

Bible Readings for Sunday March 22, 2020

1 Samuel 16:1-13 New International Version

16 The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

² But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.”

The LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’”

³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.”

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?”

⁵ Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.”

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said,

“The LORD has not chosen this one either.” ⁹ Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.” ¹⁰ Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.” ¹¹ So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

¹² So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

¹³ So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

Ephesians 5:8-14 New International Version

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness,

but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

John 9:1-41 New International Version

9 As he went 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 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

¹⁰ “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

¹¹ He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹² “Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. ¹⁹ “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

²⁰ “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind.

²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

²⁵ He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

²⁶ Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

²⁷ He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³²Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

³⁴ To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

³⁶ "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

³⁷ Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

³⁸ Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

⁴¹ Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

A man who was born blind becomes a lesson to the religious leaders, to those who should have known better. What a strange situation? What lesson could a blind man give to the highly educated, highly respected, and highly blessed leaders of the people of Israel? The Gospel reading points out that even Jesus' disciples have missed the mark on this man. They express the common opinion that obviously he has been judged by God for some terrible sin, either committed by his parents or himself. But Jesus will not let them rest on their self-righteousness judgement. He is going to do something that will challenge all of them and their attitudes.

First, he would clarify to his disciples that this had nothing to do with judgement or sin. Second, he would heal this man, restoring his hope and joy, teaching the leaders a lesson about mercy and love and what true blindness looks like. It reminds us that God can use suffering to bring about good.

Now we can interpret this in several ways- did God cause the man's blindness, let him suffer under this affliction for years just in order to heal him in some dramatic example of His power? Or we can see this as God working through the suffering of one person to bring a greater good to him and also to others?

As human creatures we are under the influence of sin and its effects, so we have all experienced suffering. We know that suffering is part of walking this earthly life. We also know that God is sovereign. In other words, He is all powerful and in control of all things, and has power over all things- even suffering. So whether God causes suffering or He allows it... may be just an academic question that cannot be answered without some humility and mystery about it. Whenever we tread upon trying to answer this we are like the Pharisees. We risk stepping on unknown ground into spiritual blindness. We are stepping into areas we have no business or knowledge about. Here we must refrain from judging. Like the Pharisees that day we often have the tendency to jump into God's role, pronounce judgement and feel quite self-assured of our own security. God may have some other plan or purpose for suffering. Sometimes we just have to say "I don't know why."

As Jesus warned them- their reaction and judgement makes them truly blind. Even when the man was physically blind he was open to see Jesus for who he was, the Pharisees could physically see but could not spiritually understand who Jesus was and why he healed the man. Instead of celebrating the healing and God's grace they looked for evidence to condemn.

The difference in between the blind man and the blind Pharisees was one of humility and heart. The healed blind man simply accepted Jesus while the Pharisees sought to discount him with their religious regulations. The very Son of God stood before them and they could not see him.

As we journey this life be mindful that God's hand is at work everywhere around us, through people we may least expect. He is active in the lives of sinners and saints. He will not be constrained by our formulas of who should get their prayers answered and who does not. Jesus will come to us in many forms, so keep a look out and celebrate when you see Him among the lost, the least, the last, and lowest. Take care not to harden your heart to his voice.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for giving us vision to see You in the world today. Lift any blindness from our hearts that we may celebrate Your activity in this world. Open our minds to how You work among the lost, the least, the last, and the lowest. Help us to be your hands and heart among them as we remember that at one time, we too were blind but now can see. "I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."

In Jesus Name we pray,

Amen