

All Muddied Up

“Ouch! Wha-what are you doing?! Hey, I didn’t ask for this! Man, that stings!”

Here’s this guy, born blind. He’s never seen anything, anytime, anywhere. He’s probably been parked there on the street by parents or friends to beg for coins or handouts. But he’s not complaining; he knows nothing else really. And, then comes his time... an appointment with his Creator.

Along comes Jesus with His disciples and before you know it, they’re pursuing a perplexing issue – why was this man born blind?

Now, either they knew him or someone filled them in because there’s no record of this fellow explaining his state of being born that way. In any event, the situation was theologically a ‘hot button’ for the rabbis taught that if such was the case, either the man sinned in the womb and thus deserved blindness or else his parents sinned such that the fruit of their folly was to pass blindness on to their child.

So the disciples asked, “*Rabbi* (a title used by the Jews to address their teachers), *who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*” (See John 9) You see, just as the only thing this blind fellow knew was darkness, all the disciples could fathom was what the rabbis opined. Either the man sinned or his parents – that’s all they knew,

and it was darkness as well – spiritual darkness. Now, they were curious, what would rabbi Jesus say?

So what Christ Jesus replied must have just zapped them.

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.”

‘Whoa, no one sinned!?’ Lord, you mean this guy’s been blind for his whole life, he’s begged in the streets, he’s been unwelcome in the synagogue ... so God’s works can be seen??’ If I were there, that’s probably what I would have thought; ‘You mean his pitiful state is somehow God’s work? That doesn’t add up, rabbi.’ What about cause and effect??

In some ways, the disciples were just as blind as this man but perhaps at a disadvantage for at least the blind man knew he was blind.

Now, the Old Testament scriptures contain promises that the Messiah would open the eyes of the blind and Jesus did that numerous times. But I submit that as great a miracle as it is to physically heal, spiritual blindness is far more consequential and to be healed of the same far more noteworthy. Typically though, we are so blind to the spiritual world, that we undervalue it and tend to interpret God’s ways, His works and His wonders in the context of the here and now; it’s all we know. We were born into it after all. In this way, we were born blind as well.

When God’s word says, “...*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think...*” our minds tend first to consider temporal

blessings. When we read, “... *Who heals all our diseases...*” we first figure that it means now -- here in this life. We sometimes hear the pragmatists among us lightly referring to eternity as “the sweet by and by” or as “pie in the sky.” Frankly, many of us only understand the Word of God in the context of the temporal – that is until we get mud in our eyes. And that’s just what Christ did.

Like you, I’ve heard a lot of good guesses as to why Jesus made mud with His spit and rubbed it into this man’s eyes. He could have spoken the command, “Now see.” Or gently touched him or used any other more ‘dignified’ way to do this miracle but no – for this guy, He made mud -- spit and dirt. Wow, that must have stung something awful! I mean, I get one speck of dust in my contacts and I know it right away.

But two points jump out – first, it was certainly a pragmatic way to ensure that this man who might not have done so otherwise would obey the command to go wash in the pool of Siloam.

And why spit? I’ll suggest that as the spit came from Christ’s mouth, so too do the situations that sometimes ‘muddy our own eyes’. Now, I’m not talking about the situations that come to us solely as a consequence of our sin, but rather the troubles and difficulties He Himself has ordained for our ultimate benefit. Sometimes dirty deals, muddy messes yet spoken forth by His mouth.

(Prophetically, this is interesting for Jesus made “pelos” – mud or clay, which speaks expressly in the Bible of the Jewish people (Isa 64:8,

Jer 18:6). You could say this pictures God using the Jews as an ‘irritation’ in the eyes of the blind world in order that they might come to see Christ.) Anyway, this man has got mud in his eyes.

And washing is just what the ‘doctor’ ordered in such a case – washing by the water of God’s Word! (Eph 5:26) For His Word is truly enlightening (Psa 119:130). But such washing is not just the result of scholarship – rather, receptivity and obedience. Let me repeat that – washing isn’t simply looking at the water, it isn’t just learning about the water, it isn’t even in just listening to the water – it is in contact with the water, emersion in the water – that is, receptivity and obedience.

