

DOUBTING JESUS' POWER

John 9:1-17; 35-41

We casually talk about belief and doubt and faith and such subjects and we may find that when we hear of certain things that are “out of the ordinary” that we ourselves may be skeptical. There is a spectrum of faith issues that runs the gamut from strongly negative to strongly positive. The position that people have in this spectrum can be described with at least five different designations. Starting with the most negative we find “unbelief” and, while still on the negative side, we can move to “doubt.” At the center or neutral position we might call this “skeptical” which would be the description of someone who is open to ideas but uses critical thinking to determine the validity of the philosophy, proposition or claim. For those who find validity, they will move into the area labeled “acceptance” or simply acknowledging the idea as truth and from there to “commitment” which results in action.

Jesus encountered people all along this faith spectrum. Those on the very negative end of “unbelief” could be described as those who will not believe regardless of the evidence. Such a position is typically taken when a person is “committed” to another competing philosophy or paradigm. This is where most of the Pharisees were with regard to Jesus. Those who fall into the “doubt” category might be said to find it “difficult to believe.” This would be a case of “cannot believe” rather than will not believe. This may be an appropriate descriptor for those who kept asking for a “sign” before they could be counted as believers. Residing for extended periods of time in the “doubt” position may lead to slipping into the “unbelief” category. Some of the Pharisees were in this position of having trouble believing but they were not necessarily adamant or closed minded.

Being skeptical is the likely starting place for people who have a sense of responsibility to know what they believe and why they believe it rather than just adopting what is popular at the moment in the culture in which they find themselves. In several places in the Old Testament we find that God issued a challenge to such people in the form of “Come, let us reason together.”

From skepticism, one could move back toward doubt or toward acceptance which would be in a positive direction on the scale. This would be acknowledging the ideas or claims to be the truth. The next step called “commitment” is evidenced by a person responding to what he or she believes by taking action.

If a person is at the point of skepticism, what might influence the direction he might move along the faith spectrum?

The Impact of Miracles on Faith – 9:1-7

¹ As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “*It was neither that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ “While 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 clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing. John 9:1-7 (NASB95)

The Jews had just attempted to stone Jesus for claiming to be equal to God. As He was leaving the temple area with His disciples, they saw this man who was a blind beggar in his regular position near the temple. He was apparently well known to those who came to the temple. The disciples asked what we would think was a strange question: “Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” The disciples were probably not thinking about our Adamic nature that is inherited, but were referring to “acts committed” that are in conflict with

God's laws and principles. We have no concept of prenatal sin; however, they may have been thinking about what some of the pagan religions taught about reincarnation. They may have thought that something the man had done in a previous life had caused this situation. The Word of God does not support such a belief and teaches that we are "appointed once to die and then the judgment."

It is difficult to imagine that an unborn child would be capable of committing any actions that could be classified as sins. The idea that the sins of the parents can affect the life of their children makes us uncomfortable; however, this **is** a reality. Kids born to drug-addicted parents or to mothers who drink during their pregnancy certainly are affected by what their parents have done. The disciples were thinking in terms of a general principle that some have called the "law of retribution" which says that if you do good things you will be blessed and if you are sinful and do evil things, then you will suffer consequences. While this outcome is what our sense of fairness would endorse, we must be careful to not think that if a person is successful it is proof of righteousness and if a person is sick or hurting it is proof of sins in a person's life.

Jesus was quick to deny that any specific sin had anything directly to do with this man's situation. Some translations would seem to imply that God caused the man to be born blind so that God could receive glory. No!! The rain falls on the just and the unjust. There are birth defects because of damage to DNA or RNA because of stress or disease. We need to put a period in the middle of verse three.

Regardless of the situation or why it happened, the way God can receive glory from any situation is for those who are "called and sent" to do the work that God sent them to do. This is what Jesus was stating in verse four.

According to the prophecy in Isaiah about the mission of the Messiah, it is God's will that "the blind should receive their sight, those that grieve should be comforted, that the sick should be healed, and those in prisons of their guilt and shame should be set free." In order for the works of God to be shown, it is necessary that we be about the job of doing the works of God. This is why we were saved (see also Eph 2:8-10).

We see also in the words of Jesus the urgency of the work to be done. We need light in which to work. If Jesus is the Light of the World, then we must make sure that we are walking in His light so that we can accomplish the job. If we ignore Him and attempt to do even "good works" in our own strength or for the wrong motives, then we will be ineffective in getting anything of lasting benefit done.

Jesus then demonstrated the works of God. He took action that provided a focus for faith. This point of focus was what the mud pack was about. I doubt there was anything medicinal about the mud, but was something that called for some action on the part of the man to demonstrate the genuineness of his faith. "Go wash in the pool of Siloam." What happened? Faith plus action equals results. He came away seeing.

One objective Jesus had was to have mankind look to Him for their "light." John earlier wrote (concerning Jesus), "In Him was life and the life was the light of men." In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told the people they were the light of the world. Actually, they were not doing a very good job of being light. He showed us how to be that light in what He did. While He taught in the Temple, He had told them He was the Light of the world. As such, He would give sight to the blind.

We can only guess the purpose of using the mud and having the man wash in the pool. It may have been a way to have the man involved in expressing his faith in the words Jesus spoke to him. How else can we demonstrate our faith if we are not obedient to God's word?

