

The Interrogation of Missions

John 9:1-34

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

Living in an age when Christianity is no longer at the center, but the fringes of our society has led many to wonder how the church is to fulfill its mandate to go and make disciples. In a society that no longer trusts organized religion it has become “easy” for people to get “drunk” in the ever increasing and vast carnal, pleasurable activities of this world and honor the god of self! It is tiresome and dare I say frustrating to develop, implement and run numerous church programs, musical events, movie nights and countless dinners and yet not see the ripe fields all around us bear any fruit! As our congregations get “older” and our attendance and budgets decline, one can’t help but wonder if this will be the last generation to walk the halls of our “small” church! Instead of reading book after book on evangelism in search of the “holy grail” method that will turn hearts and fill our pews, I invite you to consider the story of the man born blind as a possible remedy to our “blindness” when it comes to how Christ grows His church. In this four-act story of John chapter 9:1-34 we learn that for evangelism to be effective one must clean the inside of the cup, not write off people, be willing to embrace new methods, be prepared to pay any price asked by God and be focused on telling the world what one knows concerning our Lord, Savior and King.

Act 1: “Caution: Profound Change is Needed” (9:1-12)

At the beginning of chapter nine we are told of Jesus healing a man born blind. This was not a “story” or “allegory” but the recording of a miracle that happened.¹ When Jesus and His



disciples came across a man born blind the disciples asked Him: who sinned, this man or his parents”? While this question might seem odd to us today it would have been typical of those of the ancient world² who believed that suffering was due to sin³ of either the person (even in the womb according to some rabbis as they point to Psalms 51:5)⁴ or of the parents (Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9). Jesus responded by rejecting both options and said that suffering was not always due to sin but in this case happened so “that the works of

¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 162.

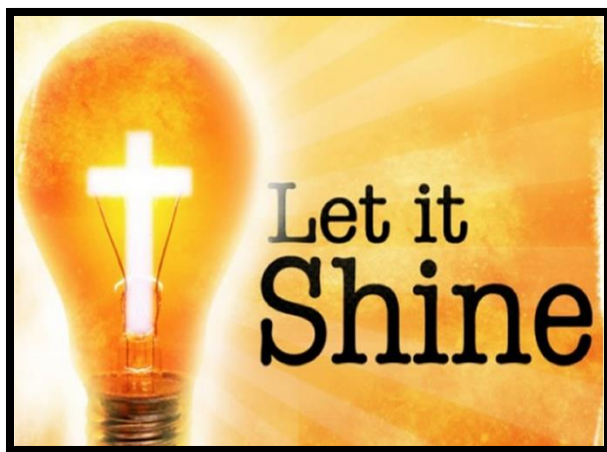
² George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 154.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 424–425.

⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, 155.

God might be displayed in him (verse 3).⁵ Jesus then spit on the ground, made some mud, put it on the man's eyes and told him to "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (verses 6-7). When the man did as Jesus asked he was born again, passing from darkness to light not only in respect to his physical but also his spiritual sight.⁶ When the man went home⁷ his neighbors and those who had seen him beg found it hard to believe he was the same man that was "formerly so pitiable in his helplessness and poverty."⁸ When the man confirmed his identity (verse 9) they asked "how were your eyes opened" (verse 10)? In response the man gave a succinct account of the miracle but stated he did not know where Jesus was (verse 12).⁹

From act one of the curing of the blind man we learn that profound change gets noticed, especially when its source comes from the light! To go from being "one voice amongst many" to a voice of the One true light (John 1:9) and Savior of this world (1 John 4:14), one must look



inward to make certain one's cup is not polluted by sin (Matthew 23:26)! This world distrusts organized religion not only due to its teachings that contradict Scripture but also because they see so little evidence of change in those who claim to be born again! While being born of the water and Spirit (John 3:5) is a radical change that begins at conversion, to be an effective ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-20) this transformation must be an ongoing process (Romans 12:1-2) of denying oneself, taking up one's cross and following Jesus (Matthew 16:24)! This world does not know they are

spiritually blind (1 Corinthians 1:18) and as such will not give up their vast pleasurable activities on the broad path (Matthew 7:13) for the mere appearance of holiness. Those dying in their sins will not be won over by a hypocritical, chameleon befriending and telling them of their "apparent" holiness but through a person whom with the power of the Holy Spirit has thrown off the shackles of sin (Romans 6:6) and now follows in the footsteps of Christ (John 13:15)! Let all our words and deeds point to God the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16) of whom is without sin (1 Peter 2:22) and can give the lost not only their sight but also save their souls (John 3:16)!

⁵ Leon Morris, 425.

⁶ J. Ramsey Michaels, 160.

