

Message #38

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John

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JESUS SEEKS THE BLIND

JOHN 9:35-41

I.

You do not have to be a news junkie to realize that the Middle East is a mess. Millions of refugees have fled Syria in the last several years because of the civil war there. In Iran the economy is in free fall, partly because of the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal and our reimposition of sanctions. In Afghanistan there is continuing conflict as the US is involved in its longest foreign military engagement in our history. There is a civil war in Yemen, to the southeast of Saudi Arabia. The Gaza Strip continues to lash out against Israel. The entire region serves as an incubator for Islamic terrorism.

The Islamic faith is dominant in this chaotic region. Yet there is evidence that the church of Christ is growing. Jesus is seeking out followers, even from among the Muslims. Some missions experts say that the country with the fastest rate of growth of Christianity is Iran.

David Garrison, who has a PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago, has been part of the Southern Baptist International Missions Board for over 25 years. He says that there is an evangelistic awakening happening in the Muslim world. It is hard to estimate, but somewhere between two and seven million Muslims have been converted to Christ in the last twenty years. The rate seems to be accelerating. How and why has this been happening? The passage before us today has something to tell us about that.

In our study of John's Gospel we have encountered the sixth of seven sign miracles that the Apostle has recorded in his effort to convince his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Chapter Nine is devoted to that miracle and its aftermath. The event probably happened at the end of the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Jesus declared at that feast that He is the light of the world.

Then He reached out to this blind beggar who was hanging out by the temple, and He healed him. He put clay on his eyes and told him to go wash it off in a nearby pool. The man who was born blind didn't

know who this Jesus was. But he followed through on the instructions given to him and was healed instantly. This caused a considerable stir with the religious leaders.

The Pharisees, who were legalists and traditionalists, held a dominant position in the religious leadership of Israel. They had decided that Jesus was a fraud. He did not fit their picture of the Messiah, and He broke their rules. He had the audacity to heal this blind guy on a Sabbath, which--- in their mind-- was work and therefore forbidden. They somehow ignored prophecies in Isaiah about the work of healing the blind that the Messiah would do.

So we saw last week that these Pharisees interviewed the blind guy and his parents and tried to find some alternative explanation for what had happened. The guy formerly blind would not change his story. So in frustration they kicked him out of the synagogue. The discussions involving the Pharisees and the blind man and his parents took place apart from Jesus. In our passage today, Jesus becomes involved in the discussion and provides a divine perspective on what has happened.

I.

In vv. 35-41 of # 9, which is p. 896 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we find that JESUS SEEKS OUT PEOPLE IN NEED TO BE HIS WORSHIPERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. JESUS SEEKS OUT PEOPLE...) The Apostle John writes in v. 35, **“Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’”**

The reference is to the man previously blind having been excommunicated. If you look back at v. 22, you will find something of an explanation for this. In v. 22 John tells us, **“(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)”** Although the temple was in Jerusalem and was the center of much religious observance by the Jews, it is clear from historical references that much of religious and social life, even in Jerusalem, was centered around local synagogues. In Acts #6, there are references to these synagogues in Jerusalem.

Jewish writings from a couple of centuries later indicate that expulsion from the synagogue meant that the guilty party was to be treated like a leper or like one who was dead. Jews were not to eat with such a person or even speak to him. Certainly they were not to employ him.

So here is this guy blind from birth who has supported himself by begging at the temple. Suddenly he has regained his sight and has the opportunity to have gainful employment. But now the religious leaders have cut him off--- all for the horrible offense of telling the truth about how he was healed and who had healed him. So the guy was still in need. But Jesus sought him out.

In #4 we looked at the story of how Jesus went out of His way to meet the Samaritan woman at the well. She was not looking for Jesus. She did not know anything about Him. She did not even share the same religion. But she had a need. She had a history of a number of men being in her life. Probably she wasn't treated so well by some of them. Jesus offered her living water.

(JOHN 4:23) Then in v. 23 He told her, **“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”** Jesus was used to bring this woman to God.

Then in #6 Jesus explains how the divine initiative is involved in attracting these people, especially those in need. (JOHN 6:44) There He says, **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”**

The Father was clearly drawing this blind man to Jesus. He had a need. He was blind, and he begged for a living. He did not know anything about Jesus. But Jesus sought him out and healed him. Still he was in need of a spiritual transformation. So somehow Jesus tracked him down and initiated this conversation. (PROJECTOR OFF)

He asks the blind man if he believes in the Son of Man. “Son of Man” was an ambiguous term that Jesus frequently used of Himself in the Gospels. It was not directly a claim to be God or even the Messiah. It could be understood to be a simply a term for a representative of humanity. But it could also be understood to be a representative of God to humanity. Then also it is used in one passage of the Old Testament to refer to the Messiah.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel there is one passage where this famous Jewish leader (PROJECTOR ON--- DANIEL 7:13) has a vision that he describes in this way: **“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. (DANIEL 7:14) And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples should serve him...”** How much the man formerly blind understood of the background

of this term, we do not know. We may also here have a shortened version of the conversation that occurred between these two.

