

FAITH IN ACTION

(Jesus heals the man born blind – John 9)

By Pr Abri Brancken, 26 Mar 2017

SCRIPTURE READING

John 9:1-11

1 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind.

2 His disciples asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?"

3 Jesus answered, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him.

4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me; night is coming when no one can work.

5 While I am in the world, I am the light for the world."

6 After he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with the spittle; he rubbed the mud on the man's eyes

7 and told him, "Go and wash your face in the Pool of Siloam." (This name means "Sent.") So the man went, washed his face, and came back seeing.

8 His neighbors, then, and the people who had seen him begging before this, asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

9 Some said, "He is the one," but others said, "No he isn't; he just looks like him." So the man himself said, "I am the man."

10 "How is it that you can now see?" they asked him.

11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made some mud, rubbed it on my eyes, and told me to go to Siloam and wash my face. So I went, and as soon as I washed, I could see."

JESUS HEALS THE BLIND MAN

Jesus encountered a man born blind (begging at the Temple entrance). To heal him, Jesus initiated the miracle. He spat in the dirt, made some mud and applied it to the man's eyes. Then, in words that may have stunned the man, Jesus told him to "go, wash in the Pool of Siloam." To receive the miracle, the man had to act. He obeyed, and he came back seeing.

Jesus was calling the man to real faith — not just belief, but to put his faith into action — by calling him to make a treacherous half-mile hike down a mountain. To take even that first step was an incredible confession that he believed Jesus was the Messiah. As he did often, Jesus linked healing with faith. Sometimes we think faith is about intellectual assent to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. In reality, faith is about taking first steps toward doing God's will, even when it seems very much impossible. Is that the kind of faith we show? Do we confess Jesus with our feet?

The man's faith completed God's creation miracle in his life. Many Christians believe, but belief must go over into action. The book of James makes this very clear. Jesus also said, if you love me you will obey my commandments. Biblical faith is always action.

You believe and you respond to your belief.

THE PURPOSE OF THE MIRACLE

Jesus shifts the focus, and instead of addressing the cause of the man's blindness he speaks of its purpose: so that the work of God might be displayed in his life (v. 3).

The purpose of this miracle was to fulfil a Messianic claim. John chapter 9 is an EXTREMELY important chapter in the gospel of John. The receiving of sight for the blind was a miracle reserved for the Messiah (Isa 61:1,2). This is evidenced by the fact that not one time in the OT was this miracle performed. Curing of blindness was the signature miracle of the Messiah, and that is why the incredulity, and perhaps even fear, manifest in the religious authorities regarding this notable miracle. For a prophet to cure blindness was to say that that prophet was THE prophet. It was, to cite the Isaiah passage, not just restoring sight to the blind, but declaring the acceptable year of the LORD.

The Hebrew people understood that the coming Messiah, or Christ, would be identified as the One who could restore sight to the blind, twice predicted by the great Hebrew prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah prophecy 1

Here the prophet describes the future joy of Israel's redeemed at the coming of the Messiah: The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom...they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God...your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened...(Isaiah 35:1-5).

Isaiah prophecy 2

And again as he penned Isaiah 42, the prophet was declaring predictively what came to be recognized as a Messianic passage describing the Servant of the Lord: I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind...(v.6,7).

Psalms 146:8 (NASB)

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; The Lord raises up those who are bowed down; The Lord loves the righteous;

Of His more than 25 specific acts of healing (including release from demon possession) recorded in the gospels, Jesus healed blindness more than any other physical infirmity – 6 pairs of eyes on 4 separate occasions. Since healing blind eyes is the work of the Lord, Yahweh, Jehovah, it shows that Jesus is God: The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. (Psalm 146:8)

By Jesus opening the man's eyes, the people would see who He is.

By helping the man to see Jesus was helping all the people to see who He is.

He was saying, I am God.

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS – ARE YOU THE MESSIAH?

As the news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and Galilee, John sent 2 disciples to ask Jesus about His identity: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight... (Matthew 6:3-5).

