

John Chapter 9

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Sin

Cultures and society can deal with issues in a variety of ways.

In the UK, when the public was asked to name a new seagoing research vessel, the popular choice was "Boaty McBoatface." The Brits, chose not go with it, naming the new vessels, RRS Sir David Attenborough". "The name Boaty McBoatface was instead given to a remotely operated submarine aboard the polar research ship."

Not so the Swedes.

"An express train running between two major Swedish cities will be named Trainy McTrainface, after the railway company opened up the name to a public vote.

MTR Express, with Swedish newspaper Metro, opened up a poll to name the new train running between the capital Stockholm and Gothenburg on the country's west coast.

Trainy McTrainface, which received 49 per cent of the vote, was the most popular name."

What is acceptable changes between society, Today we look at Sin, Sabbath and Society?

What sins are acceptable?

Every Culture defines which sins are, or are not acceptable. In some cultures, bribery is seen as a sackable offence, in others, just a way of doing business and supplementing one's income.

Sin can become very compartmentalised, something to be studied and classified, possibly to avoid the negative effects which may come with it.

In the time of Jesus physical incarnation the ruling authorities had defined a certain group as "sinners", those designated were considered out of God's will.

The argument went like this.

God blesses those who do his will. I am blessed (with finances, a position of power, health); therefore I am doing the will of God.

Those in God's will were followed, listened to, adored, and were the decision makers and shakers and leaders of society.

The others were ignored at best, or actively shunned and persecuted.

The problem with this is It applies some "fuzzy logic", best expressed in the same format below.

"My Dog has four legs; my cat has four legs, my cat is a dog."

Simply put, good things do not guarantee you are in "God's will", bad things do not denote you are outside of it.

In this mindset, Jesus needs to reset perceptions about sin. It's worth re-iterating what he taught.

The opening question by his disciples outlines the fundamental problem. Everyone has been conditioned to assume those who are suffering are doing so due to some sin, either open or hidden, by either the person or their relatives.

"The disciples did not look at the man as an object of mercy but rather as a subject for a theological discussion. It is much easier to discuss an abstract subject like "sin" than it is to minister to a concrete need in the life of a person. The disciples were sure that the man's congenital blindness was caused by sin, either his own or his parents', but Jesus disagreed with them." - Warren W. Wiersbe

This mindset is not new, expressed in the book of Job. Job's three friends come to comfort him during his time of distress, but end only in accusing him of hiding some sin and failing to repent of it!

Job 22:1-5 (NLT) Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied:

2 "Can a person do anything to help God?

Can even a wise person be helpful to him?

3 Is it any advantage to the Almighty if you are righteous?

Would it be any gain to him if you were perfect?

4 Is it because you're so pious that he accuses you and brings judgment against you?

5 No, it's because of your wickedness!

There's no limit to your sins.

"The disciples assume, like most Palestinian Jews of their day, that sin and suffering are intimately connected. In one sense, they are correct; they are simply working out the entailments of the fall (Gn. 3). If rabbis argued that there is no death without sin (B. Shabbath 55a; proved by referring to Ezk. 18:20) and no suffering without guilt (citing Ps. 89:32), Paul in the New Testament would certainly agree (Rom. 1-2; 3:10ff.). But once theologians move from generalizing statements about the origin of the human race's maladies to tight connections between the sins and the sufferings of an individual, they go beyond the biblical evidence (whether from the Old Testament or the New). That a specific illness or experience of suffering can be the direct consequence of a specific sin, few would deny (e.g. Miriam's revolt, Nu. 12; notes on Jn. 5:14; cf. 1 Cor. 11:30). That it is invariably so, numerous biblical texts flatly deny (e.g. Job; Gal. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:7)" - D. A. Carson

Jesus response to his disciple's questions clarifies things. Jesus understands that the bondage of sin holds the world. Humanity is affected in general terms by the presence of sin, "Certainly both the man and his parents had at some time committed sin, but Jesus did not see their sin as the cause of the man's blindness. Nor did He suggest that God deliberately made the man blind so that, years later, Jesus could perform a miracle. Since there is no punctuation in the original manuscripts, we are free to read John 9:3-4 this way: Neither has this man sinned nor his parents. But that the works of God should be made manifest in him, I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day." - Warren W. Wiersbe

Jesus knows this is a time to show God's power, to reset wrong thinking, and reset humanity back to the path God seeks us to walk. Here is a practical expression of the "truth will set you free".

It is worth considering today, how much bondage are we under due to wrong thinking?, taking on burdens which should not be ours?

