

“Now I See! How Christ Transforms Us”

John 9

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Please turn to John 9 in your Bible. As I take us through the chapter, I want underscore the remarkable transformation of the man born blind and how it occurred. Then I will draw some points of application.

The first seven verses recount Jesus healing this blind beggar. He applied mud to the man's eyes, which he made from his spit, and then sent him to wash them in the pool of Siloam. In all this, the man was obviously overwhelmed. We hear nothing from him.

Then in verses 8-12, his neighbors and those who had seen him begging began to question him. Was he really that man who had been blind? For the first time he speaks: “I am the man.” “Then how were your eyes opened?” “The man called Jesus made mud...” “Where is he?” “I do not know.” These were the first words he said about Jesus; just the facts.

Next in verses 13-17, the neighbors bring the man to the Pharisees. They quarrel among each other over Jesus: “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” They turn to the healed man. “What do you say about him since he has opened your eyes?” (Since you are the cause of our problem...)

Suddenly he is thrust into the middle of conflict over Jesus. He is under pressure from both factions. Politically the smart move is to side with the Jesus-is-a-sinner majority. But he doesn't. Instead he says, “He is a prophet.” Pressure has an amazing effect on him. It makes him think harder about who Jesus is. Does this challenge and threat serve to sharpen his understanding?

In verses 18-23, the Pharisees decide the miracle must not have happened, because they reject Jesus. So they go to the parents: “Is this your son who you say was born blind? How then does she now see?” (19)

The parents acknowledge that he is their son, but are too intimidated to ascribe his healing to a miracle by Jesus. They might be put out of the synagogue. That means cut off from friends and family, shamed and rejected by the community. Instead they turn the question back onto their son. “Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” (21)

The parents only avoid the prospect of rejection by placing it on their son. Would he follow his parents' example? Would he who had known the humiliation and isolation of living as a blind beggar now be willing to return to that status for the sake of the truth about Jesus?

In verses 24-34, they turn up the screws. There is no pretense any more of gathering the facts. “Give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner.” (24) In other words, in the name of God, agree with us, or else! Or else, what? Or else be charged with blasphemy for saying Jesus is from God.

Now this man who sat blind and begging for so many years speaks to the most powerful men in his society. He takes his stand. He drives his stake in the ground. “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

“The power of a personal testimony over a bad argument is very great.” (JP) Here it leaves the Pharisees even more infuriated.

“How did he open your eyes?” This is an ultimatum. Our man does not yield. His resolve strengthens. He goes on the offensive. With a show of innocence, he taunts them with questions. “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want not hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” (27)

Hear their response: “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.” Indeed our man actually was becoming Jesus’ disciple. The next exchange confirms it.

It is the Pharisees who now are defensive: “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

Our man picks up on their words. “Why, this is an amazing 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 if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

What a transformation in conviction, from “The man named Jesus made mud” to “He is a prophet” to “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.” He is from God.

His commitment grew thanks to the adversity he was under. He was being thrust from crisis to crisis, from trial to trial, in which he must decide: Is he committed to what he knows or not? To him who has more was given. The more he committed himself to what he knew, the more he knew. The more he realized what is true about Jesus.

Adversity, affliction, and antagonism are Jesus’ classroom, where he disciples us (or disciplines us as per Hebrews 12), so the truth becomes more and more a part of us.

Granted, we might read this far into John 9 and conclude the Pharisees were behind this poor man’s torments. Where was Jesus? The man said earlier, “I do not know.” (12) For all our man knew, Jesus was completely unaware of the hardship he faced because of him. And now, in verse 34, the Pharisees cast him out – he is rejected from the synagogue and life with his people.

Yes, all true, and this is where Jesus shows up once more, with an invitation to be his disciple.

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.”

Coming to faith in Christ and maturing in that faith is a consequence of testing, adversity, and crisis. I am not saying the testing comes as a consequence of maturity but the opposite, that maturity comes as consequence of testings which are hard and painful.

Christianity is not a “leave your cross behind because I carried it for you” faith but a “take up your cross and follow me” faith.

As we learned at the men’s conference yesterday, Christianity is not a “make my problems go away” faith but “help me see you more clearly through this adversity” faith.

Let me take you back to the beginning of our passage. Jesus’ disciples look at the blind man. They ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” They want to understand his affliction. So they naturally think in terms of the cause. They assume the cause. The only thing they want to know is whether it was the parents’ sin or the blind son’s sin.

Jesus completely overturns their assumption. “It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

If you want to understand why this man was born blind, don’t look to what you think is the cause, look to God’s purpose. God has a purpose for everything no matter what the cause. Often the cause – the disease, the injury, the lost job, the failed marriage – bears no resemblance to God’s purpose. Because it’s only a means and not the end.

Look to God’s to accomplish his purpose, trust in his purpose that even if you can’t see it clearly, you will, and when you do, you will not complain or object, but worship.

So for the man born blind, God’s purpose was to reveal his glory through his grace to this man so that he could see (the sign) and see further, that Jesus is the Christ (the substance) and worship him.

For that purpose, the man was born blind. For that purpose Jesus healed him using mud that was washed off. For that purpose the questionings and interrogations, the pressure and attempts at intimidation followed. For that purpose when the man was fully prepared, Jesus extended the invitation to believe, and he did.

I am sure that for that purpose, the man’s life was never the same. He faced other adversities, other pressures, other crises and afflictions. Until at the end he could say, “God caused all things to work together for my good through Christ.” Why? Because this was God’s purpose for those things in my life.

The same is true for you and me. So, don't feel pity for Christians in a classroom where Jesus teaches. They are where he wants them to be. There is great comfort in this. Love them with this truth; assure them of God's purposes. Commend them for their faith. Point them to Christ.

Our man born blind was convinced of this. I suspect he came to sing Psalm 27:10. "Though my father and my mother forsake me (What could be worse than that?), the Lord will take me in." (What could be better?)