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Man Born Blind (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the story of the man born blind in John chapter 8. He addresses some troublesome points in the text, such as the age of Jesus during the conversation and the assertion that the disciples believed in reincarnation. He also delves into the significance of the statement "I am" and how it relates to God's divine name. Gregg emphasizes that Christians today should not try to explain why some people are born with handicaps, but instead focus on having enough faith to overcome them.

Transcript

In our last session, we got through John chapter 8 with the exception of the last two verses, really. And that was very unfortunate that we ran out of space on the tape before we took those verses, because they are an organic part of the whole discussion that precedes them. And it's somewhat more desirable to treat verses in their context rather than in a separate session.

And those verses, John 8, 58, and 59, are important enough that we cannot simply content ourselves with having no record of them or no treatment of them. So I'm going to put in here at the end of John chapter 8, take those two verses, and then we're going to go on and take John chapter 9 in this session as well. In John chapter 8, Jesus had made some claims about himself, which had caused some of the Jews to say they believed in him, or at least to feel that they believed in him.

It says in John 8, 30, that when he spoke these words, many believed in him. And in verse 31, Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, If you abide in my word, then you are my disciples indeed. So he did not accept without question that all those who were believing in him were going to be persistent and true disciples.

And as he began to talk to them about their need to be made free from sin, some of them were not willing to admit the need for this, and they began to appeal to their pride that they were Abraham's descendants, which sort of underscores for us what must have been a very prevailing Jewish attitude in that time, that being descended from Abraham

was itself sufficient to save a person. That if a person was descended from Abraham, promises had been made to Abraham and to his seed, if they could show that they were in fact descended from Abraham, that would prove that they were to be participants in the blessings promised to Abraham. We know, of course, the apostle Paul understood it differently, and from this ensuing passage, we know that Jesus saw it differently as well.

Paul indicated that the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed, but that seed does not refer to, plural, seeds, all the Jews, in other words, but it refers to a particular seed, Christ, so that the promises of God to Abraham are fulfilled in and to Christ and those who are in him. This is how Paul expands on that subject in the third chapter of Galatians. Jesus talks that way here too, because while he acknowledges in verse 37 that they are Abraham's descendants, he challenges their claim to be Abraham's children, which is an interesting distinction to make.

They are physically descended from Abraham, it is true, he says in verse 37, but in verse 39, he says, if you were really Abraham's children, you'd do the works of Abraham. And he points out that they were doing works very different from Abraham, because they were seeking to kill him for no better reason than that he had told them the truth. And he said Abraham didn't do this kind of thing.

And another difference between them and Abraham is brought up later on in verse 56, where he says, your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day and saw it and was glad. Abraham was glad to see Jesus. These people who claim to be his children were not glad to see Jesus.

They didn't rejoice in Jesus' day, in his appearance. They found him troublesome. Now, of course, in saying that Abraham rejoiced and was glad to see Jesus' day, the question actually arises, when did Abraham see Jesus? In fact, the Jews raised that question themselves in verse 57.

Then the Jews said to him, you are not yet 50 years old and have you seen Abraham? It's interesting that they say he is not yet 50 years old. You know, there's one of the early church fathers, Irenaeus, who is actually a disciple of Polycarp, who was himself a disciple of the Apostle John. So the succession is the Apostle John, Polycarp and Irenaeus, pretty close to the apostolic times.

Irenaeus made a comment in one of his writings that Jesus lived to be almost 50. This is not taken as a serious, historically reliable statement by any scholars because the Bible specifically says that Jesus' ministry began around age 30. And it's hard to imagine 20 years of ministry to be sandwiched into the Gospels.

It would appear that it was more like 2, 3 or 3 1/2 years of ministry. And therefore, traditionally, we understand Jesus to have died at around age 33. And no one knows for sure why Irenaeus, seemingly so inaccurately, indicated that Jesus lived to be nearly 50.

But some have suggested it might have been based on this statement of the Jews. When they said, you are not yet 50 years old. Irenaeus may have deduced from this that Jesus was close to 50 years old, which is why they picked that figure.