The other aspect is a challenge towards our view of mercy. It can become easy to be calloused to society. Sheer information overload can cause humanity to “cease to care” an all but the most extreme cases. We can quickly reserve “mercy” for our situations only. This is not God’s heart.

“Of all God’s qualities, mercy shines brightest”- If you accept this to be true, then we, as God’s representatives need to demonstrate this attitude as a way of life.

Does mercy characterise us? Do we “Love Mercy” as the prophet Micah tells us!

Micah 6:8 (NLT) No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.

The biggest issue, is how do we think God is meant to act.

Jesus is trying to reset our view of God, by resetting our view of sin.

Ill- Reset go back to the beginning once a mistake is made, to start afresh to try again and have another go. It wasn’t that the aim was wrong at the start, but it went off kilter, and so something needs to be reset or rebooted.- As the original result was corrupted.

Jesus shows he is master of all and heals the man using clay as the medium of conveying this healing.

“Jesus placed clay (mud with ... saliva) on the man’s eyes. Interestingly man was made from this same substance—the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). Jesus probably used the clay as an aid to develop the man’s faith, not as a medicine. Jesus’ making of clay broke the Rabbinic regulations against kneading clay on the Sabbath (cf. John 9:14). Jesus then told the man, Wash in the pool of Siloam (this word means Sent). This is located at the south-east corner of Jerusalem (see the map), where Hezekiah’s tunnel channelled water inside the city walls from the Gihon Spring. The man was “sent” there and Jesus was the One “sent” by the Father. The man ... washed and went home seeing!”- Edwin A. Blum

"There were at least two reasons for our Lord's use of the clay. For one thing, it was a picture of the Incarnation. God made the first man out of the dust, and God sent His Son as a real Man. Note the emphasis on the meaning of "Siloam"—"sent." And relate this to John 9:4, "The works of Him that sent Me" (see also John 3:17, 34; 5:36; 7:29; 8:18, 42). Jesus gave a little illustration of His own coming to earth, sent by the Father. The second reason for the clay was irritation; it encouraged the man to believe and obey! If you have ever had an irritation in your eyes, you know how quickly you seek irrigation to cleanse it out! You might compare this "irritation" to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit as He uses God's Law to bring the lost sinner under judgment."-Warren W. Wiersbe.

Jesus uses differing methods of healing, often so we can concentrate not on the method but the message of Jesus. In our ministry, we should always remember we have a timeless message, but the medium to convey that message needs to alter to suit the time any place of our calling.

"Our Lord's method of healing was unique: He put clay on the man's eyes and told him to go wash. Once Jesus healed two blind men by merely touching their eyes (Matt. 9:27-31), and He healed another blind man by putting spittle on his eyes (Mark 8:22-26). Though the healing power was the same, our Lord varied His methods lest people focus on the manner of healing and miss the message in the healing."-Warren W. Wiersbe

Faith is a muscle which needs to be exercised. In this case, Jesus gives a task for the person to demonstrate their trust in the promise that God has given. In our life, do we have the same challenge, what act of faith is being asked by God to see the promise in our life come to pass?

Sabbath

The man obeys and is healed, his new change evokes much discussion, with him being brought before the Pharisees. This leads to a new challenge to view God through re-setting our view of the Sabbath.

"The religious leaders were judging by one thing: nobody who breaks the Sabbath could be a true prophet of God. They were "one-issue" thinkers, not unlike some religious people today. The Pharisees did not realise that Jesus was offering the people something greater than the Sabbath—the true spiritual rest that comes from God (Matt. 11:28–30)."-Warren W. Wiersbe

The leaders were divided. We read eventually that the negative view of Jesus wins out, but at least some were initially willing to consider the implication of this healing!

Unable to come to some satisfactory conclusion they seek to determine if the man's account "hold water", is it credible. It becomes evident that behind their thinking is the idea that some switch took place. That is, Jesus finds a blind person, claims to heal them via this method of "mud on eyes", but the person who "returns" from the pool is, in fact, a different person. Their questioning goes along these lines to see if the man is willing to stand before legal leaders and incriminate himself.

In their perception, the sabbath is designated to be used only in certain ways, and to step outside these prescribed boundaries denotes the person so acting as outside God's will.

Ill- In the UK Sunday trading laws were very odd, at certain times it was legal to sell a razor, but not the blades which went in it. It was illegal for a British traditional fish and chip shop to open on a Sunday but not for a Chinese takeaway, and they could sell fish and chips. Most interest It was illegal to buy a bible on Sunday!