Being excommunicated presents certain additional challenges to this man. But if he had stayed in the synagogue, he could have been led astray in his spiritual understanding. Now he has a certain openness to Jesus and His message.

Verse 36: **“He answered, ‘And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?’”** This is the first time that the blind man has seen Jesus with his own eyes. Perhaps he recognizes his voice. Perhaps he thinks that the speaker is referring to his healer. Perhaps he suspects that Jesus is referring to Himself, and he is looking for confirmation of that. The text is not completely clear to us.

The original Greek word for “sir” is *kurie*, which sometimes may be translated as a polite form of address, as here in our translation. Sometimes it is used to refer to a king or other leader. Sometimes it is translated in the New Testament as “Lord,” when used in reference to God or to Jesus as the Messiah. Probably the translation “sir” is best here, in that the man previously blind has not yet determined the identity of the man speaking to him.

According to v. 37, **“Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.’”** This is a significant moment in this guy’s life. For the first time he is able to see Jesus because of what Jesus has done for him. It would seem to be natural that this man would want to know more about the one who has healed him. But in the healing of the lame man in #5, the object of Jesus’ mercy seemed to have little interest in becoming His follower. Here it is different.

Verse 38 records the man’s response: **“He said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”** The man previously blind uses the same Greek word to address Jesus, *kurie*. But this time it seems to be more than a polite form of address. The fact that he worships Jesus suggests that he now acknowledges Jesus as Lord, as deity, as one worthy of worship.

Again we may have a summary here of a conversation that was a bit longer. But notice how this man has progressed in his understanding of Jesus. In v. 11 he spoke of Him as merely a man named Jesus. In v. 17 he called Jesus a prophet. In v. 33 he claimed that Jesus must be from God. Now he calls Him “Lord.” That progression may be reflective of the thinking of some of us in how we have come to know Jesus as Lord.

The end result for the blind man is worship. The literal meaning of the Greek word is “to bow down.” Sometimes the word was used to describe the action of a subject showing respect to a king. Perhaps that is something of what happens here. Perhaps the man simply spoke words of praise to Jesus. This is the only place in John’s Gospel where a person is specifically said to worship Jesus. So this is an important testimony in John’s biography of Jesus concerning the claims of Jesus. The blind man’s actions stand in stark contrast to the reactions of the Pharisees at the end of the last chapter who seek to stone Jesus to death.

It is evident that Jesus sought out this man, as He did the Samaritan woman at the well and the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. They each had a need, and Jesus sought them to be His worshipers. Jesus has likewise sought most of us out. Often He found us in a situation of need. Perhaps He is seeking out someone here in a situation of present need.

Jesus has been doing that in recent days in the Muslim world. He has been doing it in what we might regard as unusual ways. *Missions Frontiers* magazine reports that 600 Muslim converts to Christianity were questioned about the factors that led to their conversion to Christ. Twenty-five percent of them reported that they had dreams that were instrumental to their conversion. Often they had dreams of a man wearing a white robe whom they later identified as Jesus. A number of missionaries to the Muslim world are hearing similar stories.

Tom Doyle (PROJECTOR ON--- TOM DOYLE) is a fellow Dallas Seminary grad. He has been working in the Middle East for many years. He has encountered a number of converts to Christianity from Muslim backgrounds who had dreams about Jesus. He recently wrote a book about this entitled *Dreams and Visions*. (DREAMS AND VISIONS)

Tom Doyle is based in Dallas. One day he stopped for gas there, and his credit card would not work at the pump. So he went into the store and encountered a woman in her sixties with white hair. This is how he tells the story: **“As soon as I started to talk with her, I picked up the accent [and] realized she was from the Middle East, and I said, ‘Listen, I have a special place in my heart for Muslims. I go to the Middle East a lot. Where are you from?’ ‘...Saudi Arabia, that’s where I’m from.’ And so we got into this kind of talk, and I was telling her about some of the work we were doing.**

“And finally... I said, ‘You know, I wrote a book and I would love to give it to you. It’s something you’ve probably never heard of, but Muslims are having dreams about Jesus. He’s honoring them and visiting them. Could I give you a copy?’ And she said, ‘I’ve been having dreams about Jesus.’ And I was just shocked. And as I started to spend some time visiting with her, I found out... that she’d been having dreams about Jesus for over 40 years... And the next day I brought her a book.

