**WHY ON EARTH GOD? WHY GOD ON EARTH?**

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 9**

**“…..Was Blind But Now I See!“**

“**Can’t you *see*!!!** How many times has somebody wrapped a scowl around that *harumph* and lobbed it at you?

I can’t imagine being a Type A, and being sightless! You’re driven but detained. Aggressive but anchored. Independent but dependent.

During my deejay years legendary jazz pianist George Shearing was on my show in Detroit and Seattle. This soft-spoken, 81-year-old Brit could not have been a finer artist had he had 20-20 vision. Once at a New York City street corner, George heard a voice say, “Excuse me, sir, but I’m blind. Could you help me cross the street?” “Certainly,” George countered impishly. Despite honking and yelling from passersby, they reached the other curb. Asked “Why risk such folly,” George replied, “I couldn’t resist the irony of the blind leading the blind,” adding “That was the biggest thrill of my life!”

Randy McMillan is a sightless pal of mine whose dad Ed was Rainer Bank’s chief economist for years. As a sportscaster in the 70s and 80s, Randy attended Seattle’s pro games, Braille typewriter in tow, “watching” with an earplug tuned to the “live” play-by-play, then filing his post-game stories on local radio. Few listeners ever knew he’s blind.

Whether relying on a dog, the arm of a faithful spouse or friend, or a white cane, George and Randy operate as the apostle Paul espoused 2,000 years ago, i.e., we should “live by faith, not by sight.” As demonstrated by our two friends, sometimes “believing *is* seeing!” Our tendency is Missourian: “Show me, and I’ll believe.” In today’s encounter with blindness Jesus miraculously proves that faith can *precede* sight.

***Why Can’t a Pharisee See?***

Today our stroll through the fourth book of the New Testament brings us to another episode in Jesus’ tug-o’-war with the religious “ins” of his day, the confrontational Jewish sect of 6,000 Pharisees. Their relationship with Jesus is turning nasty, as they seek to silence Him once and for all.

Pharisees strictly interpreted the Law and oral traditions. These mainstreamers prefigured today’s rabbinic Judaism. Sadducees held that God is in total charge, and man’s a puppet. The non-conformist Essenes were at the other end of the spectrum, convinced that man has a lot more say-so and can actually sway God’s behavior. Pharisees drove down the doctrinal median strip, ceding to God overarching authority to do as He pleases, yet convinced that man has free will. Jesus seemed to agree.

If it helps, think of the Sadducees as Jesse Helms, the Essenes as Ted Kennedy, and the Pharisees as Chris “Hardball” Matthews! (To drill down into Judaism, see jewsforjesus.org, founded by Jews who accept Jesus as their Messiah.)

The Jews wanted a Messiah/Liberator who’d challenge their Roman oppressors. They *assumed* He’d do miracles. Duh. When Jesus multiplied a few loaves and fish to feed 5,000 in Galilee, throngs lobbied Him to be their political savior who’d usher in “heaven on earth.”

Jesus’ “signs” always had a message, tied to His teachings about life and death. His was a no-nonsense mission, i.e., to suffer and die to save all people from their sins, *not* to liberate the Jews from their Roman masters.

Many who witnessed Jesus’ miracles and hung on His every word believed in Him. Others considered Him a blasphemer and plotted to kill Him. As Jim Dobson says, “The same boiling water that softens a carrot hardens an egg...Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how we respond.”

***The Eyes Have It***

America may be on the verge of a blindness plague. As 76 million baby boomers age, experts say twice as many will be blind in 2030 as today, with macular degeneration still Culprit #1. We may have to learn to live either in physical darkness, or with many who will.

But some have blind spots in relationships. Others are spiritually blind.

Prevent Blindness America defuses a few myths about blindness. Myth #1: “Eating carrots will improve your vision.” Nope; carrots are rich in Vitamin A, but only a little A is necessary for good vision. Myth #2: “Reading in dim light can damage your eyes.” Wrong—it can cause eye fatigue, but no harm. Myth #3: “Hours of staring at a computer will hurt your vision.” Research says terminals emit little or no hazardous radiation.

Re proper eye care, it pays to separate fact from fiction. In John 9 Jesus says the same is true when it comes to spiritual vision.