⁷ Leon Morris, 428.

⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, 156.

⁹ Leon Morris, 429.

Act 2: “Don’t be so Quick to Write People Off!” (9:13-17)

Apparently not satisfied with his answer they took the man to the Pharisees for another round of interrogation. While it is possible that these Pharisees were acting as official



representatives of the Sanhedrin it is more likely that they were performing an “influential but unofficial inquiry.”¹⁰ Once again, the man repeated the facts of the miracle. It is at this point that the way in which the miracle was performed came into question. Healing a life not in danger,¹¹ using saliva that was often associated with magical practices, kneading the mud¹² and possibly anointing eyes¹³ on the Sabbath were all perceived as being practices forbidden by the Torah. While most of the Pharisees concluded that Jesus could not be from God because He broke the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 13:1-5), some of Pharisees

believed the miracle proved Jesus was from God and therefore could not be a sinner.¹⁴ After arguing with one another, they turned to the man and asked him “what do you say about Jesus, it was your eyes He opened” (verse 17)? In response the man demonstrated his understanding of

Jesus had grown¹⁵ for under formal interrogation he stated, “He is a prophet” (verse 17).¹⁶



From act two we learn to not be so quick in writing people off as “unreachable.” Despite peer pressure, some of the Pharisees broke with the traditional interpretation of the Law and believed the healing of the man born blind was proof that Jesus was accredited by God.¹⁷ It would have been easy to paint all Pharisees with the same unbelieving, incapable of change brush but that would not

¹⁰ Leon Morris, 430.

¹¹ Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 305.

¹² Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2005), 282.

¹³ D. A. Carson, “*The Gospels and Acts*,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 2172.

¹⁴ Leon Morris, 431.

¹⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, 283.

¹⁶ J. Ramsey Michaels, 165.

¹⁷ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 156.

be appropriate considering some of them were open to seeing the truth. In a similar manner we must be careful to not paint all unbelievers with the same “stone heart of Pharaoh” brush just because they indulge in the ways of this world! Not everyone who swears, trades sexual partners, drinks excessively or are motivated by money, fame or power are so closed to the Gospel message that telling them about Jesus would be the equivalent of “giving the dogs what is sacred or casting pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6)! Remember it was not that long ago that you were not only slaves to sin (Romans 6:15-23) but also felt the cross was mere foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18). Where would you be right now if the person who told you about Christ had only seen a stone heart inside of you and walked away without saying a single word? To be effective in evangelism, through prayer and the power of the Spirit we need to rightly discern¹⁸ and have the courage to share the Gospel message to anyone God sends our way!

Act 3: “Embracing New Methods and Paying the Price” (9:18-23)

Refusing to believe a miracle had happened the Pharisees brought forward the man’s parents to be interrogated. In rapid fire the Pharisees ask the parents three questions: “is he your



son,” “is this the one you say was born blind and how is it that he can see?” While the parents were willing to confirm the man was indeed their son and was born blind, out of fear of being put out of the Synagogue¹⁹ they said they did not know how or whom opened his eyes. Their response was “characterized by timidity and a readiness to submit to the authority of their questioners”²⁰ and far from truthful. It was precisely because they knew anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah would be kicked out of the Synagogue (verse 22) that parents refused to give credit where it was due.²¹ To keep from

getting involved in any theological or political issues relating to the miracle, the parents further evaded the last question by stating that since their son was of legal age to give testimony²² the Pharisees should ask him.²³

The first thing we learn from act three is that tradition can be the anchor that sinks and makes changes within the church nearly impossible. Even in the presence of the Son of God whose life and miracles proved His identity, the Pharisees would not accept the ushering in of a kingdom that transcended the temple, Torah and their national identity. These stiff necked, self-proclaimed guardians of the Law would rather keep the yoke of the law that does not give freedom (Galatians 5:1), but death firmly wrapped around the people’s throats than to accept the

¹⁸ D. A. Carson, 185.

¹⁹ Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, 312.

²⁰ Leon Morris, 433.

²¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, 166.

²² D. A. Carson, 2172.

²³ Merrill C. Tenney, 104.

grace of Christ to be the one-time sacrifice for all (Hebrews 10:11-18)! Lest we think too little of the Pharisees and too much of ourselves, are we not chained to decades old programming, music, dinners and outreach programs so that we might continue to enjoy the church that we grew up in? To be effective in evangelism one must be like Apostle Paul and “become all things to all people” so that by all possible means we might save some to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). To do this we must resist the urge to anchor ourselves in tradition while resisting and ignoring what God is doing in the present. Until our love for and desire to reach the lost of our community outweighs



our “uncomfortableness” of change, we will drag the anchor of the past while dreaming about conversions, filled pews and church budgets!