But it's probably not a reliable one. In all likelihood, Jesus was not yet even 35, much less 50. Now, why they would select the number 50 is curious because, I mean, even if Jesus had been 50 years old, that would not have caused him to live long enough to see Abraham.

Abraham had died 2,000 years before Jesus came to earth. And therefore, the selection of the number 50, you are not yet 50, would seem almost arbitrary, if not for the fact that they may have assumed that was something like his age or close to it. And that may suggest that Jesus looked haggard and he looked older than he really was.

On the other hand, of course, maturity can give the impression of age, even where physical features do not. It's often the case that a person who looks young and is young is mistaken for being older because of maturity or wisdom or whatever. And that's perhaps a better reason for believing that, for suggesting that they thought he might be nearly 50, if that's what they thought.

In any case, it is striking that they would say, you're not yet 50 years old, when in fact he's probably not even close to it. Now, I guess we might ask ourselves, before we go further, when did Abraham see Jesus? Jesus said, Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it. When did he see it? We don't know the answer to that.

It's possible that Jesus meant that Abraham foresaw it, that is, by prophetic vision or by the promise of God that was given to him. He looked forward to it and in his faith vision, he foresaw and looked forward to and rejoiced in the coming of the Messiah and the coming of Christ. This would be probably agreeable with Hebrews chapter 11, which speaks of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob.

In Hebrews 11, 13, of those persons I just named, it says, these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off. They saw them afar off, not with their eyes, however. They were assured of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Now, Abraham and his immediate successors saw the promises of God afar off and embraced them by faith. The promises certainly had to do with the Messiah coming, the seed of Abraham. And the writer of Hebrews might be telling us that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Sarah saw, you know, by faith, as it were, a day that would come.

They embraced as real, because of their faith in the promise of God, a prospect of the coming of the Messiah and rejoiced in that prospect. That is possibly what Jesus means when he says, Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad. Perhaps he

saw it by faith.

He saw it as a prospect that he knew God was going to fulfill because God had promised. So in his mind's eye, as it were, he could see the day of the Messiah and rejoiced in that. Other suggestions have been that perhaps on some of the occasions we read of in Genesis where Abraham met with God, that on one of these occasions, or all of them, this appearance of God was in fact Christ himself appearing in a theophany, a Christophany, prior to his incarnation.

We know, for example, in the 18th chapter of Genesis, that it specifically says that Abraham was sitting in the heat of the day under a tree and he saw in the distance three men who came to him. One of them was specifically said to be Jehovah. The other two were angels.

They were on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah. And they stayed with Abraham briefly, had a meal under his hospitality, and then went on their way after God told him what he was going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah. Now, since one of these persons that Abraham saw and fellowshiped with was Jehovah, it's possible that that is an occasion when Jesus is referring to Abraham having seen him or seen his day.

It's also possible that when Abraham met Melchizedek in Genesis 14, at the end of that chapter, possibly that was Christ. There are reasons to believe that, especially when one considers carefully and faithfully what is written in Hebrews 7 and allows the wording of that chapter to be taken seriously, it would seem that Melchizedek was Christ come in a pre-incarnate Christophany, or a theophany. And not all evangelicals hold that view about Melchizedek, but I can't see my way around it when I study Hebrews 7. And that being so, we know that Abraham saw and received a blessing from and gave gifts to Melchizedek, and therefore that might be what Jesus is referring to when he says that Abraham saw him and was glad.

Jesus, however, doesn't answer their actual question. When they say, when did you see Abraham? He doesn't give them a straight answer that says, oh, it was on such and such an occasion I saw Abraham. But he addresses rather the root of their objection.

The root of their objection is, you're not yet 50 years old. You haven't been around long enough to see Abraham. They actually ask for specifics.

When did you see Abraham? And rather than give them that specific, he addresses the issue of their misconstruing his antiquity. They took only into consideration his earthly life. He had not been on the earth so much as 50 years, and obviously he could not have in those years have encountered Abraham who had died 2000 years earlier.

