

"LIFE'S MEANING & PURPOSE: A Study of the Gospel of John"

V. The "Signs" and Testimony of Jesus (Jn. 2:1-12:50)

L. Opposition in Jerusalem cont. (Jn. 8:1-52)

Last study we saw how the opposition to Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem further intensified. A woman caught in adultery is brought before Jesus to entrap Him. Jesus defies His critics with supernatural wisdom and turns the tables on them by declaring "*he who is without sin, cast the first stone.*" He then ministers to the woman and compassionately offers mercy and words of grace and restoration. We then see through a series of discussions between Jesus and the Jewish leaders and crowds the contrast between Who He is and What He provides and those Who are of the flesh and of the world. These contrasts can be summed up as those between grace and law, light and darkness, and life and death. Now we will see two final contrasts before we study John 9 and the healing of the man born blind.

6. Freedom and Slavery – "...you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" – (vv. 31-47). Jesus makes an incredibly profound and bold statement: "***You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.***" Immediately His audience defensively retorts that they are not the slaves of anyone. How ironic that they would be so quick to deny enslavement when the Jewish people had suffered bondage under so many empires throughout history! Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and now Rome! And yet, Jesus says that their slavery is not primarily a physical one, it is spiritual. They are under the bondage of sin! Simply put, sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God. Sin is the reason for the disorder, dysfunction, discord, disillusionment, and division in society and it is the reason for decay and death in our world. Only God can set us free from this bondage. And He has done so in the Person of Jesus Christ! So if we know Jesus – Who He is, why He came, what He promises, and the power and wisdom He provides, we can be truly set free from the curse of sin. It is the first and only step one needs to true freedom from within! If we know Jesus we become sons of God and are no longer slaves (v. 36). Jesus tells us that the blessing of a son is in the inheritance that the son has, an inheritance that can't be taken away from him! But a slave, on the other hand has no security or hope of change! The Jews contend that they have "*Abraham as their father*" but by their very attitude and actions they demonstrate that their father is actually the devil (v. 44). A true son of God loves His Son and seeks after the truth of God with humility and openness. Jesus makes the point no one can convict Him of sin. He lived a sinless life and could not be condemned by his hearers and yet they still did not believe in Him. As a result, Jesus said in verses 46-47, "***If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."***

7. Honor and Dishonor – "I honor My Father and you dishonor me" (vv. 48-59). Having already shown their disdain for Jesus and His words by suggesting that He was born a bastard (the statement earlier in v. 41 "*We were not born of fornication*" would carry the implication "but you are!") those present now call him a Samaritan and demon possessed! Attacking one's character and name calling is a tactic many use when they can't win an argument or when they refuse to listen to reason. To say that Jesus was a Samaritan was to say that He was a low life and a heretic. To call Him demon possessed implied that he was crazy and/or evil. Such language and disdain simply reflected the hardened hearts of those present and confirmed Jesus' prior observations. Jesus continues with His incredible claims by saying in v. 51, "***Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.***" Such a claim of power over life and death further affirmed His deity. Such words further alienated those in the crowd as it meant that Jesus was greater than Abraham and the prophets! (v. 52-53). Jesus, however, could not deny the reality of Who He is and His special relationship with His Father - Jesus answered, "***If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God'; 55and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that***

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S WED. NIGHT BIBLE STUDY #10 with Fr. Ward - 2/20/19

I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. 56“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” *57*So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” *58*Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” *59*Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.” Here we have the climax of the entire chapter. Jesus makes the claim that He knew Abraham and was before Abraham was born (literally “*came into being*” (same verb used for the Incarnation) which affirms that life begins at conception!) But even more incredible, Jesus identifies Himself as the Great “I AM”! He is the same God who called out to Moses in the burning bush and He is the same God who called Abraham to follow Him. He is Yahweh! Not able to contain themselves, and commenting that Jesus was a man younger than fifty years old, those present took up stones to kill Him for committing blasphemy. But Jesus’ work on earth was not finished, and He walked out of the temple unscathed. How ironic that the chapter begins with members of the religious community presenting an adulterous woman for stoning, and now ends with many of the same ready to stone Jesus, the Son of God! Such examples highlight the depravity of man’s heart blind to God’s ways and kingdom.

M. Opposition and Signs (John 9:1-12:50)

1. The Healing of the Man Born Blind (9:1-41) – this is the fourth miracle or “sign” presented by John highlighting Jesus’ ministry and purpose for coming to earth. This miracle affirms the reality that Jesus is the “Light of the World.” It demonstrates Jesus’ power over congenital defects (blindness from birth) and hence physical ailments and the physical body. It shows that Jesus came first and foremost came to heal spiritual blindness which is far worse than physical blindness. Finally, the result of this miracle points us to what transformative faith entails.

