

“WHY DID JESUS COME?”

“The Recovery of Sight for the Blind”

Scripture Reading – Luke, 4:14-21

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’.

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.

‘Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”.’

John, 10:10, NIV

Why did Jesus come into the world? What was his manifesto? His mission?

Jesus, a truly great man, with authority and conviction, knew himself what was his destiny. He knew it was clearly prophesised in **Isaiah, 61:1-3**. He revealed this God-ordained mission first in the synagogue at Nazareth, his hometown. Unlike the (political and other) leaders of today, Jesus would actually live up to his commitment. He was, and remains, the only person who could truthfully claim, **“I ALWAYS DO WHAT PLEASES MY FATHER”** (see **John, 8:29**).

Notice that ‘ON THE SABBATH DAY HE WENT INTO THE SYNAGOGUE, AS WAS HIS CUSTOM’.

Although he was the perfect Son of God, and his local synagogue probably left much to be desired, Jesus attended services every week. There must have been many things with which he radically disagreed, and which ‘grated’ on him – yet still he went. The worship in the synagogue might have been far from perfect, but Jesus never allowed it to prevent him from joining with God’s people to worship God on God’s day.

On this particular Sabbath day, the residents of his home town were in for a surprise.

Having read from the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus claimed, **“TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING”**. I like the NLT because it says, **“THIS SCRIPTURE HAS COME TRUE TODAY BEFORE**

YOUR VERY EYES”! The people were amazed. Here was Jesus, the carpenter’s son, whom they had seen grow up from childhood, actually claiming to be the Messiah, the Christ. Could it really be true of him?

‘WHY DID JESUS COME?’ In this Advent Series, we will seek to answer this question.

Jesus came...

“TO PROCLAIM RECOVERY OF SIGHT FOR THE BLIND”

‘Jesus found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me... He has sent me to proclaim...recovery of sight for the blind...”. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.’

Luke, 4:18, 21, NIV

Sherlock Holmes and Dr John H Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine, they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend. “Watson, look up and tell me what you see”. Watson replied, “I see millions and millions of stars”. “So, what does that tell you?”, asked Holmes. Watson pondered for a moment then stated his conclusions.

“Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately three o’clock. Theologically, I can see that God is all-powerful and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Why, what does it tell you, Holmes?”. The great detective sighed and said, “Watson, it tells me that someone has stolen our tent!”.

Sometimes we can be blind to what is patently obvious to others.

We can be blind to the needs that people have. We can be blind to their hurts. We can even be blind so that we cannot see God working amongst us and in us. We sometimes cannot see his handiwork and graciousness in our lives – when others can see it so plainly.

In the United States of America somebody goes blind every twenty minutes.

The man we meet in **John, 9:1-41** was **‘A MAN BLIND FROM BIRTH’**. He had never seen the beauty of God’s creation, or the faces of his loved ones. When Jesus arrived on the scene, everything changed, and the man was made to see. However, the greatest miracle was not the opening of his physical eyes, but the opening of his spiritual eyes to enable him to see the Saviour.

‘The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.’

II Corinthians, 4:4, NIV

We study the whole of this chapter and see how Jesus can make blind eyes see...

1. THE REASON FOR THE BLINDNESS

‘As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

John, 9:1-2, NIV

Children ask some of the most difficult questions.

In my preparation, I came across these questions that children are supposed to have written in their personal letters to God...

‘Thank you for my baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy, any chance?’ (Joyce).

‘Do you think Cain would have not killed Abel if they had their own rooms? It works for me any my brother’ (Larry).

‘Is it very hard for you to love all the people in the world? There are only four people in our family and I can never do it’ (Nan).

‘Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?’ (Norma).

‘I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that okay?’ (Neil).

‘My brothers told me about being born, but it doesn’t sound right. They are just kidding, aren’t they?’ (Marsha).

Perhaps the most difficult questions to answer include: “WHY IS THERE SO MUCH PAIN AND SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?” and “WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?”

On 27 August, 2006, Comair Flight 5191 took off from the Blue Grass airport in Lexington, Kentucky, and immediately crashed, killing 49 of the 50 people aboard. The sole survivor was James Polehinke, the plane’s co-pilot, who suffered serious injuries, including multiple broken bones, a collapsed lung, and severe bleeding. He underwent surgery for his injuries, including an amputation of his left leg, and is confined to a wheelchair. The first sentence he spoke when he awoke in the hospital was, “WHY DID GOD DO THIS TO ME?” Polehinke’s mother, Honey Jackson, told him, “IT WAS NOT GOD. IT WAS JUST AN ACCIDENT”.

Many people think it happens by chance, but the disciples had it all worked out...

HE WAS BLIND BECAUSE OF PRE-NATAL SIN

They actually believed that a man could begin to sin while he was still in his mother’s womb. In an imaginary conversation between Antoninus and Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, Antoninus asked: “FROM WHAT TIME DOES THE EVIL INFLUENCE BEAR SWAY OVER A MAN, FROM THE FORMATION OF THE EMBRYO IN THE WOMB OR FROM THE MOMENT OF BIRTH?”. Rabbi Judah answered: “FROM THE FORMATION OF THE EMBRYO”.

HE WAS BLIND BECAUSE OF PRE-EXISTENCE OF THE SOUL

They really got this idea from Plato and the Greeks. They believed that all souls existed before the creation of the world in the Garden of Eden, or that they were in the Seventh Heaven, or elsewhere, waiting to enter into a body. The Jews believed that these souls were already good and bad.

HE WAS BLIND BECAUSE OF THE SINS OF HIS PARENTS

The idea that children inherit the consequences of their parents’ sin is woven into the thought of the Old Testament ‘I, THE LORD YOUR GOD, AM A JEALOUS GOD, PUNISHING THE CHILDREN FOR THE SIN OF THE FATHERS TO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION OF THOSE WHO HATE ME’ (see Exodus, 20:5). Of the wicked man the psalmist says: “MAY THE INIQUITY OF HIS FATHERS BE REMEMBERED BEFORE THE LORD; MAY THE SIN OF HIS MOTHER NEVER BE BLOTTED OUT” (see Psalms, 109:14). One of the keynotes of the Old Testament is that the sins of the fathers are always visited upon the children. It must never be forgotten that no man lives to himself and no man dies to himself. When a man sins, he sets in motion a train of consequences which has no end.

Nonetheless, neither of these answers were correct!

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned”, said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life”.

John, 9:3, NIV

The disciples wrongly thought that a spiritual disease caused physical problems.

And perhaps we should not judge the disciples too harshly. They had witnessed the healing of the paralytic man. On that occasion Jesus had said, “WHICH IS EASIER: TO SAY TO THE PARALYTIC, ‘YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN’, OR TO SAY, GET UP, TAKE YOUR MAT AND WALK’? BUT THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT THE SON OF MAN HAS AUTHORITY ON EARTH TO FORGIVE SINS...” HE SAID TO THE PARALYTIC, “I TELL YOU, GET UP, TAKE YOUR MAT AND GO HOME” (see Mark, 2:9-11).

‘A common belief in Jewish culture was that calamity or suffering was the result of some great sin. However, Christ used this man’s suffering to teach about faith and to glorify God. We live in a fallen world where good behaviour is not always rewarded and bad behaviour is not always punished. Therefore, innocent people sometimes suffer. If God took suffering away whenever we asked, we would follow him for comfort and convenience, not out of love and devotion. Regardless of the reasons for our suffering, Jesus has the power to help us with it. When you suffer from a disease, tragedy, or disability, try not to ask, “Why did this happen to me?” or “What did I do wrong?”. Instead, ask God to give you strength for the trial and a clearer perspective on what is happening.’

“LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE”, Study Notes

Is it not possible that the reason you have to endure pain and suffering is ‘SO THAT THE WORK OF GOD MIGHT BE DISPLAYED’ in your life?

Affliction, sorrow, pain, disappointment, loss are opportunities for displaying God’s grace, because it enables the sufferer to show God in action. When trouble and disaster fall upon a man who walks with God they bring out the strength and the beauty, and the endurance and the nobility, which are within a man’s heart when God is there. It is told that when an old saint was dying in an agony of pain, he sent for his family, saying: “COME AND SEE HOW A CHRISTIAN CAN DIE”. It is when life hits us a terrible blow that we can show the world how a Christian can live, and, if need be, die. Any kind of suffering is an opportunity to demonstrate the glory of God in our own lives!

2. THE RECOVERY OF PHYSICAL SIGHT

‘Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go”, he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.’

John, 9:6b-7, NIV

Our Lord’s method of healing was unique.

