

Encountering Jesus

To See or not to See

March 19, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: John 9:1-17; 34-39

As he (Jesus) walked 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?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."

They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner

*perform such signs?" And they were divided.
So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."
They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."*

Commentary: It's sobering to see the contortions of some the Pharisees here. They will condemn anyone, say anything, deny iron-clad facts if that's what it takes to defend their own 'correct' theology. But as the man proclaims "*I once was blind but now I see*, tragically, the Pharisees tell him that God had nothing to do with this miracle, because Jesus was a sinner, a Sabbath-breaker, and that the blind man was as well (his sin the obvious reason for his birth defect)!

Among the great ironies of this story in John 9 is this: both the disciples and the Pharisees try to make a connection between bad things and God. The disciples' query about the blind beggar makes this all too clear – "so who sinned? This fellow or his parents?"

That's how a lot of people operate: they see something bad and chalk it up to someone's sin and make God out to be the one who sends bad things as a punishment for sin. Their universe operates on the principle of *quid pro quo*, of tit for tat. Oddly, though, when the people in this story encounter the profoundly *good* thing of an amazing healing, they do everything in their power to *not* connect that good thing with God. Some, it seems, are more comfortable with making God out to be the dispenser of punishment rather than One who redeems and offers grace in the midst of human brokenness.

This story reminds that it is very possible to be in the presence of the "light of the world" and still be in the dark. But if it weren't for the fact that it's the religious people in this story who seem the most prone to put on spiritual sunglasses to keep out the light, John 9 might be less troubling. As it stands, however, those of us who consider ourselves 'faithful' today have plenty of reason to wonder whether—or how often—we fail to celebrate the

work of God just in case the shape of that work doesn't fit the bill of how we think things ought to go. How often don't we let our own scruples keep us from celebrating God's presence in the lives of others?

-Adapted from commentary by Scott Hoezee
(cepreaching.org/commentary/2020-03-16/john-91-41-2/)

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. The disciples and the Pharisee see the man's blindness as a punishment sent by God as a result of sin. Can you think of a current example of someone suggesting that something bad was a punishment from God?
2. How does Jesus answer the disciples (v. 3)? Can you think of an example in your own experience in which "God's works have been revealed" in a difficult situation?
3. Why do you think that some of the Pharisees were so blind to the God-given miracle that happened through Jesus? Why was it so important to them to be right about their interpretation of what constituted 'work' on the Sabbath? Do you see any of these "*My mind's made up, don't confuse me with the facts*" tendencies in the world today (in relationships? religion? politics)?
4. Ultimately the formerly blind beggar had greater spiritual sight (and insight) than the learned Pharisees. As a result, the Pharisees sought to snuff out Jesus's light, while the man worshipped Jesus as the light of the world. Why do you think that these responses to Jesus were so different? What is one way that you can see more clearly today?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: "*Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.'*" (John 9:39).