Jesus is still in Jerusalem and He comes across a blind beggar. Such folks had no means of income and were totally dependent upon the generosity of others. What makes this blind person condition different from the others Jesus had healed (Mt. 9:27-31; 12:22; 15:30; Mk. 8:22-26; 10:46-52) was that this man was blind from birth. As a result, the disciples thought (due to faulty rabbinic teaching and tradition) that the man was blind because of the sin of his parents (recall Ex. 34:7 referring to the sins of the parents being punished to the 3rd and 4th generations) or even the man himself! There were certain rabbis who taught that people were sick due to sinning while in the womb or even in a pre-existent state! Such teaching parallels the false belief of reincarnation. In India, where Hindu is the primary religion, the Caste System, is the result of the erroneous conclusion that if people are poor or sick it is because of the sins of a previous life. Such thinking is not only wrong, it leads to the evil attitude that the injustice one experiences in life is one’s own fault. It further justifies people from not helping others who are less fortunate than themselves. Jesus totally rejects such beliefs by declaring in v. 3 that ***“It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”*** Preconceived biases are usually wrong. Jesus affirms the wonderful blessings that come from God’s power and presence.

What we will see now is a spiritual transformation of a man who had no hope physically or spiritually but who found His transformation as a result of the power of Christ and his faith. Jesus makes clay from spittle and dirt and places it on the man’s eyes (v. 6). Why? It harkens back to Creation (God made man out of the dust of the earth) and hence, Jesus is demonstrating that divine creative *power* in restoring a defect in the creation that came from the Fall. It also tangibly demonstrates Jesus’ *compassion* for the man who would not know something was being done to him except for the weight and touch of the clay, as well as the motivation for the man to obey Jesus’ command (v. 7) to go and wash himself in the pool of Siloam (which means “Sent”). Would he just remain on the side of the road with mud on his eyes? The blind man in fact did obey Jesus by walking a considerable distance as the pool was at the southern end of the city. Notice that Jesus did not say that the man would be healed, He only told the man to go and wash, and the man did exactly that – he demonstrated faith by obeying Jesus. And *then* he was healed.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S WED. NIGHT BIBLE STUDY #10 with Fr. Ward - 2/20/19

During his act of obedience in washing, the blind man is healed! He can now see. We now see the response by four groups or individuals 1) the man 2) his neighbors 3) his parents and 4) the Pharisees. The neighbors would have known the man and probably had supported him financially. Amazed, some weren't sure if it was really the same guy. The blind man affirmed that it was indeed him. He didn't know who Jesus really was at that time or where He was, but he simply acknowledged the facts of what happened to him (vv. 8-12).

Now the Pharisees get wind of the healing and rather than rejoicing and giving thanks to God for the miracle they question the blind man as to who and when the healing took place (vv. 13-17). For the miracle had occurred on the Sabbath. This ongoing issue of Jesus performing miracles on the Sabbath again took center stage. There are parallels between this healing and the one in John 5 (the paralytic). Both happened on the Sabbath and in a public pool. However, then asked who performed the miracle, the man in John 5 went back to the Pharisees and exposed Jesus as the one. Moreover, there is no indication that the man in chapter 5 ever came to saving faith. Jesus had confronted him concerning his sin and then he went and told the Pharisees. This time it is much different. The blind man wasn't rebuked for sin and doesn't know who or where Jesus is. Rather he demonstrates a growing faith.

Upon being pressed further, the seeing man defends Jesus and says that He is a prophet (v. 17). The Pharisees then go to the man's parents and ask them if this is really the man born blind (vv. 18-23). They don't deny that he is their son but they won't say what they think happened for fear of being put out (excommunicated) from the synagogue. Such a punishment would not only mean banishment from the religious community, it would imply being cut off from the covenant promises of Israel and therefore the loss of salvation!

So a second time the Pharisees approached the seeing man to challenge him but he does not budge. They conclude that Jesus is a sinner so how could He perform a miracle? But the man defends Jesus with simple logic much to the consternation of the religious leaders who appeal to their own authority as disciples of Moses. They then attack the man's character ("*you were entirely born in your sins*") and then excommunicate him (v. 34).

But the man's faith journey is not over. Jesus goes to find him! He asks him the question, "***Do you believe in the Son of Man?***" Jesus does not immediately identify Himself and the man would not recognize Jesus visually since he had been blind when Christ had first spoken to Him. He might have recognized His voice. But it is the question that is so important. In fact, the Greek pronoun "*su*" is added to the expression thereby denoting a double you. In other words, Jesus is asking, "Do you, yourself, believe in the Son of Man?" To which the man answers, "***Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?***" Here we have a person who knows what happened to him is of God and who is wanting to know more and who is willing to trust in that truth as it is further revealed to him. Jesus then identifies Himself as the Son of Man and the man says "***I believe***" and then worships Jesus. Here we have true faith that culminates in the worship of the One True God – the Lord Jesus Christ! Notice the progression of uncovering Jesus' true identity – "***the man they called Jesus***" (v.11); "***he is a prophet***" (v. 17); "***from God***" (v. 33); "***Son of Man***" (v.35); and lastly, "***Lord***" (v. 38).

The conversation concludes with Jesus saying in v. 39, "***For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.***" When the Pharisees heard this, their arrogance and hard hearts spilled out with the words, "***We are not blind too, are we?***"

To which Jesus said to them, "***If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.***" Unless, we recognize our need for God and our own sinfulness there is no hope for change or for eternal life. We remain dead in our sins. We remain enslaved by our own hubris.