

# Lesson Thirteen

*(John 9:1-34)*

This lesson contains some important insights regarding why people suffer ill health, whether God hears the prayers of all people, and how people reacted in such diverse ways to the miracles of Jesus.

## **Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind**

*(John 9:1-12)*

<sup>1</sup>As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?"

<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him. <sup>4</sup>As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>While I am in the world, I am the light for the world."

<sup>6</sup>After he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud on the man's eyes <sup>7</sup>and told him, "Go and wash your face in

the Pool of Siloam." (This name means "Sent.") So the man went, washed his face, and came back seeing.

<sup>8</sup>His neighbors, then, and the people who had seen him begging before this, asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

<sup>9</sup>Some said, "He is the one," but others said, "No he isn't; he just looks like him."

So the man himself said, "I am the man."

<sup>10</sup>"How is it that you can now see?" they asked him.

<sup>11</sup>He answered, "The man called Jesus made some mud, rubbed it on my eyes, and told me to go to Siloam and wash my face. So I went, and as soon as I washed, I could see."

<sup>12</sup>"Where is he?" they asked.

"I don't know," he answered.

Here is a man suffering from congenital blindness. He has never seen his mother's face, never watched a bird soar high in the sky, never witnessed a crimson sunset. So his escape from darkness to light is a thrilling moment. And it dramatically contrasts with the stubbornness of the Jewish authorities who refuse to see the Light although they have 20-20 vision.

What was there about this blind man that catches the attention of Jesus? Was he begging for money? Was he sitting still, lonely and helpless? Or was he courageously groping his way toward the Temple in order to worship God on this Sabbath Day? John doesn't give us an answer to that. But Jesus chooses to give this man a new start in life.

In 9:2 we see that the apostles, like many people today, hold to the mistaken notion that every sufferer of disease is somehow personally responsible for it and somehow deserves that malady. Just as the "friends" of Job believed that he was afflicted because of his own sinfulness (Job 4:5-8), the Jewish rabbis had taught that there is a strong connection between sin and suffering.

It is true, of course, as Paul Butler says, "All of man's infirmities are attributable in the final analysis to sin — Adam's sin brought about physical disease and death (cf. Rom 5:12-21; also Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:20-23). Furthermore, the sins of parents may be visited upon their children in physical calamities even to the fourth generation (cf. Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14-18; Deut. 5:9, 28:32; Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:2). And it is also true that much of a man's suffering is brought by his own sin and dissipation" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 82).

However, Jesus declares that neither this man nor his parents are to blame for his handicap (9:3). It is not that they have never

sinned; it is just that none of their sins was a factor in this man's blindness. "He is blind," Jesus says, "so that God's power might be seen at work in him." Hundreds of years before this time Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would "open the eyes of the blind" (Isaiah 42:7), so this humble blind man is a part of God's divine plan.

All of us face deadlines in our lives. There are those doors of opportunity which slam shut after a given time, never to be opened again. A few years ago a group of Christians went to Montreal (Quebec), Canada, to conduct a crusade for Christ. The workers fanned out into the city to encourage people to attend the nightly meetings. A Christian named Edward Aikin walked up to an elderly gentleman who was sitting on a bench in a small park. He handed the Canadian a brochure and invited the man to attend the evangelistic series. After briefly reading the brochure, the man replied in a heavy French accent, "I be there. I be there." Aikin expressed delight at the old man's decision and went on to the other side of the park to hand out more brochures. A short time later he heard an ambulance approaching and saw it stop on the other side of the park, right where he had been earlier. He rushed over just in time to see the attendants loading that same elderly man into the ambulance for a trip to the morgue. For he had died of a massive heart attack. There would be no more opportunities for him.

But there are for you and for me. Write a letter of encouragement. Speak a word of cheer. Give some food to a needy family. Lead someone to Jesus. Do whatever you can, and do it today. Remember that God's work had better be *done*. Be aware that God's work had better be done *right*. And keep in mind that God's work had better be done *right now!* For the "night is coming when no one can work."

