

John 9:1-7,13-17,34-39 - As Jesus was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that God’s works might be revealed in connection with him. ⁴I must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World.” ⁶After saying this, Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and spread the mud on the man’s eyes. ⁷“Go,” Jesus told him, “wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. ¹³They brought this man who had been blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵So the Pharisees also asked him how he received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man told them. “I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶Then some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath.” Others were saying, “How can a sinful man work such miraculous signs?” There was division among them, ¹⁷so they said to the blind man again, “What do you say about him, because he opened your eyes?” The man replied, “He is a prophet.” ³⁴They answered him, “You were entirely born in sinfulness! Yet you presume to teach us?” And they threw him out. ³⁵Jesus heard that they had thrown him out. When he found him, he asked, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” ³⁶“Who is he, sir,” the man replied, “that I may believe in him?” ³⁷Jesus answered, “You have seen him, and he is the very one who is speaking with you.” ³⁸Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” and he knelt down and worshipped him. ³⁹Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, in order that those who do not see will see, and those who do see will become blind.”

When Martin Luther died, a little hand-scribbled note was found in his pocket: “Wir sind Pettler; hoc est verum. We are beggars – this is true.” Now from the words and actions of his last days, we know this wasn’t despair or desperation, doubting whether it was all worth it or not. Instead it was just the opposite. What Luther was stating was the confidence of the Christian, that is everything depends on God’s grace. None of it’s up to us. We stand before God’s royal throne absolutely empty-handed. Like the Hymn says, “Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to thy cross I cling.” But still – beggars? Are we all really beggars? That doesn’t sound too complimentary or nice or fun. You probably won’t ever get invited out on the inspirational speech-giving circuit telling people they’re beggars. But we are. And where Mr. Luther was never known to be one for understating the case – well, in this one instance, we could take it even one step further. Not just beggars, but *BLIND* beggars. And that’s everyone’s problem. Although not everyone admits it.

Those Pharisees sure didn’t. Here in this account of Jesus and the disciples and the blind man and the Pharisees – at first it’s not clear whose vision is the worst. But when the Savior gets out the eye chart, it becomes very apparent that the Pharisees can’t see a thing. They claimed to have perfect vision – that they could see exactly what God wanted, and how to get on his good side, and how to get into his heaven. But it was all a cruel optical illusion. Really, they couldn’t see past their own noses. They proved it by missing the point about the Sabbath by a mile. Here’s this guy who could see after a whole lifetime being blind and they were in a tizzy about what *day* Jesus healed him on. See, the Old Testament people of God weren’t supposed to do physical labor on Saturday, the day of rest. Instead they were supposed to focus on the word and worship of their God. And now the Pharisees do their little investigation and find out how Jesus healed this poor man. He had mixed spit, water, with clay – like making mortar. He was doing *masonry* on the day of rest. Caught red-handed. It was the same stunt they had tried to pull when the disciples had picked some grain and rubbed off the chaff with their hands another Saturday. “Aha. Your disciples are harvesting and threshing on the Sabbath.” But Jesus let them know God’s true Sabbath is about gladly hearing and learning His

Word. It's not a day. It's every day. The proper worship attitude of "whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do everything to the glory of God."

These Pharisees are blinder than blind. They think they can see everyone else's sins, but they can't see their own. They couldn't see that it would be impossible for them to earn their way into heaven. They couldn't see Jesus as true and mighty God or their Savior. They were so blind. And that's how it is with unbelief. It's kind of funny, because unbelievers are always accusing believers of having "blind faith." But really, as God says in 2 Corinthians 4, "The god of this age (the devil) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." And those cataracts of pride and self-righteousness and not seeing our sins and how serious and condemning they are – that's the natural condition for all of us. We're all sinful by nature. We all desperately need to be saved. The Pharisees were just too blind to see it.

But, then again, the disciples weren't exactly seeing 20/20 either. Their first reaction when they came on the scene and saw this poor blind guy was: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" If something bad happens, people always think it's either God's fault or that person's fault. Well, sometimes it's the San Andreas fault. God is never unjust or unfair. His Word clearly tells us he is not the author of evil. He cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. It's never his fault. And even though everything bad is ultimately because of sin in general – if there weren't sin they wouldn't be anything wrong – still we can't always say a specific problem is caused by a specific sin. And actually Jesus tells us that seeing bad things like that should never bring up the question of what's wrong with God or what's wrong with that other person, but what's wrong with me. As he says in Luke 13 in connection with some people being killed when a building fell on them and some others being murdered, "But unless you repent, you will all perish too." The point is this lifetime is the time of grace God gives each person for coming to the Savior.

