

Walking with Jesus... With Eyes Wide Open

John 9:1-41

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I don't understand what's happening. I thought I had God all figured out. I'm a Pharisee after all. I've studied the law all my life. I've been interpreting Moses' law for my community for years. I'm a pro. I know how God works forward and back.

So, how can someone claim to be blind one day and have sight the next? It just can't be. I know of people who sit by the "healing" pools around the temple for years and nothing happens.

So how can it be that this man named Jesus could simply tell the blind man to go and wash and then all is then well?

Jesus has no authority to do that. He didn't graduate from Torah School with me or anyone else I know, and I know everyone, of importance, anyway. Sure, he's a rabbi, but he is not connected to one of the synagogues I know of and he certainly doesn't have any clout around the temple. They all hate him!

If this blind man had sinned, (and clearly he had done something wrong to be born blind), then he should have gone to the priests, and they would have taken care of his sin. What was he thinking going to Jesus? He's making my people look totally inept and he's causing quite a stir around here too. It's unsettling really.

None of us like the way that people follow Jesus around. We don't like how he hangs out with all the wrong people. We heard how he talked to that Samaritan woman up by Jacob's well, now this blind man, and those tax collectors too. What next? He'll be raising the dead. Yuck!

And the claims he makes about himself! "Light of the World", "The Way, the Truth and the Life", "Son of Man". He thinks he's God's gift to the world or something. It's making a mockery of our well ordered community.

If we just follow the way of Moses, then everything will go nice and smoothly and nothing will have to change. After all, God gave the law to Moses. That's where God is, right there in the law. It's safe there. There is a place for everything and everything is in its place. Nice and tidy.

But that doesn't answer what happened here to this man. It just doesn't seem to fit our tradition. If he was really blind and now he sees something must have happened. Maybe he fell and bumped his head and it knocked something loose. Maybe he went to one of those miracle men and is just giving Jesus credit since all these people seem to be so interested in him. Maybe he was never blind to begin with. The problem is that none of these seem any more plausible than Jesus healing him. Could it be God doing something that we haven't already known about?

I know that some of my fellow Pharisees are really upset that this happened on the Sabbath. If Jesus isn't obeying the Sabbath, then he's not being a good Jew. And if he's not a good Jew then he doesn't have the favor of God. Right?

But Nicodemus, whom I very much respect, raises a good point when he asks "How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things?" And besides that, I heard about how he went to Jesus a few nights ago and asked him about what he knew of God. Nic told me (in confidence, of course) that Jesus said God sent him to show the world God's love. Jesus told him that God would never come to condemn the world. That makes a lot of sense, I guess. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah and said, *"I'm ready to help you right now. Deliverance is not a long-range plan. Salvation isn't on hold. I'm putting salvation to work in Zion now, and glory in Israel."* God's always cared for us Jews, but it seems that if Jesus is who he says he is, he's broadening God's care for all people.

When I think about it, there's really nothing to say that the blind man is lying. Even though his parents are worried about getting kicked out of the synagogue for siding with him, doesn't mean he's at risk of the same thing. He never had a place in the synagogue in the first place. He was blind. He was considered dirt and the only place he belonged in our community was on the street begging...That's not much of a place to belong at all, is it?

When I think about it, the good news about God is that God has been working for centuries to bring sight to everyone about how much God loves the world. He promised our ancestor Abraham a multitude of descendents and a Promised Land. God delivered us out of slavery in Egypt and brought us to that Promised Land. God gave us kings to rule us when we asked for kings (that turned out to be a mixed bag, but it was what we wanted). God was with us in exile and continued to give us hope when all else seemed lost. God has forgiven us over and over again when we've deviated from God's best laid plans. God has continued to show up over and over again in history, to bring us hope...to give us eyes to see God's salvation. The bad news is that we keep messing it up. I know how God's law protects our people and keeps everything in excellent order.

But by strictly following the letter of the law as it was seen in the past, are we missing something new that God just might be doing in the present?

This blind man has sight. Something he's never experienced before. How can I sit here in judgment when he is so elated? How can I condemn him for wanting to follow the one who restored his sight? Maybe I need to be more open to the ways that God is working today. Isn't it possible that God could be doing something new that is within the law, but looks different based on the new circumstances we live in?

And if Jesus is who this man has says he is, then God really loves the same people I've spent much of my life looking down on...The blind, the poor, the refugees and immigrants, those half-breed Samaritans, the stealing tax collectors, those people who've gotten the law wrong or ignored it. But if God really loves these folks, I suppose there's room for God to love me too. I don't know how this has all happened...but this much I know...I have been blind, but now, I think I am starting to see.