***The Blame Game***

Jim Carrey is a whacked-out, compulsive “Liar, Liar,” forced by his son’s birthday wish to speak only truth for 24 hours. That could ruin a career!

Picture us, verbally cuffed, facing death if we *blame* anyone for *anything*! Now *that’s* not fair!! Blame-o-rama is what we find, tuning in on Jesus after His tiff with religious leaders in the temple courts at the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles. Let’s read all of John 9:1-41.

(9:1-7) Childhood religious training had conditioned Jesus’ disciples to think that human sin was the direct cause of suffering. Here we get a glimpse behind another all-time myth that goes, “An all-loving, all-powerful God would never let His creatures suffer.”

***We Gotta Get Back To The Garden***

Innocents can be inflicted with great hardships, not of their own or anyone else’s doing. Not always. But the Sin-Pain link goes back to when sin entered the world in that perfect, unpolluted paradise called Eden. Adam and Eve’s fall to temptation took a bite out of our own shot at sin-free living. Since then, the Bible says each screaming tot has entered the world as a sinner, “*born* in sin,” infected with that dreaded Rebellion-against-God Virus. God didn’t create Earth like this. Not His plan. Sin, carried by Lucifer, that contagious, fallen angel, corrupted our Eden.

Jesus is clear: this beggar’s congenital blindness is neither the product of his nor his parents’ sin. Footnote: the disciples thought this man himself, ‘though *born* blind, could’ve caused his own blindness by sinning. When? In the womb??? Yup, Jewish rabbinical tradition states that an unborn fetus can sin! I confess I’d have gotten an earlier start, had I known that!

Jesus now lays a heavy on His disciples, saying this nameless guy’s visual handicap has a higher purpose -- it’s to be the platform for displaying the work of God in his life. Little did this sightless chap know he’s about to be jerked from a California blackout into the radiance of the Vegas Strip! And he doesn’t even buy a lotto ticket to win it! But Jesus is on a tight schedule: the cross looms large; His time on earth is short.

Unlike today’s perfectly sprayed telehealers, Jesus spits on the ground, fingers it into a little mud, and dabs it on those useless eyes, an act rich in symbolism. In Genesis God formed Adam from the earth. The old prophet Jeremiah refers to God as the Potter who shapes us into the vessels He wants us to be. In the Bible clay denotes human weakness. This beggar signifies man’s sinful nature, blinded from spiritual Truth.

Next, Jesus dispatches him to “Go wash in the pool of Siloam.” Jesus doesn’t even promise healing. This pool is quite a hike away, especially for a stumbling blind man. But he makes it, and returns HEALED, face to face with the Light of the World!

***Who Turned On The Lights?***

(9:8-35) Returning from the pool, the beggar sees Jerusalem for the first time. All these years he’s smelled, felt and heard the city, but never seen it. Jerusalem hadn’t changed; he had. How’d it happen, people asked? Some guy called Jesus did it; that’s all he knows.

You’d think *every*body would be dancin’ in the streets. They’d seen this penniless pauper panhandling for years. Now he’s got headlights. But those Pharisees are hacked because Jesus pulled this off on the Sabbath, breaking three of their manmade regs: (1) Making mud is work. Can’t work on the Sabbath. (2) Healing people is “work.” And (3) spit was thought to be medicine, and using medicine was work. Three strikes and you’re out, Jesus! You sinner, how can you claim to be God!??

But some Pharisees knew better, saying, “No way could a sinner pull off these miracles!”

When the leaders press the beggar about his benefactor’s identity, the man replies, “He’s a prophet.” He knows that some Old Testament prophets, as agents of God, had performed miracles, so he’s thinkin,’ “Hmmm, this Jesus must have a Friend in really high places. Sure, that’s it; He’s a ….. prophet.”

“The Jews,” a phrase meaning the Pharisees, press harder, sending for this guy’s parents to shake them down. But facing interrogation, they lie: “We don’t know nuthin’ or nobody,” fearing if they identified Jesus as the Messiah, they’d face excommunication from the synagogue -- no more membership in the club, no more racquetball on Tuesdays.

Frustrated to the max, the Pharisees recall the beggar, demanding that under oath He credit God, *not Jesus*, with his sight because obviously this faux Messiah, this breaker of Sabbath rules, is a sinner. You gotta love the man’s retort: “Yo, I didn’t go to rabbinical school. I don’t know from God. All’s I know is … He turned on my lights!” But this lynch mob is not seeking truth. They only want to confirm their preconceived notions.