But what they didn't understand is that he had a pre-existence as God, and therefore predated Abraham by a great deal. And so in verse 58, Jesus said, Then most assuredly I

say to you, before Abraham was, I am. Now this is a familiar passage to, I guess, well-read Christians who read their Bible.

It's a striking passage, most of us know, that it amounts to a tremendous claim on Jesus' part to being somebody special, and particularly being God. Not all who read it, however, agree that this is what he's claiming. For example, there are those who think that Jesus' words should be translated before Abraham was, I was, or I have been, so that he would be saying nothing more than, I existed in a pre-incarnate form before Abraham ever existed.

Now, if that is what Jesus was saying to be an entirely true statement, and we have no problems with that concept, that Jesus existed before Abraham, certainly that fact of his pre-existence is included in his statement. He is affirming that before there was an Abraham, there was him. But his actual wording is saying far more than just that bare assertion that he was around before Abraham was.

Because in the Greek language, it would have been possible for him to use the past tense and most natural for him to do so, if all he wished to say was that he pre-existed before Abraham's time. He would have, of course, said, before Abraham was, I was, or I have been, and there are Greek words that convey that. There are Greek tenses of the verbs that could have been used to say that, and that would have been very natural.

However, he does something very unnatural. He says, before Abraham was, and then in the Greek he says, ego, a me. Ego is spelled like we would say ego, E-G-O.

When Freud decided that man was made up of the id and the ego and the super-ego, he got the word ego from the Greek language. It means I. Ego, I. Really more properly pronounced ego in the Greek. And a me means, if it's all by itself, it just means I am.

You don't even need the ego part to say I in I am. A me by itself, which is spelled E-I-M-I. E-I-M-I.

By itself, a me means I am. But when you put the I before it, I, I am, it's just emphatic. I am.

Now you can say I am by saying a me, or simply by, or by emphasis by saying ego a me. Jesus said ego a me, and one thing that's striking about this statement, regardless of what our theories are about why he used the word, one thing that's obvious is that it is in the present tense. It cannot justly be translated with a past tense, because it is not a past tense of the verb.

It is the present tense of the verb, and it means I am, or it can also mean I am he. As I pointed out in our last session, it is a regular generic expression. For someone to say I am, or I am he, they can say ego a me and mean either one, and context would usually help out in determining which they have in mind.

But, for example, I pointed out last time in John 9, just the very next chapter after this, John 9 in verse 9, the blind man, when some were discussing whether he was the same guy after he was healed, whether this is the same man that had been blind and whom they had known as a blind man, some said this is he, others said he's like him. He said I am he, and once again the words of the blind man are the same, ego a me, the same as the words of Jesus in John 8, 58, and also in John 8, 24, where Jesus had said in John 8, 24, Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I am he, you will die in your sins. Again, I am he, there in the Greek is ego a me.

It could be translated just I am, or I am he. It's quite clear that in John 9, 9, when the blind man said ego a me, the correct translation is I am he. And it could be that every place in the Bible ego a me could be translated I am he, including John 8, 58, where Jesus said before Abraham was ego a me.

We could translate that before Abraham was I am he. It would be quite legitimate to do so. The Greek allows it.

But that still doesn't explain why he uses the present tense. Whether he says I am or I am he, however we prefer to translate ego a me in that case, we still have to deal with the fact that he uses the present tense. Now, in Exodus chapter 3, Moses encountered God at the burning bush.

And God commissioned him to go to Pharaoh and to the Jews and to inform them that God was delivering the Jews from Pharaoh and going to establish them as his people outside Egypt. And Moses anticipated that the Jews would question the legitimacy of Moses' claim to having such a commission. And Moses said, well, they'll probably ask, you know, who your name is, God.

I mean, what God sent me. What is your name so I can tell them? And God said to Moses on that occasion in Exodus 3, he said, I am that I am. You tell the children of Israel that I am has sent you.

And because God so clearly declared his name in Exodus 3 to be I am, the natural thing for Christians in reading John 8, 58, where Jesus said before Abraham was ego a me, is to say, oh, well, Jesus is using the divine name which was given to Moses at the burning bush as God's name. He's referring back to that incident. And therefore, we have in John 8, 58, Jesus claiming to be the same God that met Moses in the burning bush, the I am.

