

Week of March 12 – 18

Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)

On his way home, Jesus encountered a man who had been born blind. His disciples asked if he was blinded because he sinned or because of his parent's sin. Jesus explained that the man's blindness was not God's punishment for anyone's sin but a means by which God could show his glory.

"I must do the things God has given me to do while the opportunity is before me. Otherwise, every man watches his chances slip away. While I am here, I must enlighten and encourage others by my example," he told them. Then he spat on dirt to make a mud patch to put on the man's eyes and told him to go wash it off in the pool of Siloam. After he had done it, he went home able to see clearly.

Passing by neighbors, he heard them asking each other if he was the blind man who always sat on the street and begged others to help him out. He confirmed their suspicion, and they asked him how he could now see. He told them a man named Jesus made a clay patch, put it over his eyes, then directed him to wash off in the pool. "After I did it, I could see," he shared excitedly. They asked if he knew where Jesus went. He told them he didn't know.

It was the Sabbath, and they took the man to see the Pharisees who, in turn, asked him to tell what had happened. Hearing his story, some of the Pharisees concluded Jesus couldn't be divine because he violated the Sabbath law by working on that day. Others said an evil man couldn't produce such miracles. Again, they were split over who he was.

They asked the man what he thought of Jesus; "He's a prophet," the man declared. Not believing him, they asked his parents if the man was their son. They assured them he was their son, and he had been blind from birth. They added they didn't know what happened and, not wanting to get involved with the Pharisees over who Jesus was, suggested they quiz their son instead.

The Pharisees asked the man to renounce Jesus as an ordinary sinner and credit God. He responded, "I don't know anything about him except I was blind, and now I can see." They asked again what had happened, but he declared, "I've told you everything. What do you want from me? Are you interested in following him, too?" They rebuked him, saying, "You follow him. We follow Moses. God spoke to Moses, but we don't know where this man comes from." "Isn't it amazing," the man responded, "He gave me sight, and you don't know anything about him! God isn't inclined to support those who don't follow him. No one has ever caused a blind man to see. If he isn't from God, he couldn't do what he's doing." "Don't try to teach us doctrine, you lowly sinner," they responded and threw him out.

Hearing what happened, Jesus went to see him and asked, "Do you trust the Son of God?" "Who is he, that I might believe in him?" the man asked. Jesus said, "You have seen him. He is speaking to you." The man said he believed him and then bowed to honor him. Jesus said, "I have come so those who don't understand might see clearly, and those who think they see might realize they don't." Some Pharisees asked Jesus if he thought they were blind, too. Jesus told them that if they admitted their blindness, they would be innocent. Otherwise, their guilt would remain.

Commissioning of the Seventy (Luke 10:1-24)

Jesus recruited seventy people to pair up and go into the cities he had visited, telling them there was much to do and few to do it. He told them to pray God would send more helpers into the field.

“Be on your way and be careful because I am sending you out like lambs into a pack of wolves. Take nothing with you, and don’t let anyone prevent you from performing what I have sent you to do. Be cordial wherever you go. If you are welcomed, be gracious. If not, move on. Stay where you are well received and accept their hospitality. Don’t move around looking for something better. Be content in every town. Heal the sick, telling them the kingdom of God has arrived. But if they reject you, kick the dust of that place off your sandals warning them they will be judged more harshly than Sodom. Anyone who listens to you obeys me. Anyone who turns a deaf ear is rejecting me and the one I represent.”

When the seventy returned, they were ecstatic, reporting that evil spirits submitted them by Jesus’ authority. “I watched Satan fall from Heaven like a bolt of lightning,” Jesus shared. “I empower you to tread on serpents and scorpions, and I strengthen you to stand firm before your enemies. Nothing can hurt you. Be happy because you have been enrolled as citizens of Heaven.”

Jesus, filled with joy, said, “Thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth. You determined to conceal these mysteries from proud intellectuals and reveal them to trusting children for your purposes. No one knows who I am but you, and no one knows who you are but me and the ones I instruct.”

Turning to his disciples, he said, “Many prophets and kings wanted to see what you are seeing unfold, but didn’t. They longed to hear what you are hearing, but couldn’t.”

Story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

An expert from the Temple tried to entrap Jesus by asking the conditions by which he could gain eternal life. “You know God’s law. How do you interpret it?” Jesus asked. The expert said, “You have to love God with every fiber of your being and show empathy and consideration to your neighbor.” “That’s right,” Jesus responded, “Do it and live.” “Then who is my neighbor?” he asked Jesus.

Jesus told the story of a man traveling, when bandits assaulted him, taking his clothes, beating him severely, and running away, left him to die. A priest passed by and crossed the street to avoid him. Then a noble Jew spotted him and came to investigate, only to go on his way. But a Samaritan saw him and took pity, treating his wounds and bandaging him so he could ride his donkey to an inn where he could be nursed back to health. He paid for the room, left an advance, and told the innkeeper he would personally take care of all costs incurred by the injured man. Which of these three would you call a neighbor?” The expert concluded it would be the one showing mercy and taking care of the hurt man. “That’s right,” Jesus confirmed. “Now go and do the same.”

Jesus’ Visit with Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)

He went to Bethany, stopping to see Martha and Mary, his friends. Martha invited the company in and began serving them, but her sister joined the group so she could listen to Jesus. Martha objected and asked Jesus to tell Mary that she should be helping her. “Martha, Martha,” Jesus

said, "You are anxious and worried about things that seem urgent right now. But the thing your sister chose is what is more vital. I won't take that from her."

The Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21)

Jesus said, "The porter opens the gate for the shepherd, and the sheep come to him when they hear his voice as he calls them by name. They follow him everywhere. The thief doesn't enter through the gate but sneaks in another way. When the sheep detect him, they flee from him. Jesus explained, "My sheep only recognize me. They find safe pastures and return to my security. The thief plans to steal, kill, and destroy, but I am here to ensure the comfort and safety of the flock. I am a good shepherd willing to give up his life for his sheep. When the wolf comes, a less responsible shepherd might flee to keep his own life, allowing the wolf to take some of the sheep and scatter the rest, but I am the good shepherd who knows my sheep, and they depend on me.

"Likewise, my father knows me, and I trust him, so I am willing to lay down my life for the sheep. I have other flocks that I must bring together into one fold under one shepherd. My father loves me because I am willing to give up my life to gain a better life. No man can force me to lay down my life. I willingly give it because my Father has assured me I will get it back."

The religious leaders couldn't agree about him, saying he was crazy, and no one should pay attention to him. But others noted that lunatics don't open the eyes of blind people.

Attempt to Stone or Arrest Jesus for Blasphemy at the Feast (John 10:22-39)

That winter, Jesus went to the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem. The priests surrounded him in the Temple courtyard and asked, "How long do you intend to keep us in suspense? If you are really the Christ, why don't you tell us outright?" "I told you," Jesus replied, "But you don't believe me. My miracles confirm who I am. But you don't believe it because you aren't of my flock. My father, who brought my sheep to me, is more powerful than any opposing force, and no one can snatch them from his mighty grip. I am just like my father."

When the priests started picking up rocks to stone him, he said, "I have done many good deeds my father sent me to do right in front of you. For which of these miracles do you intend to stone me?"

"We aren't going to stone you for what you have done, but for what you just said," they responded. "It's blasphemy for a mere man to claim he is the same as God."

Jesus replied, "David wrote, 'You are gods' He called those who received and professed the word of God gods, and you can't pluck out scriptures. How do you dare call God's ambassador a blasphemer because I said I am his protégé. If you don't do my father's bidding, you are right not to trust me. But if I do, and you still have a hard time believing me, trust my miracles."

From Jerusalem to Perea (John 10:39-42)

They tried to grab him, but he escaped and passed through Galilee and Judea beyond Jordan and returned where John the Baptist baptized him. Crowds found him again, and he ministered to them and taught them. Most of the group verified that what John the Baptist had said about him was true.

Lazarus Raised from Death (John 11:1-54)

Jesus heard that Lazarus was very sick. He told those standing nearby that Lazarus' illness would not end in death, but that God would be glorified. He loved Lazarus and his sisters, so he lingered a couple of days and told his disciples he intended to go back to Judea to visit them.

"There is only a limited amount of daylight," he explained. "If a man goes about his business in broad daylight, he doesn't get tripped up because everything is visible. But when darkness comes, he'll stumble, not seeing clearly. Lazarus is asleep, and it's time for me to wake him up." His disciples figured Lazarus would recover, not realizing Jesus was talking about his death. "Lazarus is dead, and it's better I wasn't there so you won't have any reason to question. Let's go."

Thomas challenged the others to go with Jesus and be ready and willing to die with him. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days. Many had come to comfort Mary and Martha over the loss of their brother. Martha ran to meet Jesus as he was approaching, telling him that Lazarus wouldn't have died if he had come earlier. She acknowledged that God would give Jesus whatever he asked for. Jesus assured Martha that her brother would rise again to which Martha conceded, "I know he will be resurrected at the end of time."

"I am the resurrection and the source of life," Jesus declared. "Anyone who puts his faith in me will live forever. Do you believe me?" "Yes, Lord," she said. "I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, and savior of all men." She went home and told Mary that Jesus was outside and wanted to see her. When Mary found Jesus, she fell at his feet and wept, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her crying, he got upset and asked where they had put Lazarus' body. They led him to the tomb, and he, too, began to cry.

"See how much he loved him," some said. But others complained, "Don't you suppose someone who restored sight to the blind could have prevented such a close friend from dying?"

Sobbing, Jesus approached the cave with a large stone rolled over its opening. "Take away the gravestone," Jesus commanded. Martha reminded him that he had been dead four days, and his body was already decaying.

"Didn't I tell you that if you trusted me, you would see the glory of God?" he responded. So they rolled the stone out of the way, and Jesus lifted his gaze to Heaven, boldly proclaiming, "Father, thank you for listening to me. I know you hear my very thoughts, but for the sake of the people looking on, I say this aloud so they can know beyond question that you have sent me." And with a loud voice, he called out, "Lazarus, come forth!"

Many of the Jews saw the miracle and were convinced Jesus was genuine, but some ran back to the Pharisees to report what he had done. A group then met with the chief priests to determine what to do. They figured if they didn't do something, everyone would flock to him, and the Romans might close the Temple. Caiaphas, the Head Priest, called them politically ignorant, advising them that getting rid of one man could prove to be a great way to preserve the nation. He sincerely believed that such a course would rally devout Jews all over the world. From that day forward, they were intent on killing Jesus, so he no longer walked openly among the Jews, but fled to Ephraim out in the desert where he stayed with his disciples.