That's why Jesus adds this part about, "doing the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work." God sent Jesus for us, and whoever's eyes he opens to see that, God sends them out too. With Jesus, the Light of the world, in our lives, it is day. And as we go out with this light of Jesus, we can see it shining, and we can see blind people receiving their sight. Every once in a while there will be some news of some blind guy that hits his head and all of a sudden he can see. The doctors are quoted as not being able to pinpoint the reason. Well, when this man, blind from birth, received his sight, we can definitely pinpoint the reason. The God who doesn't cause bad things, often uses even the worst of the bad things for our best. This was for God to be glorified.

At first, the *how* is a little weird. Other times Jesus healed by just saying something or by touching a person, or even at a distance, not even being there. But this time, Jesus spits in the dirt to make a little bit of mud, and then glops that on the guy's eyes. Now doesn't that seem worthless and useless, almost kind of silly? I suppose the way baptism sounds to someone who doesn't trust the Lord's promises connected with that Sacrament. That we could put a little bit of water on a baby's head and say a tiny little part of God's Word and that child receives faith and forgiveness and adoption into God's own family. Or that somehow when we use the bread and wine with God's Word in the Lord's Supper, Jesus' same body and blood that he used to suffer and die for us are really there making our faith stronger. Or that the Gospel, not programs or policies or strategic plans or well-thought out arguments or anything we can add – that just the Gospel – those simple words that tell of God's love and the Son of God living a perfect life for us and dying an awful death for us to make us right with the heavenly Father. Doesn't make any sense – at least not humanly speaking. But then we're not speaking humanly. This is God's work and His way. And His way works.

So anyway, Jesus makes mud from the spit and dirt and puts it on the man's eyes. Then he sends him to Siloam to wash it off. And as the man washes he finds out his previously worthless eyes

can now see. What an amazing miracle. Proving Jesus is God just like he said he was. And proving that Bible truth “that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.” What a great blessing for this man. But really, that getting unblind thing, that was the little miracle. There was a much bigger miracle going on here. Where Jesus’ remedy with the mud might have seemed worthless, this man put up with it. He realized how helpless he was to do anything for himself. And when Jesus gives instructions about washing it off, he does that too. And now he can see clearly. But it’s not just his eyes. He’s not backing down from the Pharisees’ badgering. He’s giving all the credit to Jesus. And as Jesus comes back and tells him the rest of the Gospel story, now this man’s soul matches his eyes for being able to see.

And that’s the miracle you and I have been involved in too. Our Lord who came down to heal this blind beggar. Our Lord who came from his throne of glory to pick up the check for our countless sins. Our Lord who suffered and died as the cure for our spiritual blindness. He has worked faith in us. Through his Gospel in Word and sacraments he has opened our eyes. And by those same tools he keeps them open. By God’s grace we can see how blind and helpless we were in sin. We can see and believe in our Savior Jesus. But worry can blow sand into our eyes. Doubts about God’s goodness can make us squint a little to see through. Guilt and problems and difficulties make it seem darker. And we need our Savior to open our eyes back up.

See, the miracle of faith doesn’t mean all our problems go away. Sometimes we can get used to hearing these personal testimonies of how much better and easier everything is now because of faith. A few summers back I heard about some Fundamentalist church camp in west Texas, where sometime during the two weeks each child was expected to come forward and give his or her life to Christ and then give a personal testimony. The problem is most of the kids are just ordinary kids who don’t have a great story to tell. But one 12-year-old preacher’s daughter was writing testimonies for the other campers at \$5 a pop and making a mint. See, she knew the formula: “once my life was in shambles, but I met Christ and now everything is wonderful.”

Well, God and his way of doing things isn’t always quite that simple and predictable. Now you won’t often hear a personal testimony that says, “I was living a pretty decent life. Nice family; nice job; nice home. Then Jesus came into my life and messed up everything.” But here, in a way, that happens to this blind beggar. Yeah, Jesus gave him sight. But that wasn’t the day his troubles ended. In fact, they were just starting. Remember in that part of the story where it says they threw out this previously blind man. What they were throwing him out of was the synagogue. And that was tough back then. Really tough. Here people leave one church and join a different one down the street and don’t think anything of it. But back then there was only one synagogue in town. And being thrown out meant you were completely cut off from social life. You were treated like a leper. No one would come near you or talk to you. Not even your family. You couldn’t work in that town. And you’d have to pack up and move away by yourself. But that was okay, because this man could see. And not just with his eyes. He could see with a faith that knew he had a Savior. A Savior who had straightened everything between him and God. A Savior who guaranteed him a perfect forever. And seeing that means everything. Martin Luther was right. We are all beggars. But that’s okay. Because at least we aren’t blind any more. We know we are beggars. And we know how our Savior treats beggars. Amen.