The second thing we learn in act three concerning evangelism is that to be effective in spreading the Gospel message one must first be ready to be ostracized from society. The parents had a wonderful opportunity to testify about Jesus but were unwilling to do so because to be kicked out of the Synagogue was a price they were unwilling to pay. Telling those whom are on



the dark path about Jesus invites ridicule and persecution because those who “do evil hate the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed” (John 3:20). Jesus warned that the world hates anyone in whom they do not see a reflective shadow of themselves but instead a true ambassador of Christ living and proclaiming the Gospel message (John 15:18-19)! While you are unlikely to be killed because of your witness concerning Christ here in North

America, do not underestimate how devastating it is to be rejected from group events or dismissed for a promotion at work merely because you have spoken in His Name! To effectively plant seeds in God’s kingdom we need people in our church that are willing to put God first and risk anything to tell others the Good News!

Act 4: “Tell the World what you Know” (24-34)

Since the parent’s refused to give them the answers they wanted, the Pharisees summoned the man for another round of interrogations. They began with a pious exhortation²⁴

²⁴ Leon Morris, 436.

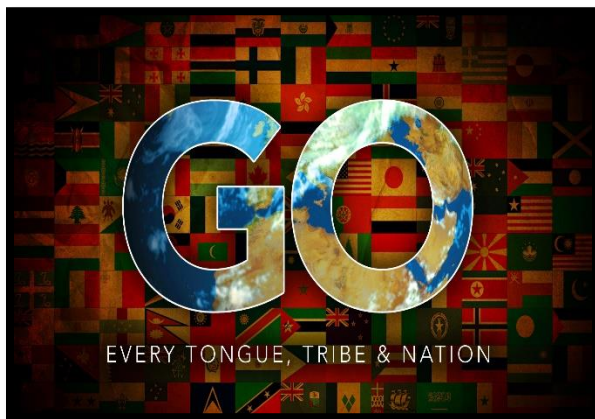
that the man under solemn oath²⁵ give God the glory by confessing that he had held something back that proved Jesus was a sinner.²⁶ In response the man simply stated what he knew for certainty, “I was blind and now I see” (verse 25). Not satisfied with this answer the Pharisees



asked, “what did He do to you and how did he open your eyes?” (verse 26). The man reminded them that he had already answered these questions and at the height of irony²⁷ and with sarcasm²⁸ asked the Pharisees “do you want to become His disciples too?” (verse 27). Realizing the man had admitted to becoming a disciple of Jesus,²⁹ the Pharisees hurled insults at him and proclaimed they were “abiding by the authority Moses,”³⁰ but Jesus they knew not where He came (Verse 29). With increased courage and cynical wit,³¹ the man stated he was amazed these religious experts

could not see³² the unheard-of miracle of giving sight to one born blind as being uncontroversial evidence³³ that Jesus was not a sinner, nor had He gone against God’s will but indeed had divine approval. Having no real answer to his argument the Pharisees attempted to assassinate the man’s character³⁴ by stating he was “steeped in sin from birth” and by excommunicating this “suborn heretic”³⁵ from the synagogue.³⁶

From the final act we learn how important it is to tell what we know about Jesus to those



God sends our way! Living in a society that no longer trusts organized religion or the existence of absolute truth but in many paths to the “heaven” of their choice, evangelism is often seen as an impossible and dare I say a frightening endeavor! What does one say to the pleasure-seeking cynics of this world whom hate the light because it exposes the evil in their lives? Watching our attendance, budgets and morale decline while hiding our light within the confines of the church is not what God wants from us (Matthew 5:15-16).

²⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, 285.

²⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, 158.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Merrill C. Tenney, 104–105.

²⁹ J. Ramsey Michaels, 169.

³⁰ Merrill C. Tenney, 104–105.

³¹ D. A. Carson, 2172.

³² Leon Morris, 438.

³³ George R. Beasley-Murray, 158.

³⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, 105.

³⁵ Leon Morris, 438.

³⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, 105.

We who revere Christ as Lord and are not only to be prepared but willing to give the answer as to the reason we have hope (1 Peter 3:15)! We are not to be scared to talk about Jesus for even if we run across a modern-day Pharisee that wants to test our theological astuteness, remember “the Holy Spirit will teach you at the time what you should say” (Luke 12:12). If one who was born blind and a stranger to “academic and forensic argument”³⁷ can win a theological debate against the most learned religious leaders of his day, through the power of the Holy Spirit so can you! Either the church goes and makes disciples of all nations or they close the doors ... the choice for now is in our hands!

³⁷ Leon Morris, 438.