

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 32

CHRIST AND THE BLIND BEGGAR

(CONTINUED)

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Transcript

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CHAPTER 32

CHRIST AND THE BLIND BEGGAR (CONTINUED)

John 9:8-23

We begin with our usual Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:— 1. The uncertainty of the neighbors: verses 8, 9. 2. Their questioning of the beggar: verse 10. 3. The beggar's answers: verses 11, 12. 4. The Pharisees and the Sabbath: verses 13, 14. 5. The beggar before the Pharisees: verses 15-17. 6. The skepticism of the Jews: verse 18. 7. The beggar's parents interrogated: verses 19-23. In our last chapter we pointed out how that the opening verses of John 9 supply us with a blessed illustration of the outflow of sovereign grace toward an elect sinner. Every detail in the picture contributes to its beauty and accuracy. Upon the dark background of the Jews' hatred of Christ (chapter 8) we are now shown the Savior ministering to one who strictly portrays the spiritual condition of each of God's elect when the Lord begins His distinguishing work of mercy upon him. Seven things are told us about the object of the Redeemer's compassion: First, he was found outside the Temple, portraying the fact that, in his natural 'condition, the elect sinner is alienated from God. Second, he was blind, and therefore unable to see the Savior when He approached him. Third, he had been blind from birth: so, too, is the sinner—"estranged from the womb" (Ps. 58:3). Fourth, he was therefore quite beyond the aid of man: helpless and hopeless unless God intervened. Fifth, he was a beggar (verse 8), unable to purchase any remedy if remedy there was; completely dependent upon charity. Sixth, he made no appeal to the Savior and uttered no cry for mercy; such is our condition before Divine grace begins to work within us. Seventh, the reasoning of the disciples (verse 2) illustrates the sad fact that no human eye pities the sinner in his spiritual wretchedness. Our Lord's dealings with this poor fellow shadow forth His gracious work in us today. Note, again, seven things, in connection with Christ and the blind beggar. First, He looked in tender pity upon the one who so sorely needed His healing touch. Second, He declared that this man had been created to the end that the power and grace of God might be manifested in him (verse 3). Third, He intimated that necessity was laid upon Him (verse 4): the eternal counsels of grace "must" be accomplished in the one singled out by Divine

favor. Fourth, He announced Himself as the One who had power to communicate light to those in darkness (verse 5). Fifth, He pressed upon the blind beggar his desperate need by emphasizing his sad condition (verse 6). Sixth, He pointed him to the means of blessing and put his faith to the test (verse 7). Seventh, the beggar obeyed, and in his obedience obtained evidence that a miracle of mercy had been wrought upon him. Each of these seven things has their counterpart in the realm of grace today. As we follow the Divine narrative and note the experiences of the blind beggar after he had received his sight, we shall find that it continues to mirror forth that which has its analogy in the spiritual history of those who have been apprehended by Christ. What is before us here in John 9 is something more than an incident that happened in the long ago—it accurately depicts what is transpiring in our own day. The more the believer studies this passage in the light of his own spiritual history, the more will he see how perfectly this narrative describes his own experiences. "The neighbors therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?" (John 9:8). When a genuine work of grace has been wrought in a soul it is impossible to conceal it from our neighbors and acquaintances. At first they will talk among themselves and discuss with a good deal of curiosity and speculation what has happened. The unsaved are always skeptical of God's miracles. When one of their fellows is saved, they cannot deny that a radical change has taken place, though the nature of it they are completely at a loss to explain. They know not that the manifestation of Christ in the outward life of a quickened soul is due to Christ now dwelling within. Yet, even the unbelieving world is compelled to take note and indirectly acknowledge that regeneration is a real thing. Ah! dear reader, if the Lord Jesus has laid His wondrous hand on you, then those with whom you come into daily contact will recognize the fact. "They will see that it is not with thee as it used to be—that a real change has passed upon thee—that the tempers and lusts, habits and influences which once ruled thee with despotic power, now rule thee no longer—that though evil may occasionally break out, it does not habitually bear sway—that though it dwells within it does not reign—though it plagues it does not govern." "Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he" (John 9:9). How marvellously accurate is this line in the picture! When one who is dead in trespasses and sins has been quickened into newness of life he becomes a new creature in Christ, but the old man still remains. Not yet has he been delivered from this body of death; for that, he must await the return of our Lord. In the one who has been born again there are, then, two natures: the old is not destroyed, but a new has been imparted. This is plainly foreshadowed in the verse before us: some recognized the one they had known before his eyes were opened; others saw a different personality. It is this which is so puzzling in connection with regeneration. The individual is still the same, but a new principle and element have come into his life. "Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?" (John 9:10). How true to life again! The one who has found mercy with the Lord is now put to the proof: his faith, his loyalty, his courage must be tested. It is not long before the quickened soul discovers that he is living in a world that is unfriendly toward him. At first God may not permit that unfriendliness to take on a very aggressive form, for He deals very tenderly with the babes in His family. But as they grow in grace and become strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, He suffers them to be tested more severely and no longer shields them from the fiercer assaults of their great enemy. Nevertheless, testing they must have from the beginning, for it is thus that faith is developed by casting us upon the Lord and perfecting our weakness in His strength. "Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?" Here was an opportunity afforded this one who had so wondrously received his sight to bear witness to His gracious Benefactor. To confess Christ, to tell of what great things the Lord hath done for him, is the first duty of the newly saved soul, and the promise is, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8). But this is the last thing which the world appreciates or desires: that blessed Name which is above every name is an offense to them. It is