Now, this is entirely possible. And almost all Christians I know, including myself at one time, felt like that is really what was intended by Jesus when he when he said this, that he was actually trying to hark back to the incident in Exodus chapter three at the burning bush. Now, persons who are opposed to the doctrine of the deity of Christ and probably chief among those would be the Jehovah's Witnesses, have pointed out that in the Greek version of the Old Testament, in the Septuagint, when you read Exodus

chapter three and that interchange between Moses and God in the Septuagint, the Greek words that are used to translate God's divine name, I am, are not the same as here.

They're not ego a me. John, of course, was written in Greek. Exodus was originally written in Hebrew, but was translated into Greek in 285 B.C. And that Greek translation, the translators did not choose to use the words ego a me in Exodus three to translate God's divine name.

Now, of course, what choice the translators of the Septuagint made is hardly relevant in terms of the ultimate nature of things. But what is significant is that Jesus and his generation were familiar with the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. And of course, the apostles in their writings almost entirely when they quoted Scripture quoted from the Greek translation, the Septuagint.

Jesus also would have been familiar with the Septuagint. And John, who wrote these words, remember, Jesus spoke in Aramaic. John translated into Greek here.

Now, the point to make is this. If Jesus, in fact, used the same words when he said before Abraham was I am, if he used the same words for I am that God used in Exodus three. And if John being familiar with the Greek expression used in the Septuagint in Exodus, wish to convey to us that Jesus was using the same words, he would likely have used the same Greek words that the Septuagint used when translating into Greek.

You understand that concept? I mean, it's it's not certain that John would have done so. And there's nothing that would have compelled him to. It just seems to be the natural thing for him to do.

If he's trying to give his readers cause to make this connection in their mind, Jesus was claiming the same thing to be the God of the burning bush here. Then one would expect that John in translating whatever Jesus said in Aramaic into Greek would have chosen the same Greek expression that the Septuagint writers, which was familiar to everybody in John's day, had used to translate God's words into Greek in Exodus. And this John did not do, which, as I said, the Jehovah's Witnesses and perhaps some others as well would say that indicates that John in writing this did not believe and did not understand Jesus to be referring back to Exodus three at all or the divine name that's found there.

In response to this, a number of things can be said. One is that could be correct. It could be correct that that John doesn't understand it to be so, and that Jesus was not, in fact, referring back to Exodus three.

It is also possible, and this is an alternative that needs to be considered, that John, who was, as it says in the book of Acts, an unlearned and unschooled layman, may not have read the Septuagint that much. And he may not have been very familiar with the way the passage in Exodus three read in the Septuagint. He might not have been familiar

with what Greek words were used there.

Hard to say. He may have. It may be that he did understand Jesus to be making a reference back, but John didn't look it up in the Septuagint to see what Greek words were used.

Therefore, he chose some words which worked well but were not the same ones. That's a possibility. A third possibility is that Jesus, when he spoke in Aramaic, was, in fact, referring back to what God said in Exodus, but John didn't catch it.

John didn't know it. He just recorded what Jesus said, and it never occurred to him to look back at the Septuagint and see whether the words he used were the same there. I mean, those are all possibilities.

I don't know that all are equally probable. I'm saying, however, that the difference in the Greek words here from those in the Septuagint of Exodus are not conclusive against the thought that Jesus was referring back to the burning bush when he spoke. But I allow the critics the point that Jesus may not at all have been referring back to Exodus.

He may not have been appealing to the divine name there, but there are other places in the Old Testament where the divine name is given, and it's not always the same name. Of course, God has many names by which he called himself, and most of those names are used in the New Testament of Christ. One of those divine names is found frequently in the middle chapters, or somewhat late of the middle chapters, of Isaiah.

The first of them being quite early in Isaiah chapter 41 or so. 41.4, that's right. Someone made a total list on a previous occasion.