This event can be seen as a “living parable” of how a person is saved. Warren Weirsbe has noted that the man who was healed had the physical characteristics that are spiritually present in those who are lost in that he was blind, he was begging because he had great needs, and he could not help or save himself. The action that Jesus took showed that He took the initiative and reached out in grace and mercy to help the man. The application of the mud to his eyes could be thought of as conviction that motivates us to change our direction. In the case of the blind man the mud was motivation to go wash the dirt from his eyes. The “cure” was brought about by divine power and was received by the man upon his faithful obedience to the words of Jesus. The cure did bring glory to God and it was noticed by others in the changed life of the one who was “cured” or saved.

Feeling Uncertain – 9:8-12

⁸Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, “Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Others were saying, “This is he,” *still* others were saying, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the one.” ¹⁰So they were saying to him, “How then were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash’; so I went away and washed, and I received sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is He?” He said, “I do not know.” John 9:8-12 (NASB95)

When we encounter Jesus, our lives should be changed so that others will see a difference. We may look the same physically, but we will have changed in our attitudes and actions and outlook. Such changes provide an opportunity to tell others how Jesus makes a difference in our lives because many will not understand what has happened to us. As a result of such misunderstanding there could be speculation regarding why a change is evident.

Sometimes we hear about people who might be in the middle of a crisis situation and they will claim and show evidence of something dramatic happening to them. Some skeptics may wonder if such “jailhouse” conversions are real or if the person is “playing the system” in order to get favorable treatment. We see people who might make a profession of faith at a “crusade” as a result of a moving message and an emotional invitation. Many times, those who are involved in such “decisions” are hard to find in less than a year after the event.

The controversy surrounding the man who was blind from birth whom Jesus healed took on several facets. The first controversy was over whether this was the same person or someone else pretending to be the man who had been blind and begged in the temple for many years. Is there an application for us in this confusion of identities? The point for us to take away is that once we have encountered Jesus and our lives have been impacted, those who knew us from pre-salvation times should wonder if we are the same person they used to know. Is this not what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17? “If any man be in Christ, behold, he is a new creation, the old has passed away and all things have become new.”

When we are new in our walk with God, we may not be able to point others to Jesus. However, we can learn to do so and should make this a priority in what we do. We can see this inability in the healed, formerly blind man. People had asked where they might find this “healer” and he was not able to tell them. A logical reaction that a person might make when something unusual happens is to try to find an “expert” who can explain it. The experts of that day were the Pharisees.

Resisting the Truth – 9:13-17

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, “He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶Therefore some of the Pharisees

were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet." John 9:13-17 (NASB95)

The Pharisees were respected by the common people for their knowledge of Scriptures and the traditional law. Since the people had encountered such an uncommon situation with the blind man who was healed, they sought the help of the Pharisees to understand what had happened. However, the Pharisees were blind to the significance of what Jesus had done. They could see only the keeping of rituals, rules and rites as important and did not consider the life-changing healing brought to the man nor the implication regarding the One who had healed him.

The difference in opinions the Pharisees were having was a result of conflicts of the facts with their paradigms of what constituted right standing before God which produced another controversy regarding the identity of the One Who had healed the blind man. Both groups who were arguing their points were using faulty logic. One side said that Jesus could not be from God since He did not keep the Sabbath in the way they had interpreted that it should be kept. They should have been asking if the minutia or pettiness of their practices really mattered to God. On the other hand, some were arguing that the signs that Jesus did could only be done by someone who came from God. They were forgetting what Moses had encountered with the magicians that Pharaoh had in his court. People who use such evidence today as a basis for what they believe may be deceived by the lying wonders that the devil will do in the end times.

The Pharisees could not agree among themselves so they turned to the man who had been blind for his opinion. He made the best guess he could regarding Jesus when he suggested that Jesus was a prophet which is probably the only description that he could think of for someone who was spiritually powerful.

Refusing to See – 9:35-41

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." ³⁸ And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him. ³⁹ And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."

⁴⁰ Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. John 9:35-41 (NASB95)

The man had never seen the One who healed him. Even though the society had rejected the man, he found acceptance in the Kingdom of God. This is the Good News of the Gospel. Acceptance is very important to people. How many of us would bother to come to any gathering if we felt as if we were not accepted for who we are. So many people in the world feel rejected and this leads to many of the problems that we experience in our society.

Many were looking on as Jesus talked with the man and among the crowd were the Pharisees. Jesus then spoke so that they could hear.

The purpose of Jesus' coming into the world was to redeem mankind; however, His very presence brings judgment because He is Light. Judgment occurs when He is present. He can be present in His word or in a believer and judgment happens. If others can see Christ in you, then they will change their behavior when they are around you because of the judgment that the

presence of Jesus brings.

Many of the sayings of Jesus seem paradoxical. He said that He came so that the blind could see and that those who could see were made blind. The Pharisees thought the common people were blind because they could not see the significance of keeping all their petty rules. They erroneously thought that this was the way of salvation. On the other hand, the Pharisees themselves would not consider refocusing their sight on the basic truths that Jesus taught and they were, for all practical purposes, blind to those truths. To admit that they had something to learn would have hurt their pride. They asked, "Are we blind, also?" Jesus went right to the heart of the matter in His answer to them. He said, in effect, that if they could not see that their behavior would not be sin; however, in their case, it was a matter that they would not see. This is sin.

The message is clear to us that we should respond to the light that we have and not refuse to see what the word of God teaches. Then we can walk in that word in obedience by following the Light of the World.