“And then two days later I needed gas again. ... I went in to see Sharin and visited with her some more. She loved the book. She was reading some of the passages in the Bible... (PROJECTOR OFF) and said, ‘You know, all these years I’ve been looking for answers about these Jesus dreams. But I knew two things, number one, that He loved me so much. He loved me with a passion, because I’ve never felt so secure in my life being around Him in these dreams. And then secondly, because of His great love for me, I knew He would come for me one day.’ And that day she prayed to receive Jesus as her Savior in a gas station in Texas...” (jashow.org/articles/general/when-muslims-meet-jesusprogram-2)

Jesus seeks out people in need to be His worshipers. He is even seeking out Muslims. We need to keep this in mind as we have opportunities to interact with Muslims in our world.

II.

Then in vv. 39-41 we find that JESUS STANDS IN JUDGMENT OVER THE RELIGIOUS WHO DEPEND UPON THEIR OWN MERIT. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. JESUS STANDS IN JUDGMENT...) According to v. 39, **“Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.’”**

There seems to be a scene change here. For in the next verse the Pharisees become part of the conversation. The three previous verses seem to involve a private interview between Jesus and the blind man. It concludes with the blind man worshipping Jesus. It is difficult for me to believe that if the Pharisees were witnessing this that they would not have interrupted it. So my guess is that either the Pharisees showed up on the scene after the previous conversation, or that this new conversation happened in a different setting.

Notice about this statement from Jesus that there is a hint again about His preexistence. He says that He came into the world. This implies that He existed before He became a human being.

The more challenging thing about this statement from Jesus is that He says that He came into the world for judgment. You may remember that following the famous statement of Jesus in John 3:16, He said this (JOHN 3:17) in v.17: **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”** Put together, these two statements might seem to be contradictory. The right way to interpret this is probably that we should see that the primary reason that Jesus came into the world was to offer deliverance, to seek out people in need, to offer eternal salvation to those who would believe in Him. But judgment is implied for those who reject His gracious offer.

Indeed, this seems to be what is indicated in the next two verses, John 3:18 & 19 (JOHN 3:18): **“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (JOHN 3:19) And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”** Jesus was sent on a divine rescue mission, but those who reject His help will face judgment.

The second part of v. 39 in our passage describes much of the purpose for the healing of this blind man. (PROJECTOR OFF) Jesus came to enlighten the blind and to blind those who think that they are enlightened. This miracle is an enacted parable. The blind man illustrates the spiritually lost who recognize their need and respond to Jesus. Those who think that they see are the Pharisees, the religious leadership of the Jews. They are dependent upon their own merit. They pride themselves upon their descent from Abraham and their knowledge of the Old Testament law. They are very religious. They follow their traditions and adhere to their strict interpretation of the law. They are certain that their merit will get them to heaven.

The Pharisees are blind to the prophecies in Isaiah which predict that it will be the Messiah who will have the power to heal the blind. It is the blind man who points out that never in their history has there been a story of one who could heal the blind. Yet these Pharisees want to kill Jesus. They are spiritually blind.

Jesus spoke in these terms to the Jews who refused to recognize him in Matthew #13 vv. 14 & 15. (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 13:14) In doing so, He was quoting the prophet Isaiah: **“Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’ (MATTHEW 13:15) For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed...”**

Some people in our world face this danger. Some of them are people who call themselves Christians. Their dependence is upon their own merit. They trust in their baptism, their church membership, their good works. They fail to recognize that Jesus came to save sinners whose only hope for heaven is in the sacrifice that He made for them on the cross. This death for us is appropriated only by grace and faith. In Ephesians #2 vv. 8 & 9 (EPHESIANS 2:8-9) the Apostle Paul wrote, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”** That gift is offered to us today. To reject it means judgment.

Our story continues in v. 40: (PROJECTOR OFF) **“Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, ‘Are we also blind?’”** The Pharisees at least understood that Jesus was speaking in spiritual terms. But they were offended that they would be accused of having a lack of spiritual insight. These were serious students and teachers of the Old Testament. They were very religious. They were respected by most people for their insights into God’s word.

Verse 41: **“Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now you say, “We see,” your guilt remains.’”** If the Pharisees had no understanding of spiritual things at all, if they had no revelation from God, they could perhaps be excused for their ignorance. Perhaps Jesus is making a comparison between them and the blind man. The realization of his blindness and his spiritual need led to his recognition of Jesus as the Messiah.