There is a complete list I've given you when we went through Isaiah also. Isaiah 41.4, we read, Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Jehovah, am the first, and with the last, I am he. Now, without even paying special attention to the expression, first and last, which is applied to Jesus in the book of Revelation, and is here applied to Jehovah, we have the expression, I am he.

Now, in our Bibles, you can see that the am is an italic, so that in the Hebrew, there's just a word that says, I he. However, when the Septuagint translation was made of this passage, and like passages in Isaiah, the translators chose to use the Greek words, ego eimi. So that God said, I, Jehovah, am the first, and with the last, ego eimi, which can be translated, I am, or I am he.

The fact is, these words, the very words used in John 8.58 to translate Jesus' statement, are the words in Greek that were used by the Septuagint to refer to this divine title. Now, someone could argue, but this isn't a divine title. God's just saying, I'm he.

That could be stated, more or less, as just a statement without there being a title implied

in it. Yes, John? It is. Oh, wait, 46.9? I'm sorry, 46.4, yes.

I'm not sure about 46.9. Let me have a look there. I don't think it's there. I am God? Where it says that? I am God? No, I don't think we have ego eimi there, but I'm not sure about that.

It is not one of the passages where this particular phrase is used in the manner that is, I think, specialized here of God, because in Isaiah 41.4, we have that, but it's the first of many cases. In chapter 43 and verse 10 of Isaiah, in 43.10, God says, You are my witnesses, says Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen. So, he's talking to Jehovah's Witnesses, right? You are my witnesses, says Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that ego eimi, the Septuagint says, that I am he, or I am.

Either translation is possible. And before me there was no God-form, nor shall there be after me, etc. Then, in Isaiah 43.13, it says, Indeed, before the day was, I am he.

Again, the ego eimi in the Septuagint. Now, here we come to something special, because in Isaiah 43.13, we come to the first instance where this word is used in a way that spells it out clearly as a title, as a label that God uses for himself, a distinctive technical term, rather than just the ordinary statement, I am he, which anyone might make in different contexts. Here we have him saying, Before the day was, I am.

Now, the form of that sentence is just as awkward as Jesus' statement, Before Abraham was, I am. Because, of course, when you say, Before such and such was, it would be more proper to say, I was, not I am. It's awkward.

It's awkward because it's non-grammatical. It violates the natural use of grammatical rules, and it does so, giving the indication that ego eimi in this place is being used, as in the other like places in Isaiah, as a title. It does not change with the grammatical structure of the sentence.

It is not dependent on the tense of the other verbs in the sentence. It stands as an unchanging title. Likewise, in Isaiah 46.4, God says, Even to your old age, I am he, or in the Septuagint, ego eimi.

And even to your gray hairs, I will carry you. Now, you can see, even to your old age and even to your gray hairs, he's talking about something future. That's clear, for example, by the second line.

Even to your old age, I will carry you. That's future tense. But the first thing is, even to your old age, I am.

You would expect him to say, I will be. He's talking about something future. But again, we find the unchangeable tense of this because it is a title, a divine name.

It is being used as a divine name. Now, the important thing about all this is that, even though the Septuagint did not use the words *ego eimi*, when translating Exodus 3 and the divine title there, they did in all of these places in Isaiah, where Jehovah uses this as a title for himself. And we have much closer parallels there in Isaiah to the use of this expression, that is to John 8.58, than we do in Exodus.

Because we have him saying, Before the day was, *ego eimi*. Jesus, before Abraham was, *ego eimi*. It's a similar sentence.

It's a similar usage. And therefore, the evidence, I believe, is favorable to the supposition that Jesus was, in fact, claiming the divine title for himself. But not the divine title as found in Exodus, but that which is found so many times in Isaiah, which is Jehovah's own title.

Now, whatever actual words Jesus used in Aramaic, the language he spoke, we may never know because we only have the Greek translation of them here in John. But we know that his original hearers certainly recognized the words he spoke and their implication. And it says in verse 59, Then they took up stones to throw at him.

But Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. So the fact that they took up stones to stone him was due not to the fact that he was claiming to have been around longer than Abraham. For that, they could have just said, You're nuts.

