

### Exegesis

**Vs. 1-3** – Aside from the fact that this is the only instance in the Gospels where we're told that the afflicted has been so since birth, there is nothing unusual about finding a beggar who was blind (cf. 5:3; Ac. 3:2; 14:8).<sup>1</sup> And like most ailments that impeded a person's mobility, the only way a blind person could survive was to rely upon the mercy of others (cf. 5:7). However, in light of Jesus' claims to bring eternal life, it seems he intended to show that his work on earth wasn't just restorative but creative. The Lord wanted to restore what had been lost during the Fall, but he also wanted to make man into a new creation. By the end of this scene, this blind man will gain both a physical and a spiritual sight enabling him to see in a way that no one has before.

Though the disciples were likely present during the events of the last two chapters, John made no mention of them. And so, with the reemergence of the disciples in John's narrative also comes a puzzling question.<sup>2</sup> Somehow already knowing this man's history, they ask Jesus, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" The underlying assumption fueling their question was that the only reason for the blindness was that someone, possibly the man, his mom, dad, or some combination of three, had sinned and thus caused this man to lose his sight. The reference to the parents' sin makes sense in so far that, before the birth of their son, they would've had the opportunity to disobey. But how could a man sin before he was born? While yet in his mother's womb, had he broken one of the ten commandments? Their question might go against our western sensibilities; after all, few today would be so bold as to say that a person's physical disability resulted from their own or their parent's shortcomings.<sup>3</sup> But this rationale made perfect sense to many first-century Jews.<sup>4</sup> Not to mention the fact that numerous bible passages make a causal link between sin and suffering (cf. Gen. 3; Ex. 34:7; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 11:30). Add to this, it appears Jesus was implying that the invalid of John 5 was such because of some sin he had committed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Köstenberger (2004), p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> Keener (2003), 1:777, notes that many differing religions—African mystics, Shona tradition, Navajo belief system—associate disabilities with some moral failure, usually on the part of the parent.

<sup>4</sup> Carson (1991), p. 362, explains that rabbi used passages such as Gen. 25:22 and Ps. 58:3 to show why Esau, though born first, was overlooked in favor of Jacob. They concluded that Esau must've sinned while yet in Rebecca's womb. Furthermore, Jewish leaders also taught that if a pregnant woman worshiped in a pagan temple, their unborn child had essentially worshiped.

<sup>5</sup> For a more in-depth explanation of this topic, see notes for 5:14.

But while physical infirmities might be the direct result of some moral failure, it is not always a foregone conclusion (cf. Lu. 13.2-5).<sup>6</sup> The entire book of Job, for instance, takes its time dismantling such an assumption (cf. Gal. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:7). Clearly, the answer to the disciple's question isn't as cut and dry as they thought. Thus, as far as this blind man is concerned, Jesus responds to the disciples by saying, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Though blindness, along with other disabilities, is a direct result of humanity's fall, God can still use the effects of evil to serve a greater purpose (cf. 11:4). God's will is not confined by morality. He uses the unjust as efficiently as the just to accomplish his work (i.e., Pharaoh; Rom 9:17; Ex. 9:16; 14:4). So, while Jesus does not explain, specifically, what caused this man's blindness, he revealed that it could still be used for the purposes of God.<sup>7</sup> We don't always know the answers to the "why" questions in life, but we can always "...know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). The calling of God upon one's life turns crippling disabilities into magnificent opportunities to glorify God (cf. 2 Cor. 2:9-10).

**Vs. 4-5** – "I must work the works of him that sent me..."<sup>8</sup> This man was born blind so that the "works of God" might be displayed before all. What a coincidence that Jesus says that he is just such a one who works the kind of works that glorify—"manifest"—God (cf. 5:7; 17:4). Jesus then uses a metaphor to explain that his earthly ministry has a time limit as he says that he only works "while it is day." Barring a few exceptions, no one works during the "night," not even the Son of God. Jesus is here hinting at the temporary nature of his bodily presence on earth. "His stay in this world is short."<sup>9</sup> Eventually, his redemptive work will be finished, and he'll return to the Father (cf. 7:33-36).

The Lord explains his imagery by saying, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (cf. 8:12). So long as the sun is in the sky, work continues. Likewise, so long as the Son of God is in the world, God's work continues. This is not to say Jesus' light ceased to shine when he returned to heaven. Numerous passages attest that the Lord is ever with the believer (cf. Mat. 28:20). His presence and light remain constant, and his work will continue even after returning to the Father, a point he will make abundantly clear in 14:12. But when Jesus

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<sup>6</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 252.

<sup>7</sup> Morris (1995), p. 425, quotes Bruce, "God overruled the disaster of the child's blindness so that, when the child grew to manhood, he might, by recovering his sight, see the glory of God in the face of Christ."

<sup>8</sup> Keener (2003), 1:779; Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 151, Morris (1995), p. 426, only the KJV and NKJV read "I must work..." as most manuscripts have the plural term "we" instead of the singular "I." This is why modern translations—ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, etc.—favor the reading "We must work..." This means that Jesus was likely speaking broadly about his earthly ministry. Just as the Son of God was sent to do the works of God, so too are the disciples and believers sent to do the works of God (cf. 14:12; 20:21).