We can get caught in what God designed for the Sabbath. The leaders had done so, unwilling to "see" the Good that Jesus was doing; they preferred to maintain the status quo, rather than let the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God.

"It seems to me that Jesus often got into trouble with the religious "experts" when it came to how best serve the Lord's Sabbath. God had instructed through Moses, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." (Exod. 20.8) He instructed that all work should be done in six days, and the seventh to be a day of rest, with no work.

The Pharisees and other leaders had turned the Sabbath into a religious bondage. So many rules and regulations governed the behaviour of the people - but not always the behaviour of those who made and enforced the rules!

Jesus brought a more Godly observance to the Sabbath. I believe He showed how the Sabbath day of rest was meant to be lived. And I see life as the essence of the Sabbath - life in God, a life of rest in God, and in the fullness of all the life that God gives. The Sabbath is for enjoying God, and enjoying the whole of His creation.” - Peter Francis

Are we open to “seeing” the movement of God around us, and in our own lives?

Society

Finally, the leaders of the day seek to clarify the situation by appealing to this man’s parents, could they confirm what was going on?

Instead, they pass the buck back to their son.

It’s now we need to stop and consider the awful overall situation. Were these parents respected?, What was the opinion of the people about this man and his parents. Were they highly regarded? It’s unlikely. Not only was his blindness considered a result of sin, but as per the disciple’s original question, the consensus was that the parents were guilty of some sin as well.

They were scared of further ostracisation, were they tolerated? Were they invited to people’s houses? How unclean were they?

Their life was affected by how they were viewed, and how they lived. Rather than stand up for their child, so in fear are they; they throw him to the wolves. How beaten must people be, reacting to such good news as a healing of their child’s blindness with fear!

In this case, instead of helping, the society had allowed this perception to be continued.

This is an opportunity for social healing. It is upon all of us that claim the name of Christian to seek to work to stand for one another and the broken and dispossessed, whoever they may be.

The healed man now is questioned again.

The leaders are not to be dissuaded, "But the "judges" prejudiced everybody from the start! "We know that this Man is a sinner!" They were warning the witness that he had better cooperate with the court, or he might be excommunicated. But the beggar was made of sturdier stuff than to be intimidated. He had experienced a miracle, and he was not afraid to tell them what had happened. For the fourth time, the question is asked, "How did He open your eyes?" (see John 9:10, 15, 19, and 26) I can imagine the man getting quite impatient at this point. After all, he had been blind all his life, and there was so much now to see. He certainly did not want to spend much longer in a synagogue court, looking at angry faces and answering the same questions! The beggar then gave the "experts" a lesson in practical theology. Perhaps he had Psalm 66:18 in mind: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The leaders called Jesus a sinner (John 9:24), yet Jesus was used of God to open the blind man's eyes. The religious leaders officially excommunicated this man from the local synagogue. This meant that the man was cut off from friends and family and looked on by the Jews as a "publican and sinner." But Jesus came for the "outcasts" and never let them down." Warren W. Wiersbe

Jesus meets the man and reveals to him who he is, using the designation "Son of Man". Jesus uses his favourite self-description, implies that he understand the issues the man has faced and is willing to be associated with them. Jesus has come to save humanity, that is who he is to serve by his future actions on the cross. Finally, the Pharisees are judged by their standard and left in no doubt about Jesus view of them

If you wanted to know the answer, ask and consider the implications if it were true. The leader of the people was now at a point, where nothing that Jesus could do was going to change them from their course. They had set their minds and were not to be moved.

How many of us claim to see but are blind, the not so hidden challenge to this account is those who claim sight are often the blindest, and that only in admitting to our blindness can we have the hope of seeing the truth. God comes to the broken hearted, not the proud or self-righteous.

Are we willing to consider our view of God, will this account lead us to understand who God is.

Rather than asking "how" these things happened, we should answer God's anagram and seek "who" is responsible for them.

Here are some questions to ask ourselves.

Questions

What are our preconceptions about God that prevent us from seeing clearly?

How is God meant to act?

How do you see God?

What are your views on sin and mercy?

How do you see the "Sabbath."

What pressures from society do we face to conform?

Which ones should we resist?

Which ones do we need to support?

How do you go about working out the difference?

Who is brave enough to step forward,

Are we willing to be part of the solution, reaching to those who others have deemed unworthy of our time?

Are we willing to challenge a community in fear because we know Jesus is the change agent within the community?