Cure**

Without explaining his words, Jesus bent down, and from his own saliva and the dust of the road, made a sticky mud, which he pasted gently onto the eyelids of the blind beggar. If he was sightless before, he was now doubly blind – blind from birth and blind from the clay. “Go”, commanded Jesus when his work was complete, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (v7).

It is barely a quarter of a mile from the Temple to Siloam, a steep downhill road which on a Sabbath would be thick with people. The beggar would know the way, sensing the echoes of the Roman pavement, feeling stored heat from the sun radiating from stone walls, and the perilous descent on



worn, uneven steps to the cool liquid that gushed from the rock at the end of King Hezekiah’s conduit. Jesus was offering him the chance of a lifetime. He had never seen a miracle performed, but he had heard that Jesus of Nazareth brought healing to all kinds of sick folk.

He made a strange sight, tap, tapping along with clay-crust ed eyes and a haste that betrayed the urgency of his desire to see. We can picture him, kneeling down alongside the other people there, rubbing his eyes clean with the precious fluid, and turning upwards to see, for the first time ever, golden sunshine streaming down into the dark pool.

The place he knew only from its damp, mossy smell and tinkling watery sounds was transformed into a new world of colour, movement and vibrant life. Cobalt Mediterranean sky, silvery green leaves of olives, red sashes on white robes, bright eyes and creased brown faces – all the sights we take for granted – crashed in upon him with brilliant clarity. It was breath-taking. Tears of joy followed the Siloam water down his cheeks.

Racing back up the hill, weak limbs overstretched and heart pounding with excitement, he burst into the circle of his old friends.

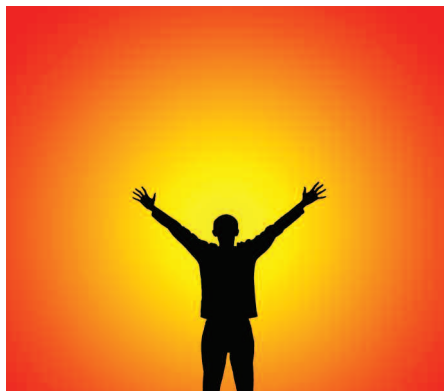
## **Friendly Faces?**

At first they failed to recognise him. We find the same difficulty when someone we know well goes out without his or her glasses. A lady I know sat next to her own mother without being recognised after she had her first pair of contact lenses.

*Therefore the neighbours and those who previously had seen that he was*

blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him." He said, "I am he" (v8-9).

He was the same person, but transformed from a hunched and sightless beggar into a radiant, excited youngster, bubbling with energy and joy.



The Pharisees were soon on the scene, dampening his enthusiasm with their ingrained hostility to the man who had made him better. Oblivious to the remarkable miracle that had been worked on the man, they decided that because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, he must be a sinner.

When someone pointed out that sinners do not usually work miracles, they changed their tactics and tried to suggest the man had never been blind in the first place; that he was making it all up. That argument fell to the ground when his parents came along and insisted their son had been born blind.

As the man himself mocked them for their refusal to accept the power of Jesus, they resorted to the age old weapon of out-argued clerics, and excommunicated him. This was a fearful punishment for a devout Jew,

cutting him off from synagogue, Temple and employment.

Knowing how wounded he would feel, with his new joy turned to loneliness and fear, Jesus himself went to look for his latest disciple. "Do you believe in the Son of God?" (v35) he enquired gravely. The blind man recognised the voice, but had never before seen this strong face with its compassionate but penetrating eyes. "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" he asked (v36). And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen him and it is he who is talking with you" (v37).

For the first time, he looked at the man who had opened his eyes, and gratitude, awe and respect filled his heart. Falling at Jesus' feet, he worshipped him.

## The Complete Healing Process

What was the lesson behind the clay? Why did Jesus send the man to Siloam to wash? And what did he mean when he said this?

*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 (v39).*

John only gives us a slender key to its interpretation. He mentions, in passing, that the word 'Siloam' means 'sent' (v7). It is a theme of John's gospel that Jesus was 'sent' from God. He mentions the fact 40 times in his 20 chapters. Therefore we may safely assume that the Pool of Siloam was symbolic of the Lord himself.

But why did Jesus cover the blind man's eyes with mud? Again, it is an Old Testament theme that man was made from dust, and that for his sins against God, he is doomed to return to

dust when he dies. ‘Dust’ equals ‘flesh’ is the idea, and ‘flesh’ in its pride and arrogance rebels against God. The blind man was symbolic of us all, cut off by our sins from the warmth and light of God’s presence, as Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden. But God sent us a saviour, His Son, to wash away our sins. If we follow his commandment carefully, we too will go down the steps into the water and come up new men and women.

Like the beggar man, we are all born blind. We are sinners by birth, and not even the most skilled and dedicated doctor can take away this malady. Neither can money buy us a cure. We have to believe in the power of Jesus to make us better, and go down into the water of baptism, washing away the clay of our past sins. That living water,



gushing out of the cool rock, can open our eyes and give us a new start in life. We shall be as happy at discovering the Saviour God has sent as the blind man at the Pool of Siloam.

## Recognising Our Need

Sadly, though, we will find plenty who, like the Pharisees, would pour scorn on our new-found faith. It is pride, so often, that blinds people to the truth about Jesus. The words of Jesus fit their case exactly “...now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains” (v41).

Confident in their college degrees, their traditions and their wisdom, they are not prepared to consider the claims of the carpenter from Nazareth. They cannot bring themselves to admit they need forgiveness from God. They will dream up many ingenious theories to explain away his miracles, even though, as the blind man pointed out with devastating logic:

*Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind (v32).*

This is what Jesus was talking about in verse 39. He came ‘for judgement’ because he divides mankind; everyone has to make up his or her mind about Jesus, one way or the other. Either you accept his claims, or you reject them; there is no middle way.

Those who insist they can see quite well, thank you, and have no need of the Light of the world, remain eternally blind.

But those who are prepared to admit they are blind, helpless in the dark world of sin and death, can call on his healing power and be made to see.

**David M. Pearce**