<sup>9</sup> Morris (1995), p. 426.

returned to heaven, after the resurrection, believers became the sole source of God's illumination. Thus, for over two thousand years, Christians have stood in place of the Lord as the only beacon of light to the world (cf. Mat. 5:14). And while the gift of healing the blind is not universal, any Christian who leads others to Jesus has been used to bring sight to the blind in the same way that mud will be used to bring sight to this blind man.

**Vs. 6-7** – Without saying so much as "hello," John tells us that Jesus "spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent)." It is possible that the Lord and his disciples knew this man, this might not only explain how they knew his history, but it would also lessen the jarring nature of Jesus' actions. Nevertheless, it is shocking that there is no actual discussion with the blind man before Jesus acts. Even more surprising is Jesus' use of saliva to make the clay salve. Most cultures at this time, especially that of Palestinian Jews, thought that any substance that came from the human body was a form of dirt.<sup>10</sup> Thus, any action with these materials (i.e., saliva) would render a person ceremonially unclean (cf. Lev. 15:8).

Sadly, the answer as to why Jesus used spittle is unclear. Considering that he used saliva on two other occasions (cf. Mr. 7:33, 8:23), we know this must've been his habit; but we don't know why. Thus, given this peculiar method, various explanations have been proposed. For instance, while usually thought of as defiling a person, some mystics taught that the spit of a firstborn had healing properties.<sup>11</sup> Could Jesus be playing off of a cultural belief? This is unlikely as most rabbis distanced themselves from anything that might be associated with the occult. More compelling than that hypothesis is the theory of Carson, who believed that "Jesus is making a claim to have religious authority."<sup>12</sup> After all, he would often perform miracles in such a way that would've rendered any other person unclean (cf. Mat. 8:1-4). If the results were undeniable, then the authority of the one who performed the miracle cannot be denied. However, when early church fathers read this passage and saw the connection of saliva with mud thought that Jesus' actions recalled the creation of man in how God used the dust of the earth (cf. Gen. 2:7).<sup>13</sup> This seems the most likely explanation given the novelty of the miracle as echoes of the creation narrative permeate John's writing (cf. 1:1; 3:1-21; 20:22). Admittedly, however, this does not explain Jesus' use of spittle elsewhere, so we cannot know for sure.

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<sup>10</sup> Köstenberger (2004), p. 283.

<sup>11</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> Carson (1991), p. 363-364; Köstenberger (2004), p. 283.

<sup>13</sup> Keener (2003), 1:780; Morris (1995), p. 427.

Whatever his reasons for using salvia and dirt, John tells us that the blind man obeyed Jesus: "He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing." The pool where he washed was called "Siloam," to which John helpfully tells us the Greek equivalent of that Hebrew term means "sent." The Pool of Siloam is situated on the southern end of Jerusalem and is about half a mile from the Temple Mount.<sup>14</sup> According to archaeologists, the structure was trapezoidal in shape, measuring as long as 225 feet from its widest end.<sup>15</sup> And, as of 2004, when the pool was rediscovered, excavations have revealed at least three sets of five steps, each divided by a wide landing leading down into the pool.<sup>16</sup> As such, this would've been big enough to swim in.<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly, Kruse explains the significance of John's translation from "Siloam" to "sent" was to show that the healing took place because the blind man was sent by Jesus and not because he washed in the pool itself.<sup>18</sup> Many used the pool to wash, likely in preparation for one of the many Jewish festivals such as the Feast of Tabernacles, but only this man was healed.<sup>19</sup> Like the mud, the waters of Siloam had no restorative properties. Though the methods varied throughout the Gospels, Jesus was always the source from which all miracles flowed. Rather than being healed by the pool called sent, the blind man was healed by the great Sent One (cf. 3:17; 5:36; 6:29; 7:29; 8:42, etc.).<sup>20</sup>

**Vs. 8-12** – John breaks from form and moves the focus away from Jesus and now centers our attention onto the once-blind-man and what follows in the wake of this miraculous event. Jesus will not return to centerstage until verse 35.

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<sup>14</sup> *The CSB Holy Land Illustrated Bible*, (Nashville, TN; Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), p. 1510.

<sup>15</sup> Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, "The Siloam Pool: Where Jesus Healed the Blind Man," August 31, 2021, *The Biblical Archaeology Society*, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/the-siloam-pool-where-jesus-healed-the-blind-man/>, (accessed, March 16, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> General Editors, "The Pool of Siloam," *BiblePlaces.com*, <https://www.bibleplaces.com/poolofsilam/>, (accessed, March 16, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Morris (1995), p. 427.

<sup>18</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 255.

<sup>19</sup> Carson (1991), p. 365.

<sup>20</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 155-156.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 12

Text: John 9:1-7

Did you ever wonder why the innocent seem to suffer in this world? The disciples did too. They even asked Jesus a similar question about a blind man. And technically, Jesus doesn't specifically explain what caused this man's blindness; but he does reveal that it could still be used for the purposes of God. This passage teaches us that we may not know the answers to the "why" questions in life, but we can always "...know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Through Jesus Christ, the calling of God upon one's life turns crippling disabilities into magnificent opportunities to glorify God (cf. 2 Cor. 2:9-10).

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: