

Augusta FBC
The Bible Says That? Jesus Spits
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The Bible Says That? Series

John 9:1-12

"As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. [2] His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" [3] Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. [4] We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." [6] When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, [7] saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. [8] The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" [9] Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." [10] But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" [11] He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." [12] They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

At an early age, I remember being taught not to spit, at least not in public. Spitting was rude, coarse, and unbecoming of a proper gentleman. Of course, as a child, I completely ignored the teaching of my well-meaning grandmother and grammar school teachers. Boys, I believe, are born with an inclination to spit. We spit over high ledges, into wells, and we spit for distance.

Now that I have two sons, I am grateful to share that inclination with them. Of course, I have attempted to pass on good manners to my sons, but let's face it: there is something about the "Y" chromosome that makes a boy and a man want to spit.

This past spring, the media alerted the world of a campaign China is launching in preparation for the 2008 Olympics: No Spitting. It seems that the Chinese have no qualms about snorting, hacking and letting one fly in public or private, and so, Beijing announced steep fines to anyone caught publicly spitting. I suppose after the Olympics, the Chinese can spit all they want.

Little boys, incorrigible men, and the Chinese are in good company after all. Jesus, so the Bible tells us, would spit. We have read about it in today's text, but this is not the only account of Jesus spitting. Once, in Mark 7:33, he spits and heals a man who was both deaf and mute. Another time, in Mark 8:23, Jesus spits again and restores the sight of another man who was blind. In fact, this man had to have a second touch to get his vision fully restored.

I cannot speak for you, but while I have heard many sermons and lessons about Jesus healing the deaf, the mute and the blind, I cannot recall much, if any attention, about Jesus spitting in these stories. Read it for yourself. Jesus spits. It may be gross, it may be ungracious,

and unbecoming of a gentleman, but this is the word of God, and we have read it for ourselves: Jesus spits.

Scholars tell us, that in the ancient Greco-Roman world, spittle and clay was often mixed for medicinal purposes. According to Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson, the Jews held spit as efficacious for eye-trouble. Spitting, I need to add, was forbidden on the Sabbath, but any other day it could be just another pharmaceutical!

Why spit? Certainly Jesus could have healed the man with just a word or a thought. We should be fair to all three stories in the Bible where Jesus spits— spitting is not the point of any of the healings. One could almost say they are incidental or cultural. While what Jesus did, may seem to us modern readers as unusual, even gross, most anyone that was around during Jesus' day would have found it quite ordinary.

The spit is only part of the story. The larger story keeps unfolding throughout all of chapter nine. It is a story of the blind seeing and the seeing going blind.

The story opens by telling us that Jesus sees a man who was blind since birth. It is pitiful and tragic. In the ancient world, when someone lost their sight, there was at least a faint hope that by some miracle they might regain it, but not with someone born blind. A person born blind was doomed to a life of utter dependency on all others. Amidst such a perceived tragedy – and while today the situation would be viewed differently, we must not underestimate that this scene has implied pity - the disciples want answers.

It is in my nature, that when someone asks of me a question, I will give them an answer. Any answer will do, even if it is the wrong answer. My family often accuses me about having an answer to everything. It doesn't matter if I have little clue about the subject, I will come up with something. Doesn't that drive you nuts, to be around someone who appears to have an answer or response to every little mundane or trivial detail in life? I suppose, somewhere in my life, something or someone instilled in me that there must be an answer to every question. No doubt, that in life it is important to know the right answers. I want my physician, who attends to my health, to have the right answers. I want the engineer, who designs the bridge I drive over, to have the right answers. I want the chemist, that mixes my medication, to have the right answers. I am learning over the years, however, that answers are not nearly as important as the questions.

Often, it is the “why” questions that are given prominence in our seeker vocabulary. We raise the “why” questions, for example, in the face of difficulty: “Why did this happen to me? Why did such an awful circumstance come to such a fine family? Why must the innocent suffer?” Or more colloquially, “Why me?”

Those disciples were no different: "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*"

You see, this entire chapter – and we must read it in its entirety – is concerned with blindness. Here, Jesus is trying to let the darkened world know that he is the “Light of the

World.” [5] *“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Twenty three times the Gospel of John mentions “light.”*

This blind man along the road was not the only one who was visually impaired. It seems the disciples had a tough time seeing, and so did the crowds and especially the religious folk.

In our own way, we all come groping in here this morning looking for a little light. Guilt has had the better of us, sin has had its way in all of us, and our weaknesses have overcome our fatigued wills. Visual impairment is not simply a physical handicap, but a spiritual one. To be blind is to be alienated, to be cut-off from reality. We know that something better is out there, we just cannot see it – blind marriages, blind health, blind relationships, blind, blind, blind – we know that something better is out there, we just cannot see it.

But really, just what is the right question? When life has us by the throat and we are trampled on by circumstances, events and others, what do we really need to be asking? There is the “Why” question: *“Who sinned, this man or his parents that he is born blind?”* In other words, “why?” Now, before we reprimand the disciples for asking such an insensitive – even primitive – question, let us not excuse ourselves from the very same insensitivity. When the AIDS virus first became a household word, many rushed to judgment and said things like: “They knew the consequences of their actions – it is because of their sin that they suffer so.” Or, what about those innocents, who suffer because of the choices of others? If you know an alcoholic, look beyond them and see family or friends who suffer too.

The disciples who asked Jesus why this man was born blind, were really asking a pretty traditional Judaic question. The ancient Jews believed that one could sin even in the womb. For the traditional Jew, suffering and sin went together – bad things happen to bad people. So their reasoning as applied to the man born blind was that it had to be, because of something he did (supposedly in the womb) or something his parents did. The disciples decided to hold a prayer meeting right there on the spot, except prayer wasn’t involved – and discuss the origins of suffering. Theologians call this “theodicy.”

Many believers today make the same general assumptions: God is punishing me because ... It is a “why” sort of question, and we all ask it all the time.

Now, don’t misunderstand me, the “why” questions of life have their place, but it is also the type of question where the answer does not come easily, if at all. Beware, sisters and brothers, of the person who has an answer to everything. Once in college, I was involved in a rather intense discussion with some other students and a professor or two. One of the students hastily inserted in our debate, (exactly what we were debating I do not recall), the pithy phrase “Jesus is the answer.” Oh yeah, I felt good about that one, end of discussion, what else is there to say, no more to add to that answer. One wise professor quietly spoke and said, “Jesus may indeed be the answer, but what is the question?”

We all ask the “why question,” but I think there is a better question. It is the “who question,” not “why,” but “who”, should lead in to all of our questions.

[3] *“Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”* Jesus was saying that it was relatively unimportant as to who, if anybody, was at fault concerning the man’s blindness, but that in the midst of such darkness God was going to shed some light.

I love that last line of Jesus: *“God’s works might be revealed in him...”* Have you ever considered that God would like to work in you? You, that are blind, you, that are impaired, you, that have limped in here, grasping for something, someone to shed a little light? Sometimes, we just cannot see how God wants to work in us and through us, because our blindness has left us feeling hopeless. Jesus wants to undo that.

Who was really blind that day? The disciples, who kept misunderstanding God’s mission through Jesus? The crowd, who witnessed the miracle, but never saw the miracle? The religious leaders, who could not see beyond the rules? John’s point in retelling this story is one of irony: the blind had nothing to do with visual impairment, it was the spiritually impaired.

The irony, if we may describe this narrative as such, is that the man is gradually opening his eyes to who Jesus is throughout chapter nine. He gets his vision up front, but his other vision comes on more gradually. Slowly and decidedly he moves from knowing his name to having a relationship.

The real miracle comes with the man’s confession: *“The man called Jesus, made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” (John 9:11) ... He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. (John 9:38)* This man’s faith follows the healing. It comes after the act and slowly grows.

It’s like the little boy who goes out to pick blackberries. Pushing through the brambles and briars and risking bites from red bugs and other insects, getting scratched and pricked by unseen obstacles, just to retrieve a humble pail of fruit. When he takes his proud harvest to his grandmother, she then carefully washes the berries and sets them in a dish. On top she pours flour, sugar, and butter, some cinnamon and cream, and in less than an hour the kitchen and all the house is filled with the smell of blackberry cobbler.

God is like that grandmother with us: He takes the hard won fruit of our sacrifices and gives them back to us better than we gave them to him. We do not always see that, do we?

You know, I really don’t have the answers to life’s tough questions. With most questions I am resigned to simply shrug my shoulders and say with exasperation, “I just don’t know.” Most of us are not really good with the “why” question in life, but that is not the important question anyway.

I can, however, answer the “who” question, because life doesn’t have to be a tragedy when you are blind.

A favorite hymn writer of many is Fanny Crosby, who wrote seventeen of the hymns listed in our sanctuary hymn book. Great hymns such as, “To God Be The Glory,” “Tell Me the Story of Jesus,” “All the Way My Savior Leads Me,” “I Am Thine, O Lord,” and “Blessed Assurance.” You probably also know that she was blind. She was born that way. Why? I don’t know, but I, and millions of others who have been led to worship through her music, are very glad that she could truly see.

Ultimately, it is not my vision for our journey of discovery together. It is the vision that Christ offers to us who have been in darkness, and now see a great light.