Some folks think that because they simply read or listen to the Word, that, in and of itself, is taking care of this cleansing and that’s not necessarily so. Oh, reading the scriptures diligently and listening to those speaking it are absolutely critical in the life of a believer! But, it doesn’t stop there. Whether in the pew or the pulpit, the heart that pleases God is the one that trembles at His word (Isaiah 66:2) and that takes heed to it (Psa 119:9).

Second, this gives us a wonderful illustration of how God gives sight to the eyes of our heart – spiritual sight. This fellow was the subject of God’s attention; Christ came to him. Not the other way around. Jesus knew his condition and his situation. In like manner, whether you’ve considered yourself a ‘seeker’ or no, if you’re saved and a member

of God's family, it's because God found you. And...

Mud works. It's God's way so often with those of us who are not only blind but satisfied with that blindness. Mud is not a healing balm, it's an irritant! So are the situations God puts us in sometimes to eventually open our eyes. Heartaches, heartbreaks, tribulation and sorrow – so often, they're 'mud in the eye'.

But in obedience to Jesus, this guy went to the pool of Siloam to wash. It was southeast of the old city, but who knows how far it was; perhaps he wondered along the way why this man Jesus did it this way. Have you wandered and wondered in tribulation? Seem like you're just feeling your way along sometimes? Impossible situation? Recall, no one had ever healed a person who'd been born blind before, and this guy knew it. He knew his situation was impossible. (John 9:32)

But he went, he washed, and he returned seeing. Dear friend, if you're in such a state, take courage that your Siloam is reachable. God wouldn't send you there if it weren't. How far away is it? Not far. You'll make it. Wash in the water of His Word. Not only will you be clean, but you will see for the first time what you never saw before – not just physically but spiritually.

You see, as if to punctuate the point, the Holy Spirit demonstrates to us that this man who first only knew his Maker as someone called Jesus (John 9:11), came to see Him as a healer (John 9:15), then a prophet (John 9:17), then as the Son of God (John 9:38). The true

healing was his salvation. He saw Christ for who He is and believed.

While the disciples were still calling Jesus "rabbi" (John 9:2), this man, once doubly blind, now called Him Lord. He became 'heavenly minded' so to speak. One dear pastor friend of mine told me that since becoming devastatingly ill, he recognized the context of heaven and eternity in so much more of the scripture than ever before.

Mud does that. It leads to new eyesight as God opens our eyes to behold wondrous things (Psa 119:18), to recognize our Messiah, to better know our Father, to discern His Spirit, to set our minds on things above and thus to bear truly good fruit.

Can you relate to this guy? Stumbling in the darkness of grief and sorrow, I came to my own Siloam and began to wash and wash and wash and wash and wash. Gradually, my smoldering ember of hope re-ignited and then as if by the nape of the neck, the Lord took me out of the pit and set my feet once again upon the Rock (*Psa 40:2*)

In the 'trembling' study of His Word, you will see Him and be reminded of what you know – God is good. Heaven is real. His promises are sure. Your heart will recognize your Savior afresh and much more clearly. You'll realize that it was His hand that gently applied the mud if you would.

Certainly, we can appreciate the application of this passage to those who don't know the Lord. But, we as Christians can also have much more to see concerning our triune Lord. By salvation, we know Him as

Savior, we know Him as our Lord, our King, our Maker, our Bridegroom, our Father, our Comforter, our ... but can we still see more? Yes, resoundingly, yes. In fact, I'm convinced that we will spend eternity doing so.

In heaven the four living creatures (full of eyes) around God's throne keep saying, "Holy, holy, holy!" each time they see Him. Clearly, they are continually astounded and awed!

But here in these Shadowlands, while we're still in a tent of flesh, He will often muddy us up for that very same purpose – to see Him more clearly.