He put clay on the man’s eyes and told him to go wash. Once Jesus healed two blind men by merely touching their eyes (see **Matthew, 9:27-31**), and he healed another blind man by putting spit on his eyes (see **Mark, 8:22-26**). Though the healing power was the same, our Lord varied his methods lest people focus on the manner of healing and miss the message in the healing.

There were at least two reasons for our Lord’s use of the clay...

THE CLAY WAS A PICTURE OF THE INCARNATION

God made the first man out of the dust, and God sent his Son as a real man – the Son of Man. Jesus sent the blind man to the pool of Siloam, which means ‘sent’. Of course, Jesus came into the world because the Father sent him. Whilst on earth, Jesus did ‘**THE WORKS OF HIM WHO SENT ME**’ (see **John, 9:4**). Jesus provided a little illustration of his own coming to earth – he was sent by the Father.

THE CLAY WAS A PICTURE OF IRRITATION

If you have ever had an irritation in your eyes, how quickly you seek irrigation to cleanse it out! I have to some times administer drops and gel when my eyes are tired and sore. The irritation encouraged the man to believe and obey! In the spiritual realm, you could compare this ‘irritation’ to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit as he brings the lost sinner under judgment.

ILLUMINATION SOON LED TO A PROBLEM OF IDENTIFICATION

‘WAS THIS REALLY THE BLIND BEGGAR?’ and ‘WHO CAUSED HIM TO SEE?’. Throughout the rest of **John, chapter 9**, a growing conflict takes place around these two questions. The religious leaders did not want to face the fact that Jesus had healed the man, or even that the man had been healed!

Four times in this chapter people asked, “HOW WERE YOU HEALED?”.

First the neighbours asked the man, and then the Pharisees asked him. Not satisfied with his reply, the Pharisees then asked the man’s parents and then gave the son one final interrogation. All of this looked very official and efficient, but it was really a most evasive manoeuvre on the part of both the people and the leaders. The Pharisees wanted to get rid of the evidence, and the people were afraid to speak the truth!

But they were all asking the wrong question!

They should not have asked “HOW?” but “WHO?” (Simply rearrange the letters!) But we ourselves are so prone to ask: “HOW?”. We want to understand the mechanics of a miracle instead of simply trusting the Saviour, who alone can perform the miracle. Understanding the process, even if we could, is no guarantee that we have experienced the miracle!

For over half-a-century, Bob Edens was blind. He could not see anything. His world was a black hall of sounds and smells. He felt his way through five decades of darkness. And then, he could see. A skilled surgeon performed a complicated operation and, for the first time, Bob Edens had sight. He found it overwhelming. “I never would have dreamed that yellow is so... yellow”, he exclaimed. “I don’t have the words. I am amazed by yellow. But red is my favourite colour. I just cannot believe red. I can see the shape of the moon – and I like nothing better than seeing a jet plane flying across the sky leaving a long vapour trail behind. And of course, sunrises and sunsets. And at night I look at the stars in the sky and the flashing light. You could never know how wonderful everything is”.

*Pass me not, O mighty Spirit, thou canst make the blind to see;
Witnesser of Jesus’ merit, speak the word of power to me, even me.*

Elizabeth Cadner, SASB 295:3

‘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. 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”.’

John, 9:16-17, NIV

The Pharisees labelled Jesus as a ‘sinner’ because he healed on the Sabbath.

By making clay he had been guilty of working on the Sabbath when even the simplest acts constituted work. Here are some of the things which were forbidden on the Sabbath: ‘A MAN MAY NOT FILL A DISH WITH OIL AND PUT IT BESIDE A LAMP AND PUT THE END OF THE WICK IN IT... IF A MAN EXTINGUISHES A LAMP ON THE SABBATH TO SPARE THE LAMP OR THE OIL OR THE WICK, HE IS CULPABLE... A MAN MAY NOT GO OUT ON THE SABBATH WITH SANDALS SHOD WITH NAILS (BECAUSE THE WEIGHT OF THE NAILS WOULD HAVE CONSTITUTED A BURDEN, AND TO CARRY A BURDEN WAS TO BREAK THE SABBATH)... A MAN MIGHT NOT CUT HIS FINGER NAILS OR PULL OUT A HAIR OF HIS HEAD OR HIS BEARD’. Obviously in the eyes of such a law to make clay was to work and so to break the Sabbath.

It was forbidden to heal on the Sabbath.

