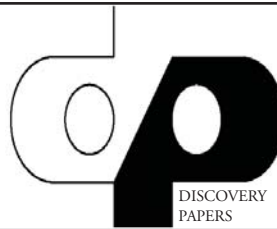


I WAS BLIND, BUT NOW I SEE

SERIES: PORTRAITS JOHN PAINTED



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John 9:8-41
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The rumbling voice of Jeremiah: “Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear: Should you not fear me?” declares the LORD. “Should you not tremble in my presence? ... But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away” (Jeremiah 5:21-23). They are foolish people who have eyes that cannot see; foolish people who have rebellious and stubborn hearts. Jeremiah connects our ability to see to the condition of our hearts.

We are in the midst of studying a passage, in the ninth chapter of John, which focuses on a man who was born blind. Previously, we saw Jesus begin the process of his physical healing. In this study we will discover truth about spiritual sight (those who see Jesus clearly) and blindness (“foolish people who have rebellious and stubborn hearts”).

John 9:7:

⁷“Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

The man born blind came home seeing. He came home with eyes that worked for the first time in his life. And it also becomes clear that he (alone) sees the world truly. Throughout his life he felt inferior to his sighted neighbors, but he will learn that physical eyesight is no advantage in discovering God’s presence and obeying his word.

John 9:8-12:

⁸His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some claimed that he was.

**Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”
But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”**

¹⁰“How then were your eyes opened?” they demanded.

¹¹He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹²“Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

It is clear that Jesus arranges for the beneficiary of this extraordinary miracle to be alone when he saw his familiar world for the first time. Jesus will return later to help him, but first the man—surely bursting with happiness—must encounter neighbors and family by himself.

First reaction: maybe eyesight isn’t all its cracked up to be. People who had observed him for years couldn’t tell if the one who returned from Siloam was indeed the man who had been blind since birth. “Is this the guy? I can’t tell, do you know?”

Yet, perhaps, we shouldn’t be surprised. It is common for beggars to stop being noticed. Poor and needy people grow tiresome. “Is he wearing different clothes today, or not? Is he sitting at a different place today, who cares? Does he have anything interesting to say?” Nobody asks. In 9:1 we read that “Jesus saw a man.” For everyone else this man had become part of the landscape.

The term John uses, neighbor, looms large in the Bible. When Jesus was asked, “What does God require of us?” he said that there are two commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. These commands are at the core of God’s purposes. The man in this account was not a transient—he was a neighbor in his own community who had been shunted aside and become invisible.

Before moving on we should examine ourselves. How many ‘neighbors,’ placed in our lives by God, do we ignore because they are different, needy, shy, too young, too old, or too boring? Would Jeremiah indict us for having eyes that do not see? Surely, disregard for those whom Jesus loves will keep us from growing in our knowledge of the Lord himself.

Returning to John 9, we have much to learn from the man with new eyes and a perceptive heart. We will see the growth of his faith in the different terms he uses to describe the Lord as this story unfolds. First he is ‘the man they call Jesus’ (v.11). In v. 17 he declares Jesus to be ‘a prophet.’ In v. 33 he calls him ‘a man from God.’ And finally in v. 38 he addresses Jesus as ‘Lord.’

Due to the length of the chapter I want to both read and summarize the text as we pick up the story in verse 13. The neighbors who encounter the once-blind man appeal to those with religious authority for explanation. As the Pharisees begin an investigation, the blindness of their hearts is immediately apparent. They fixate on a breach of Sabbath regulation (it was forbidden for Jesus to spit on the ground and make mud) while ignoring a glorious and unprecedented miracle.

It is entirely appropriate, of course, that both the neighbors and Pharisees undertake an examination. A great many claims of divine intervention prove false. Hoaxes are perpetrated and mistakes are made. Dark powers can accomplish the phenomenal (recall the magicians who opposed Moses in Pharaoh's court). Yet the Pharisees in this account do not find any reason to question the reality or beauty of the miracle. They miss an occasion to sing God's praise and rejoice with a poor man who had been given an extraordinary gift, because they are outraged by a minor, technical violation of Sabbath regulations.

Jesus elsewhere denounced Pharisees like these. Mt 23 . . . ³"They do not practice what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" . . . ²³"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness."

Returning to the events in Jerusalem, the Pharisees who still lack an explanation and question the once-blind man about Jesus. The man says simply, "He is a prophet" (v.17). Rejecting this statement, the Pharisees move on to interrogate the beggar's parents.

John 9:20-23:

²⁰"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

Though these parents miss out on a joyful embrace of their son because they are blinded by the fear of rejection, I think we should regard them with some sympathy. They

raised a handicapped child without any of the medical aids or social support that we take for granted. Further, we can recall the disciples' question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?"—certainly this inquiry was familiar. Did they ask it of themselves or blame one another? Their fear (their blindness) is not hard to understand. Life had dealt them a hard blow with the birth of a handicapped son and years later they felt they could not chance the social stigma that came with banishment from the synagogue. And yet, if had they asked for his help, Jesus would have taken them from the darkness of their fear into a bright place beside their son.

Our attention returns to the previously ignored beggar. The man with new eyes looks around—at blind neighbors, blind spiritual leaders, and at parents who turn away from him. He has not found what he is looking for. The Pharisees' interrogation continues.

John 9:24-25:

²⁴A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God" they said. "We know this man is a sinner." [All who failed to give meticulous attention to law-keeping as defined by the Pharisees' were designated 'sinners'] ²⁵He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Our hero's patience is running out, "I don't know if he is a Pharisee or a 'sinner,' whether he has your stamp of approval or not. I don't care. I do know that I can see . . . I was blind, but now I see!"

This man, who endured real hardship since birth, had nothing to lose. He did not care about the opinion of religious bullies. Focused on trivialities the Pharisees could not explain or even fully acknowledge a great work of God.

John 9:27-34:

²⁷He 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?"

²⁸Then they hurled insults at him . . . ³²[The blind man speaking:] Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

³⁴To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

The text says that they threw the man out, though I believe they did so to save face because he was leaving anyway. He had moved beyond their teaching, their intimidation—their blindness. Neighbors, parents, and teachers all had proved disappointing and there was no one left for him to ‘see’—save One. Jesus left this man on his own in order to learn these lessons. The Lord now steps back into the picture.

John 9:35-38:

³⁵Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

³⁶“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

³⁷Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

³⁸Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

Jesus’ question contains a messianic phrase (the Son of Man) and essentially asks the beggar if he believes in God’s promised redemption. He answers in the affirmative and Jesus counters all his recent disappointments by declaring, “you have seen him (the Messiah) now.” For this man, disappointment created longing. His bold declaration of faith led to ‘seeing’ Jesus the Messiah.

The life of a blind beggar changed forever. He worshipped (the word means to fall to one’s knees). There is no clearer description of initial salvation and eternal life begun—“Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.”

Conclusion

John 9:39-41:

³⁹Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

⁴⁰Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

⁴¹Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can

see, your guilt remains.

Jeremiah spoke of blindness as a condition of the heart. Jesus says to the spiritually blind Pharisees—“your guilt remains.” Humble confession is the only way forward. Those who acknowledge blindness, who know their inadequacy, are granted sight and fall at the Lord’s feet.

Jesus said, “I have come into the world so that the blind will see.” May we see him clearly and worship without reservation.

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