

# Those With Sight Can't Always See

## John 9

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This is a story of how a man who sat in darkness was brought into the light, in every way imaginable. It is also the story of how those who thought they saw were blind. It is clear being legalistic is a little like wearing sunglasses at night, it makes a dark situation even darker. This story starts with a blind man who will gain his sight; it ends with the Pharisees who with two good eyes can't see.

We begin with a question-----" who was it, Lord, was it this man or his parents who sinned so he was born blind."(John 9:2) This bad theology lingers like bad breath. Like the cockroach, I'm afraid we are going to have this troubling theology with us forever. We have updated the question but we are still perpetuating the idea that God is some sort of metaphysical hitman.

A minister in Virginia heard that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in early 2000 had a stroke. Like the disciples to the blind man---the minister's first reaction is not compassion or pausing to offer a prayer, instead he says, "I believe his sudden decline in health could be ascribed to his policy of "dividing God's land" by ceding Gaza to the Palestinians." He gets sick because

he did something God did not want. Sharon is trying to avoid more bloodshed and practice being a peacemaker (which incidentally is what Jesus ask us to do) and according to this Virginia minister, this is not what God wants.

Think about what he is saying-----our actions cause God to act and punish us.

If that's the case God has some explaining to do to Sharon, because the Kardashians are making a fortune. Politicians may have an enemies list, and the mafia may have a hit list, but God has a grace list.

Another preacher announces God punishes sinners by explaining 9/11 this way, "when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad."

Who caused this man to be born blind--his parents or himself?

Who caused a terrorist to fly commercial airliners into the world trade center?

The question is different –but the theology is the same----God's response is to send tragedy.

The disciples question and our fascination with blaming the tragedy on someone's sin are a riddle which needs to be addressed. Let's begin with "the action" (blindness or terrorist attack) is credited to God. Blaming God for something God has nothing to do with has to be a sin itself. Jesus' response is worth repeating and REMEMBERING-----" **Neither this man or his parents sin.**" (John 9:3) Can Jesus make it any clearer-----no one's sin caused this

tragedy. Even if dividing up the Gaza strip was not a good idea--it had nothing to do with Sharon stroke. Even if "pagans" have some organized agenda this did not cause 9/11-----*neither this man or his parents* should forever make it clear there is not a direct line from our sin to our health or any place. Jesus goes on---"but this HAPPENED." This happened-----genetics fail us, people are frustrated enough to think to fly a plane into a building will make their pathetic life have more meaning. It should occur to us more often than it does---but some things just happen. Trouble comes, people get sick, and there is nothing to blame it on but the passing of time and the wearing out of parts----God is not a part of the breaking.

Jesus continues----"so that the work of God might be displayed." God may not be a part of the breaking but God is a part of the healing. God did not cause it or allow it to happen---he didn't break it but he is still willing to buy it. God steps in to heal the broken heart after a divorce. to rebuild lives after 9/11, to create peace in willing hearts in Israel and Palestine, and to give sight to the blind.

The disciples instead of seeing a chance to be compassionate saw a theological debate. Further, they perpetuated the false belief that God is wrathful-- a never forgetting deity, who looks for a chance to punish by robbing people of sight or happiness.

Jesus tries to confront this illogical system of blaming God. One of Jesus' mission is to renew our image of God, they and we have a distorted image of

the divine and Jesus is working overtime to enlighten us----we are not punished FOR our sins----we are punished BY our sins.

If we are greedy, the greed eventually gets us . . . Bernie Madoff

If we are prideful, the pride gets us . . . Pharaoh

If we are mean and bitter, in the end, they corner us . . . Saul

There is a natural law at work, God doesn't have to lift a finger. You tell enough lies they catch up with you ---we are punished BY our sins--so stop blaming God.

While the story opens with a conflict between compassion and bad theology there is much more. The remainder of the story is given to the conflict between doing good and following the rules.

"Now the day which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was the Sabbath . . . the Pharisees said, "this man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." (John 9:14,15).

As the disciples were pre-occupied with theology and void of compassion----likewise the Pharisees are obsessed with their rules and ignorant of God's compassion. They can't see the trees for the forest-----what should matter is the man is healed not when he was healed.

Jesus had several clashes over the Sabbath rules. The Sabbath rules had a holy origin. In the 10 Commandments, the people were told to remember the

Sabbath and keep it holy by not laboring. Similar to circumcision it would be one of those identifying marks of God's people. By not laboring the Jewish people would offer testimony of who their God was without speaking a word. Certainly a noble trait. Since the day of Moses, however, many clarifications and specifics had been added to the codified behavior of the Hebrews. In time it became more about worshipping the Sabbath than honoring their God.

Jesus, of course, will not play along with the popular notion of the religion of the day. If religion is in-prisoning people you can count on Jesus standing up for the people. In this one episode Jesus confronts bad theology with compassion, malpractice religion with humble faith, and human suffering in one afternoon.

Jesus does good in spite of the Sabbath rules. Of course the healed blind man---after testifying to what happened, is treated as if he has committed the crime. Running out of patience he offers all the critics and doubters this passionate defense.

*'I do not know whether he is a sinner. 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?'* *Then 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, 'Here is an astonishing 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 he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'* *They*

answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out. (John 9:27-34).

Notice in the former blind man's speech the absence of any mention of the Sabbath. Only the legalist care about the when-----on the Sabbath or Sunday. Only the legalist care about the where----God is in the Temple or the Contemporary mega church. The broken, the real people, the people Jesus came for only care about the change.

The focus of healthy religion and meaningful faith is not on sin, short-comings or brokenness, it is on transformation.

The religious leaders of the day misunderstood. They confused rules with worship. They confused their issues with God's will. If we are not careful we will become like the Pharisee, people who think we can see, but we can't.

This is the story of how a person who sat in darkness was brought to the light, in all imaginable ways. On the other hand it is the story of those who thought they saw (the religious establishment) but who were running eagerly into the darkness. The story begins in verse 1 with a blind man who will gain his sight; it ends in verse 41 with the religious leaders who have become spiritually blind.

Blindness is more than an eye problem it is a will problem. A doing problem. An obedience problem. Sometimes blindness happens not because we can't see, but because we refuse to see. Yet for those willing to admit our blindness and accept the Grace of God, the reward is leaving our past behind to walk in the newness of the light.