In fact, they had said something like that in verse 48, just a little earlier in the same chapter, when the Jews answered and said, Do we not rightly say you're a Samaritan, have a demon? In other words, they're saying, You're nuts. You're crazy. You're demonized.

No one who's in his right mind could say such things as what you're saying. But they didn't just, you know, say you're nuts here in verse 59. They obviously took him to be blaspheming, to be claiming to be God, which is why they took up stones.

And for that reason, we have to assume that regardless of what we're concluding from the translation we're left with, those who heard his original words in the original language made no mistake as to the nature of his claim. He was claiming to be Jehovah God. And so they understood him.

Okay, moving along then. John chapter 9 is a story, a very appealing story, actually. It's really kind of neat.

It's not just another miracle story of Jesus, of which there are many in the Gospels. It is, of course, that, a miracle story, but the miracle takes place early in the chapter. And the rest of the story is about the one upon whom the miracle was performed and his interaction with the Jewish community and with Jesus later on.

And this makes it a very unusual miracle story because, as you probably know, if you think about it for a moment, all the other miracle stories about Jesus in the Bible, they tell of the miracle, and then you hear nothing more about the person. What happened to him? I shouldn't say we hear nothing more. We usually hear they went out and told everybody, even though Jesus told them not to.

And that's the last we hear about it. Or that Jesus sent the man of the tombs back to his city to testify, and we read that he did, and he went out and testified throughout the Decapolis. But, you know, in those cases, we have nothing more than a short statement summarizing what that person did immediately after he was healed, but not in any sense giving as much detail about his specific conversations with people and so forth.

So that the focus of chapter 9 momentarily is really upon the man who is healed more than on Jesus who healed him. However, of course, Jesus is prominent at the beginning and the end of the chapter, and he is the one being discussed and theorized about throughout the chapter. Therefore, of course, it is about Jesus.

But it's interesting about this guy. And one thing that has been pointed out many times, by preachers anyway, is that this man who is born blind and healed by Jesus makes a good sermon to liken him, by way of analogy, to a person who gets saved. It's obvious from the Bible that those who are not believers are in darkness.

They're blind. They don't know God. They're blind to spiritual things, and they walk in darkness.

The Bible says this in many ways in many places. And the man being healed is like a person coming out of darkness, out of blindness, having his eyes opened by the touch of the Master, by coming to know who Jesus is. And the things that happen to the man after this have often been seen as analogous to some of the experiences of the Christian, after conversion, having to explain his conversion, having to handle objections from disagreeing parties, and even living initially with a bit of an inadequate theology, but being loyal to Jesus because he knows he's been touched and he's been changed.

And so as we read the story, I think we are justified in seeing that there is a connection here. For one thing, because in John's gospel, as I've pointed out before, more than in the other gospels, in John's gospel, the miracles that are selected to be told, to be recorded, are mostly those that have a spiritual analogy that is intended. And this is no exception, because back in John 8 and verse 12, Jesus said, I am the light of the world.

He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. And it would appear that the next miracle we read of illustrates this point, that a man who is born physically blind in physical darkness represents the person who is spiritually blind. And Jesus, the light of the world, offers this man and provides for him light, for his eyes, natural light, and that as a symbol of spiritual light.

So also, at the end of the story, Jesus makes comments that seem to make a spiritual application of the entire story, because he says in verse 39 of John 9, John 9, verse 39, Jesus said, For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind. And some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these words and said to him, Are we also blind? And Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say we see, therefore your sin remains.

Throughout that entire little exchange, verses 39 through 41, blind and seeing is clearly not a reference to physical blindness. Jesus didn't come to make seeing eyes blind. And when he says, I came to make blind eyes see, he probably was not referring simply to the few cases where he actually healed blind people.

But his mission, in the larger sense, was to cause those who were spiritually blind to see. And when he says, If you were blind, you'd have no sin, he obviously isn't talking about physical blindness, because physical blind people can be just as sinful as others. He's saying, if you really were ignorant, if you really had no light whatsoever, then you might be held less accountable.