Jesus is "the light for the world" (9:5). Burton Coffman says, "This light obligates all who see it. Men may be pardoned for stumbling in darkness; but those who close their eyes against the light commit a sin against nature as well as against God. The obligation imposed by the presence of light may not be assumed or rejected by men, for the very existence of light carries the inherent requirement that men shall walk in it" (*Commentary on John*, p. 234). And Jesus himself says, "I have come into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness" (12:46).

In 9:6-7 Jesus applies a mud pack to the man's eyes and tells

him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. There is no mention of this man's faith, but he was at least willing to give the Great Physician a try. And he is given the precious gift of sight!

Why does Jesus use such a technique here? Perhaps this was the best way, under the circumstances, to show that this healing came from him. But it was not the only method he used to heal the blind.

Imagine that you are attending the "First Annual Convention of Ex-Blind People." The first speaker explains that all in the world a person has to do to be healed is to sit at the feet of Jesus (Matt. 15:29-31). The second speaker says, "Aw, that's dumb. It's not what position you're in, it's *where* you are. You've gotta be in the Temple before you can get your sight restored" (Matt. 21:14).

The third speaker clears his throat and says, "Listen up, good buddies, and I'll tell you what the approved example is. Jesus takes you by the hand, spits in your eyes, places his hands on your eyes and asks what you can see so far, then he places his hands on your eyes again. And presto, you can see. And I wasn't anywhere near the Temple, either!" (Mark 8:22-26).

Bartimaeus, a former blind beggar who is not even on the program, stands up and shouts, "Why do we have to ritualize everything? I'm here to tell ya that you can be healed without any of those things! Jesus doesn't even have to touch your eyes in order to heal them" (Mark 10:46-52).

The fourth speaker restores order and says, "It is evident that, in the midst of the excitement of the healing, all of you guys forgot exactly what took place. First, Jesus makes a kind of mud pie and rubs it in your eyes. Then he tells you to go wash your face in the pool of Siloam. That's all there is to it. And that's the gospel truth."

Well, the point of this little story is this: Jesus, as the Son of God, had the power to heal as he wished, anywhere and anytime, even on a Sabbath day and right in the Temple.

This incident in 9:1-12 points out the importance of doing whatever Jesus instructs you to do. Suppose that the blind man had said to Jesus, "Listen, my friend, we both know you can heal me without me having to stumble down to the pool and wash my face. There's nothing in that water that will heal my eyes. So, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll claim my vision right now, then at a more convenient time I'll go down and wash just to show that I trust you." That man would have died the same way he was born: blind! He was healed because he believed enough to obey.

The same principle applies in regard to our salvation. Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). That command is just as clear as "Go and wash your face in the Pool of Siloam." Yet some object by saying, "Water can't wash away your sins," as though anybody today teaches that it can. It can't. But *obedience* to Jesus' command will wash away your sins, just as obedience to Jesus' command gave this man his sight. Praise the Lord!

### **The Pharisees Investigate the Healing**

*(John 9:13-34)*

<sup>13</sup>Then they took to the Pharisees the man who had been blind.

<sup>14</sup>The day that Jesus made the mud and cured him of his blindness was a Sabbath. <sup>15</sup>The Pharisees, then, asked the man again how he had received his sight. He told them, "He put some mud on my eyes; I washed my face, and now I can see."

<sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, "The man who did this cannot be from God, for he does not obey the Sabbath law."

Others, however, said, "How could a man who is a sinner perform such miracles as these?" And there was a division among them.

<sup>17</sup>So the Pharisees asked the man once more, "You say he cured you of your blindness — well, what do you say about him?"

"He is a prophet," the man answered.

<sup>18</sup>The Jewish authorities, however, were not willing to believe that he had been blind and could now see, until they called his parents <sup>19</sup>and asked them, "Is this your son? You say that he was born blind; how is it, then, that he can now see?"