You may be new in your walk with Jesus. Maybe you’ve heard that the Bible says we’re to openly confess our allegiance to Christ. Many are reluctant, fearing they’ll be snookered into a theological debate for which they feel ill-equipped. But this beggar’s got it right. Standing up for Jesus is just telling others what He’s done in your life. Nobody can deny that.

These Pharisees are breathin’ flames now. They’re ready to suit up for the XFL! Vince McMahon would love these Xperts in taunting and violence.

They muscle this poor illiterate one last time, demanding to know how Jesus pulled off this miracle. YourDictionary.com says, “There are 7,327 known languages and dialects spoken in the 191 countries in the world.” The beggar says, “How many languages do I need? Read my lips! I told you a-ready.” Then he really pushes their button. “Oh I *get* it; you wanna become His disciples too, is that it?!” Whoa…..

The Pharisees then admit their fatal flaw, confessing they don’t know where Jesus is from. With thousands trailing Jesus all over the country, how could they *not* know where this amazing carpenter out of Nazareth is from? So the beggar has ‘em dead to rights: “Nobody’s ever healed a blind person. If Jesus *weren’t* from God, He coulda never done this! *I* can see better than all o’ youse!”

***The Light Dawns***

Notice the progression of the beggar’s conception of Jesus. First, he knows Him only by name, and that He’d healed him. Next, his vision improves to seeing Jesus as a man *of* God, perhaps even a prophet. Now, thanks to spiritual eye surgery, he regards Jesus as a man *from* God, the One whom God had sent, the One John the Baptist identified as the Messiah. Now he has 20/20 *spiritual* vision too.

Tired of being lectured by this grubby streetperson, weary of having their irrational accusations snuffed out by this bum’s powerful, logical, first-hand testimony, the Pharisees toss him out of the synagogue …. excommunicated … an alien in his own country.

***No Power Shortage Here!***

(9:36-41) Maybe word of this excommunication, this pompous bigotry reaches Jesus by the grapevine; maybe He just……*knows*. Whatever, Jesus seeks out His new, sighted friend and asks what He asks you and me: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The OT prophet Daniel and Jesus Himself use this “Son of Man” expression to point to Christ’s being fully human, fully capable of suffering for us as a man, and to underline the awe-inspiring fact that the Son of God came to this planet and donned an earthsuit in order to live as we live, then to die for our sins.

In response to Jesus’ question, the beggar wants to know who this Son of Man is because he *wants* to believe in Him. When Jesus says, “I’m He,” the man wilts and says, “Lord, I believe!” And he begins to worship Jesus.

Seizing the moment, Jesus positions Himself as the providential Pivot on which all destiny turns, saying, “I’ve come to earth to give sight to the blind, and to confound those who just *think* they can see.”

Jesus is saying, if you acknowledge your blindness, you can be forever forgiven of your sin. But if you, knowing what you know about Me, still claim to see, despite your spiritual darkness, there’s no hope for you. You’ll be, as the new movie and best-selling series says, “Left Behind.”

The Bible says there’s nothing we can do to earn God’s forgiveness. It’s His free gift, given out of His heart of grace, through faith alone. It’s more than fire insurance, more than a “get out of jail free” card. It’s the act of removing yourself from the throne of your life and putting Jesus there. Jesus says, “Follow me.”

After Christ had returned to heaven, Peter wrote that Jesus paid the ultimate price for us in order to … bring us to God. Tolerance and political correctness have become America’s religion of choice. But Jesus is not offering you and me religion. He just wants to walk with us, to live inside our hearts, to be the Pivot of our lives.

If you haven’t reached for the Light switch yet to emerge from your own spiritual blackout, now’s the best chance you’ll ever have. Just say something like this: “Father, I agree with you that I’ve been wandering around in my spiritual blindness. By faith I accept and believe that the Bible is true when it says that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. By that one act, not thanks to anything that I have done or could ever do, You forgave and blotted out my sins forever. I receive Your forgiveness right now, and give you my heart and life in exchange, knowing that this is not much of a bargain for You! I want to follow Jesus. Please help me do that, starting now. Thank You. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

His Deal

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www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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