There was a merit-based religion. That kind of religion can produce a corruption where certain sins get covered over. Abusers can get promoted to be cardinals of the church. But Jesus stands in judgment over such religiosity.

Religious, merit-based systems tend to lead to pride. The author of the Proverbs (PROJECTOR ON--- PROVERBS 26: 12) warned in #26 v. 12, **“Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”** That was the Pharisees in the time of Jesus. That is some religious people in our world. Pride is a temptation that we Christians face. We must always remember that we are sinners who are saved by grace through faith. There is no merit in us deserving of eternal salvation. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So Jesus tells the Pharisees that their sin remains. They are satisfied in their circumstances of life. The implied warning from Jesus is that they face judgment.

Nabil Kassem was a very religious man. He was an imam at the Grand Mosque in Aleppo, Syria. He spoke often against Christians. He preached that honor killings were justified for any family member who would turn to the one that he called the Nazarene. He preached regularly about the duty of killing infidels.

Nabil's wife Noor didn't like such negative preaching. She sometimes did not come to the mosque to hear his preaching. For that she suffered. He often beat her. He also took out his rage upon his two daughters. They were beaten, too.

Noor described her frustration to her best friend Huda. Both of them were in loveless marriages. One day Huda confessed to the imam's wife that she had been going to a Christian church and had found peace there. Huda told Noor that she had become a Jesus follower.

Shortly after that, the Russians approached Aleppo. Imam Nabil Kassem decided that his family needed to flee to Lebanon. They did. They settled in Tripoli. Noor's friend Huda and her family also came to Tripoli. Huda's husband recently became a Christian, and his behavior changed for the better. Huda attended a women's Bible study in Tripoli. Noor eventually went with her. She was attracted to Jesus.

Nabil the imam was spending a lot of time looking for a job. So he did not know that Noor was attending this Bible study. Noor became a follower of Jesus. Her friend Huda gave her a Bible and encouraged her to begin reading John's gospel. Here we are. Shortly afterward, Noor decided that she had to tell her husband Nabil that she had become a Christian. Her friend Huda encouraged her to pray and fast for a week. They recognized the danger that Nabil could decide to kill his wife because of this. One week later Noor told her husband, the imam, that she had become a Jesus follower. Nabil was enraged. He beat his wife severely, but he did not kill her.

The house in which they were staying was a vacation home for Noor's parents. They put it in their daughter's name. Jesus was standing in judgment over Noor. Noor was dependent upon his wife for having a place to live. Meanwhile the three children in the family also became Christians.

One day Nabil announced to Noor that if she ever got baptized, he would kill her. The church group was planning a baptism on a Sunday afternoon. Noor showed up toward the end of that service to be baptized. Noor herself writes these words: **"So why am I still alive? It is only through the protection of God. Nabil promised to kill me if I was baptized. But Jesus called me to baptism, and I did it joyfully for**

my Savior. I truly figured my life with Jesus on this earth would be short. But He still stands with me here.

“Sabina and Shireen [their daughters] are following Jesus, too! The horrible beatings from their father did not stop them from running into the arms of their Savior. With Hussein [their son], it took some time. He did not want to disgrace his father, but the call of God on his life was strong. One day he found his sisters and me praying and knelt so quietly beside us that, at first, we didn’t even know he was there. It startled us when he spoke, but his words brought such a rush of joy to our hearts!

“He said, ‘Jesus, I do love You too. Please forgive me. And please forgive my father and open his heart that is so hard.’

“Nabil, though, rages on. Since I still own the home, I told Nabil he could have a room on the other side of the house if he leaves us alone. Many friends told me that was not smart, but Nabil abides by the agreement. He doesn’t have anywhere else to go. [Jesus, you see, stands in judgment over the religious who depend upon their own merit.]

“Do you have a family member with a stubborn heart? If so, please don’t give up on him or her. Do you have a family member you need to forgive? Pray without ceasing, like Paul says. We pray for Nabil every day. At first, I could tell he hated hearing us pray for him, but now I think he likes to listen just around the corner, out of sight.

“Because of us, Nabil is learning about Jesus. We make it a point to read the Bible out loud, and since our home is small, he can’t help but hear us.

“I believe the Savior’s love will reach my husband’s heart someday. Jesus has given me the grace to forgive Nabil for all the beatings, and he sees it in me. Nabil had never known forgiveness until now. It was not easy for me, of course, but everyone who follows Jesus must learn to forgive--- especially someone who is married to an imam.” (*Standing in the Fire*, Tom Doyle, pp. 68-69)

Jesus seeks out people in need to be his worshipers. Jesus stands in judgment over the religious who depend upon their own merit.