<sup>20</sup>His parents answered, "We know that he is our son, and we know that he was born blind. <sup>21</sup>But we do not know how it is that he is now able to see, nor do we know who cured him of his blindness. Ask him; he is old enough, and he can answer for himself!" <sup>22</sup>His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, who had already agreed that anyone who said he believed that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. <sup>23</sup>That is why his parents said, "He is old enough; ask him."

<sup>24</sup>A second time they called back the man who had been born blind, and said to him, "Promise before God that you will tell the truth! We know that this man who cured you is a sinner."

<sup>25</sup>"I do not know if he is a sinner or not," the man replied. "One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I see."

<sup>26</sup>"What did he do to you?" they asked. "How did he cure you of your blindness?"

<sup>27</sup>"I have already told you," he answered, "and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Maybe you, too, would like to be his disciples?"

<sup>28</sup>They insulted him and said, "You are that fellow's disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. <sup>29</sup>We know that God spoke to Moses; as for that fellow, however, we do not even know where he comes from!"

<sup>30</sup>The man answered, "What a strange thing that is! You do not know where he comes from, but he cured me of my blindness! <sup>31</sup>We know that God does not listen to sinners; he does listen to people who respect him and do what he wants them to do. <sup>32</sup>Since the beginning of the world nobody has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a blind person. <sup>33</sup>Unless this man came from God, he would not be able to do a thing."

<sup>34</sup>They answered, "You were born and brought up in sin — and you are trying to teach us?" And they expelled him from the synagogue.

What a sad ending to what should have been a thrilling and happy story. Instead of rejoicing with the healed man, they put him on trial and finally kick him out of their fellowship. Something is obviously wrong when a man who has been blind since birth, who has never read a single page of scripture, is able to refute the learned religious leaders!

Frank Pack says, "Those Pharisees who rejected the miracle and therefore rejected Jesus as a man from God felt they were following the teaching, or at least the spirit of Deuteronomy 13:1-5 that one must not believe a miracle worker if he teaches people to follow idols. So because Jesus was breaking their tradition concerning the sabbath, they felt that he could not be from God" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 159).

The fundamental principle of prayer is that God will hear and answer any request which is in keeping with his will and which is properly motivated (Matt. 7:7; James 1:5-8; 4:3). So we have the case of a non-Christian named Cornelius, who was an honest and good man, whose prayers were heard and answered by God (Acts 10).

But it is equally true that God will not heed the prayers of those who are committed to a life of sin. Isaiah told the wicked people of his day, "Don't think that the Lord is too weak to save you or too deaf to hear your call for help! It is because of your sins that he doesn't hear you. It is your sins that separate you from God when you try to worship him" (Isaiah 59:1-2).

So in the context of 9:31, the blind man is simply arguing that God would not give a blatant sinner the power to heal the blind. Unfortunately, 9:31 has often been used to infer that God will not hear the prayers of anyone except those in our own little group or those who believe as we do on all doctrinal matters. That is not what this passage teaches.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 9:1-34**

1. Whose sin caused this man to be born blind?
2. Why is there a sense of urgency about God's work?
3. Are those who are sick sometimes personally responsible for it?
4. Are those who are sick always personally responsible for it?
5. How did death and disease come into the world?
6. Discuss an important spiritual opportunity which you failed to grasp.
7. Take seven sheets of paper and write down how your time is spent on a typical Sunday, Monday, etc. Then rework your schedule to include more time for Bible study, prayer, your family, service to others, etc.
8. Why did Jesus "come into the world as light"?
9. Explain this statement: "The faith that saves is the faith that obeys."
10. Why did the blind man's parent's tell the Jewish authorities they would let their son speak for himself?
11. We may have to suffer insults and persecution, as the blind man did after he was healed, when we witness for Jesus. But since spiritual healing is even greater news than physical healing, tell *someone* this week why you love Jesus.
12. Explain whose prayers God will hear and why.