Once John heard Jesus had restored sight to blind eyes, his mind would have immediately flashed back to the prophecies of Isaiah. The indisputable Messianic identity was tied to this critical piece of information: the ability to restore sight was a sure indication that this must be the long-expected Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount, He warned about the need to absorb the light of His truth with our spiritual eyes: The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22,23).

POOLS OF SHILOAM

The pool's name in Hebrew is Shiloah from the Hebrew verb "to send." God the Father sent His Son to the earth to help people to "see" the truth. In the same way, Jesus sends this man born blind in order that he can see. The name of the pool is applicable to the man, but also to Jesus himself, who was sent from heaven.

Although Siloam was used as a water supply and for baptizing converts to Judaism, it has more direct significance here. This was probably still the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 37), and the water of Siloam was the sacred water used for this feast (see comment on 7:37-38). Here Jesus employs the ritual water (cf. 2:6; 3:5), but it works only because the man is "sent."

The Pool of Siloam was built by King Hezekiah in the 8th century BC (2 Kings 20:20) in order to provide water to Jerusalem, even in the event that the city were besieged. The pool was fed by tunnel Hezekiah cut through almost 2,000 feet of solid rock from the Gihon Spring, also called the Virgin's Spring. Hezekiah's Tunnel channeled the water from Gihon to the pool, located in the southeast part of the city in the Tyropoeon Valley. The original Pool of Siloam was about 53 feet long, 18 feet wide, and 19 feet deep and was made of part hewn rock and part masonry.

Jerusalem and the Pool of Siloam were destroyed by the Babylonians about 600 BC. Seventy years later, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, and part of the job was to repair the Pool of Siloam: (Nehemiah 3:15)

During the reign of Herod the Great, improvements were made to the Pool of Siloam. The pool itself was enlarged, and a large arcade (a set of arches) was built around the pool. Another arcade divided the pool, probably to create separate areas for men and women. During this time, the poor and sick people would often come to the Pool of Siloam to bathe.

But it is during the time of Christ that the Pool of Siloam finds its true significance. Because the pool was near the temple, its water was used for a special ceremony during the Feast of Tabernacles. Every morning during that joyful feast, a priest would

take a golden vessel to the Pool of Siloam, fill it with water from the pool, and bring it back to the altar amid the shouts of the people. Then, as the crowd chanted the Hallel (Psalms 113—118), that priest poured out the water on the west side of the altar, and another priest poured a drink offering of wine on the east side of the altar. This ritual was probably to illustrate Isaiah 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”

However, on the eighth and final day of the feast, the ritual was not repeated. And that is exactly when Jesus chose to make a startling announcement: “On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them’” (John 7:37–38). On the one day of the feast when no water was poured, Jesus stood up and filled the gap. The “water” He offers (the Holy Spirit, verse 39) is better than the waters of Siloam. In offering the water of life, Jesus identified Himself with the rock in the wilderness that gave water to the Hebrews (see 1 Corinthians 10:4). In the Old Testament times the Pool of Siloam was used by kings and priests.

GOD FORMED MAN FROM THE EARTH

Genesis 2:7

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

It was as if creation was not completed in this man. Everything was done, except for his eyes. This miracle is a clear link to Genesis 2. God created the heavens and the earth and here Jesus echoes Genesis 2, showing the people that He is the one who created mankind. He is the Potter and we are the clay.

JESUS IS GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

The best possible news is: Jesus! The worst possible news is: Jesus! For many, Jesus is good news because He opens their blind eyes and gives them eternal life. For many others, Jesus is bad news because they reject His gift of sight and they will face eternal judgment (see 1 Pet. 2:6–8 for the same truth). In other words, Jesus always divides people into one of two camps: Those who believe in Him for salvation receive eternal life; those who reject Him are hardened in unbelief and face eventual eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46). There is no third category. So, be very careful how you respond to Jesus!

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

What have you felt the Lord told you to do? Have you responded. Faith is a verb and is always action. You can believe things about God, but it must go over into action to become faith.

Your faith can move mountains and your doubt can create them. Don't just believe, do!