You would have more innocence. But because you have light, and you claim to have light, therefore you're held accountable for what you know, and therefore you're more sinful, you're more guilty. Excuse me.

As you know, I've had a cold. It's a little worse in some ways today than usual. Not as bad in some other ways.

I'm recovering. Let's read the story. Now, as Jesus passed by, he saw a man who was blind from birth.

And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Now, all this conversation took place before Jesus did anything for the blind man. He and his disciples are passing by.

They see a man who's been born blind. The disciples knew that this man was born blind because they mentioned it. Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? That means that he was a rather familiar person there.

The disciples had probably seen him before, and most of the people around seemed to know who he was. As we know, further on in the story, everybody seemed to recognize him and know him as the local blind man. So this man had been probably for a long time begging in all likelihood next to the road.

It gave occasion on this circumstance for the disciples to raise a theological question that many would ask. And it's kind of fortunate for us that it was asked so Jesus could give an answer and it would be recorded for us. The question is, who sinned that this man should be born blind? Now, they offered two suggestions, this man or his parents.

Now, to suggest that the man sinned and therefore he was born blind, it may seem at first to suggest that he had a preexistence in which he sinned so that in this life he was born blind as a consequence of his previous sin. That is how reincarnation advocates understand this verse. Of course, most reincarnation advocates don't appeal to scripture very much, but where they think they can, they do.

And this is one place. They say, you see, the disciples must have believed in reincarnation because they figured this man may have sinned so as to cause him to be born blind. And if that were true, he would have had to have sinned in a previous life.

Well, I disagree with that. But even if it were true that the disciples believed in reincarnation, certainly Jesus' answer would disprove reincarnation because he said this man nor his parents had sinned and that would prove that it wasn't bad karma. You know, the reincarnationist would have said, in fact, he was born blind because he had sinned.

He had bad karma from a previous life. And even if that's what the disciples believed, which I do not believe that, I don't think they did, and I don't believe they implied that. But even if that were their view, it stands corrected by Jesus.

Because when he says neither this man nor his parents sinned that he would be born blind, he is specifically saying that this condition the man is in is not the result of any misbehavior on anyone's part, his own or anyone else's. It is obviously, therefore, not the result of bad karma left over from a previous lifetime, and therefore it goes right against what reincarnation and karma doctrine would teach. So even if we wish to grant the New Age people their assertion that the disciples believed in reincarnation, we have to go far enough into the passage to know that even if they had believed it, Jesus corrected it and said they were wrong.

Now, it's not necessary to assume that the disciples believed in reincarnation or in a previous life that this man had lived. They were obviously struggling, as most people would, to figure out why anyone would be born blind. It's conceivable that a person who does something wrong in their lifetime might suffer disaster, might suffer sickness or handicap or some bad thing is the result of that.

But why an innocent child should be born blind, it boggles the mind. One suggestion would be that his parents had sinned. I mean, it's just a possibility.

If, for example, his parents had been promiscuous, if his mother had been promiscuous

and she got syphilis, a child could be born blind as a result of that. And the child's sin would not be a factor, but his mother's would be, although that wasn't the case here. There are some cases where the sins of a parent might bring some kind of a harm upon their unborn child.

It has happened before. Children are born crack babies because of the sins of their parents in many cases. But obviously that was not relevant to this case.

The other possibility was that this man was being punished for his own sins, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the disciples were suggesting the possibility that he had lived a previous lifetime because the disciples would have understood, as a Hebrew would, that God knows the future, that God knows all things future. I mean, the whole prophetic scriptures of their Old Testament were a demonstration of that fact. And therefore, it probably did not seem impossible to their minds in their desperation to grasp some kind of rationale for this man being born in this condition, if not his parents, then was it possible that God foresaw that this man would be a sinner in his life and in advance, handicapped him for it.

If God is able to foresee the future as if it were the past or the present, then it would be no difficulty for him and no injustice for him to punish a person even prior to their committing the sin because he knew they were going to do it. And that might be what the disciples were thinking. But again, if that's what they were thinking, they were wrong.