Medical attention could be given only if life was in actual danger. Even then it must be only such as to keep the patient from getting worse, not to make him any better. For instance, a man with toothache might not suck vinegar through his teeth. It was forbidden to set a broken limb. ‘If a man’s hand or foot is dislocated he may not pour cold water over it’. Clearly the man who was born blind was in no danger of his life; therefore Jesus broke the Sabbath when he healed him.

It was quite definitely laid down: ‘AS TO FASTING SPITTLE, IT IS NOT LAWFUL TO PUT IT SO MUCH AS UPON THE EYELIDS’.

3. THE RECOVERY OF SPIRITUAL SIGHT

‘The Pharisees asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 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?”’

John, 9:26-27, NIV

Throughout the chapter, we see four different reactions to this miracle...

THE NEIGHBOURS

They revealed surprise and scepticism and they argued as to the identity of the blind man. Although they knew the blind man, and saw the miracle for themselves, they simply did not believe their own eyes!

‘Jesus told Thomas, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”.’

John, 20:29, NIV

THE PARENTS

The Pharisees interrogated the parents asking them: “IS THIS YOUR SON? IS THIS THE ONE YOU SAY WAS BORN BLIND? HOW IS IT THAT NOW HE CAN SEE?” (see **John, 9:19**). If they refused to answer either question, they were in trouble; or if they answered with replies contrary to what the leaders wanted, they were in trouble. What a dilemma!

They answered the first question honestly: he was their son and he had been born blind. They answered the second question evasively: they did not know how he was healed or who healed him.

They were obviously unco-operative, but at the same time they were afraid.

The synagogue authorities had a powerful weapon, the weapon of excommunication, whereby a man was shut off from the congregation of God's people. Away back in the days of Ezra we read of a decree that whosoever did not obey the command of the authorities ‘**WOULD FORFEIT ALL HIS PROPERTY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DECISION OF THE OFFICIALS AND ELDERS, AND WOULD HIMSELF BE EXPELLED FROM THE ASSEMBLY**’ (see **Ezra, 10:8**). Many of the rulers in Jerusalem really believed in Jesus, but were afraid to say so ‘**FOR FEAR THEY WOULD BE PUT OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE**’ (see **John, 12:42**).

THE PHARISEES

They were SUSPICIOUS – they did not believe that the man had been born blind, suspecting this was a miracle faked between Jesus and him. Then they were ANNOYED – as the blind man based his argument on Scripture. As far as he was concerned, Jesus could not be bad because God had heard his prayer and the healing really had taken place.

When they were confronted with such an argument, see what they did!

First, they resorted to abuse – ‘they heaped abuse upon him’. Second, they resorted to insult – “**YOU WERE STEEPED IN SIN AT BIRTH; HOW DARE YOU LECTURE US**” (They accused him of having pre-natal sin). Third, they resorted to threatened force as they ordered him out of their presence (see **John, 9:34**).

THE BLIND MAN

The man's new faith was severely tested by some of the authorities.

He was cursed and evicted from the synagogue. Persecution may come when you follow Jesus. You may lose friends; you may even lose your life. But no one can ever take away the eternal life that Jesus gives you.

Despite such opposition, he showed a beautiful, consistent and growing faith!

John, 9:11 – “THE MAN THEY CALL JESUS”.

John, 9:17 – “HE IS A PROPHET”.

John, 9:25 – “ONE THING I KNOW: I WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE”.

‘Jesus heard that the Pharisees had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him”. Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you”. Then the man said, “Lord, I believe”, and he worshipped him.’

John, 9:35-38, NIV

JESUS LOOKED FOR THE MAN

‘THE JEWS CAST HIM OUT OF THE TEMPLE; BUT THE LORD OF THE TEMPLE FOUND HIM’ (**John Chrysostom**). If Christian witness separates him from his fellow-men, it only serves to bring him nearer to Jesus Christ. Jesus is always true to the man who is true to him.

JESUS REVEALED HIS TRUE IDENTITY

To this man there was made the great revelation that Jesus is the Son of God. Loyalty always brings revelation; it is to the man who is true to him that Jesus most fully reveals himself. The penalty of loyalty may well be persecution and ostracism at the hands of men; its reward is a closer walk with Christ, and an increasing knowledge of his wonder.

‘Jesus said, “For judgement I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind”.’

John, 9:39, NIV

And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love;

For that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in Heaven above.

And he leads his children on to the place where he is gone.

Cecil Frances Alexander, SASB 87:5

“HE CAME TO MAKE THE BLIND TO SEE!”