CLASS 3: John 9 & the Things a Blind Man Saw

One of the remarkable events in the Gospel of John is the healing of the blind man in John 9. It begins with a difficult subject: who is responsible for the blindness of a man born blind from birth? It is not uncommon that we feel that suffering is always a direct punishment for sin. Here and later in John 11 it seems that even Jesus' disciples thought that bad things happen because God wants it to happen. In Job, Job's friends constantly accuse him of having sinned because of the difficulties he experienced.

However, we are told that the conclusion that the apostles reached (that either the blind man was sinful or his parents were sinful) was incorrect. Jesus instead points to the blindness of the man as a purpose rather than a penalty. Let us consider the following points we are told from Scripture: (1) God does not punish children for their fathers (Ezekiel 18); (2) the punishment of sin is eternal damnation, NOT events in this life (Romans 6:23); (3) the consequences of sin are not the same as punishments (2 Samuel 12:13-14); and (4) not every bad thing is bad (Genesis 50:20).

What is really remarkable about John 9 is that most of the chapter is about the conversation of the blind man, not Jesus. It is also remarkable because the blind man makes some very astute theological observations. He sees that: Jesus is (the) Prophet, that Jesus worked the Messiah's promises (miracles that ONLY the Messiah was prophesied to perform). This is tremendously important. There were prophesied miracles that the Messiah would perform. Consider that the prophets spoke about the blind seeing and the lame walking on multiple occasions (Isaiah 35:4-6, 42:7). The blind man of John 9 rightly understood that in history, these miracles had never taken place.

Another consideration is that while the blind man did not know Jesus personally, he saw that Jesus could not be a sinner (this in light of the miracle being performed on a Sabbath). John 9:30 indicates that these observations are based on an understanding that the blind man has from the Old Testament: GOD DOES NOT HEAR SINNERS.

When the blind man state this, he is stating a old covenant truth:

> Isaiah 59:1-2 *Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear*.
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> Proverbs 15:29 *The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous*.
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> Micah 3:4 *Then they will cry to the LORD, but He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, because they have been evil in their deeds*.
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> Zechariah 7:12-13 "*They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. And just as He called and*

they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts

Do not think that this was merely part of the Old Testament; the Blind Man is pointing to a new covenant truth as well:

> 1 Peter 3:12 *For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil*."

When we consider this, there are several issues that come to mind. First, are there not example of God hearing sinners? What about Cornelius (Acts 10:31) or the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:8-10)? How is it possible that an all knowing God cannot hear something? To understand this we ought to define the terms that the blind man used.

What did he mean when he said “hear”? It does NOT mean God literally cannot hear them. Consider that God is a God of knowledge (1 Samuel 2:3) and that He knows all things (1 John 3:20). Indeed, we are told that every word that every man speaks is heard (and recorded) by God for the day of judgment (Matthew 12:36). For God to “hear” means to “listen”. We would say it means to honor or regard, or to grant our petition or request (particularly, the forgiveness of sins; contextually, to work miracles).

What did he mean when he said “Sinner”? A Sinner is one in the condition (ownership) of sin. The term is often mistakenly used to describe our propensity to sin (as many Christians sometimes describe themselves as still being sinners, they mean that they still stumble in sin from time to time). This is not the Biblical meaning, since being a sinner is necessarily devoid of righteousness (2 Corinthians 6:14-16) and s Christian has been liberated from the ownership and nationality of sin (Colossians 1:13). The Blind Man is telling us that absolute truth: one CANNOT be a Sinner and Godly at once (1 John 1:6).

What did he mean when he said “God-fearing / worshipper of God”? We might describe this from the Scripture as one who acts with reverence towards God (Deuteronomy 8:6) by obedience. Consider that for one to be heard by God requires obedient action first. Men like Cornelius acted righteously first, then they were heard by God. The people of Nineveh repented first, then they were heard by God. Obedience (it is now to the Gospel) comes first.

We need to understand that the Blind Man was suggesting that God does hear Saints (those who are sanctified). We point out that effective prayers require righteous conduct (James 5:16). We also should say that effective prayers require Holy relationships. We are holy by being priests and the temple of God (1 Peter 2:5, 1 Corinthians 6:19). We are told that having been sanctified in obedience to the Gospel of Christ (baptism, 1 Corinthians 6:11), we become temples to the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). We can consider the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer (Romans 8:26) as being damaged by sin; as Peter says, our prayers are hindered by our conduct (1 Peter 3:7).

John 9 regards three important theological truths: suffering in this life is not because of sin, and we do not inherit the sins of our ancestors (Original Sin); Jesus must be the Messiah because of the unique miracles He performed; a sinner's prayer cannot be effective.