Whatever they were thinking, they were wrong. In this case, it was neither the man's sins nor the parents' sins that entered into his condition. Now, lack of faith is a sin.

Whatever is not of faith is sin. Therefore, we can also say that this man's condition was not a result of lack of faith on his part either because Jesus said he had not sinned. It was not his sin that caused it.

Not to say the man had never sinned. Of course, the man, like anyone else, was a sinner. But Jesus was saying there was no connection between his condition that he was in and any sin that he had committed, including, although Jesus doesn't make this point, but we'd have to include in that the sin of unbelief.

And I say that for obvious reasons because there are Christians today who believe that if you have enough faith, you can overcome and be rid of handicaps and sickness and so forth. Jesus didn't indicate that this man had any control over this at all. His moral decisions, his spiritual life, his choices had nothing to do with him being in this condition.

This condition was brought on him by God. Now, how can we say such a thing? How could we say that God would bring such a condition on him? Well, Jesus implies it. He says in verse 3, neither this man nor his parents' sin, but that the works of God should be

revealed in him.

If this was the work of the devil, if the devil did this to him, and God was not in the picture, it's hard to imagine why the devil would put this man in this condition in order that the works of God could be seen in him. Now, that the devil may be in the picture as the one who afflicts is not disputed. In the book of Job, the devil brought Job's sickness to him, but only with God's permission because God had a purpose for it happening.

God was never squeamish about taking responsibility for people's disasters. It apparently never occurred to God that this would argue against his justice or his mercy. And by the way, it shouldn't occur to us that it does because it doesn't.

It does not argue against his justice or his mercy. God is certainly within his rights to do such things. And if it brings glory to himself, that's his business to do.

Now, I would remind you that when Moses stood before the burning bush, he complained that he was not quick of speech and he was not very qualified to speak before Pharaoh. And in Exodus chapter 4, the Lord answered him. Exodus 4, 11.

The Lord said to him, Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now, this is an interesting statement because the word of faith people say, No, the devil is the one who makes people blind and mute and deaf. And God's only concern is to change their condition. But that's not what God said.

He said, Who is it who made people mute, deaf, seeing, or blind? Isn't it I? Didn't I do it? God said. He's implying he did. He makes people born with vision or born without vision.

That's his business to do. Now, if somebody is born handicapped, we will not argue whether or not God has allowed the devil to do it or whether God has done it directly apart from any agency of the devil. But even if the devil is involved, that's not the significant point.

The significant point that God makes in Exodus 4 and which Jesus makes here is that God had a purpose in this handicap. God had a purpose in this person being in this condition. In this case, it was so the works of God could be seen in him.

And in this particular instance, the works of God were to heal him. Now, by the way, the works of God can be seen in a handicapped person, in a disabled person, even if they're not healed. Because the principal work of God is that which he works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.

That's the supreme miracle. When God takes a rebel heart of a born confirmed sinner and changes their whole orientation to be a lover of God and a lover of righteousness and to will and to do God's good pleasure, that is the work of God. Jesus even said when

his adversaries said, what must we do that we may do the works of God? He said, this is the work of God that you believe in him that he has sent.

That in itself requires a work of God even for you to believe. That's a work of God. Now, I'm probably putting a slant on that particular statement that is not implied, but the point is the only work that God does in sick people is not necessarily to heal them.

There are other works, even greater works than these, no doubt. And in fact, Jesus indicated that his own resurrection was a greater work than any of the healing works he had done. And God's going to resurrect all of us from the dead too.

That's a great work. The work of God can be seen in our infirmity. As Paul himself said about his infirmities, he said, I'll rejoice in my infirmities because when I'm weak, then I'm strong because God's strength is made perfect in my weakness.

When I'm weak, the work of God is made more evident in me. In this case and in many other cases, the work of God in the life of the disabled man was to heal him. And we can hope in the mercy of God that he may heal us if we are in similar conditions.

But we can't demand it, nor can we say that if God doesn't do it, that he's not doing something important or that he's not doing the right thing.