striking to observe how the neighbors of the beggar framed their question: "How were thine eyes opened?" not "Who opened thine eyes?" They wished to satisfy their curiosity, but they had no desire to hear about Christ! "He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight" (John 9:11). The witness borne by this man was simple and honest. As yet he did not have much light, but he was faithful to the light that he did have; and that is the way to obtain more. He did not speculate nor philosophize, but gave a straightforward account of what the Lord had done to him. Two things in this man's confession should be noted as accurately illustrating the witness of a newly saved soul today. First, it was the work of Christ rather than His person which had most impressed him; it was what Christ had done, rather than who He was that was emphasized in his testimony. It is so with us. The first thing we grasp is that it is the Cross-work of the Lord Jesus, His sacrificial death which put away our sins; the infinite value of His person we learn later, as the Spirit unfolds it to us through the Word. Second, in connection with the person of Christ it was His humanity, not His Deity that this man spoke of. And was it not so with us? "A man that is called Jesus"—was it not that aspect of His blessed person which first filled our vision! "A man that is called Jesus" speaks of His lowliness and humiliation. Later, as we study the Scriptures and grow in the knowledge of the Lord, we discover that the man Christ Jesus is none other than the Son of God. "He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight." That precious name of "Jesus" was the most hated of all to those Jews; yet did the beggar boldly confess it. "It would manifestly have served the poor man's worldly interest to cushion the truth as to what had been done for him. He might have enjoyed the benefit of the work of Christ, and yet avoided the rough path of testimony for His name in the face of the world's hostility. He might have enjoyed his eyesight, and, at the same time, retained his place within the pale of respectable religious profession. He might have reaped the fruit of Christ's work and yet escaped the reproach of confessing His name. "How often is this the case! Alas, how often! Thousands are very well pleased to hear of what Jesus has done; but they do not want to be identified with His outcast and rejected Name. In other words, to use a modern and very popular phrase, 'They want to make the best of both worlds'—a sentiment from which every true-hearted lover of Christ must shrink with abhorrence—an idea of which genuine faith is wholly ignorant. It is obvious that the subject of our narrative knew nothing of any such maxim. He had had his eyes opened, and he could not but speak of it, and tell who did it, and how it was done. He was an honest man. He had no mixed motives. No sinister object, no undercurrent. Happy for him? (C.H.M.). "He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash." There is one little detail here which strikingly evidences the truthfulness of this narrative, and that is one little omission in this man's description of what the Savior had done to him. It is to be noted that the beggar made no reference to Christ spitting on the ground and making clay of the spittle. Being blind he could not see what the Lord did, though he could feel what He applied! It is in just such little undesigned coincidences, such artless touches, as this, that makes the more apparent the genuineness of these Divine narratives. "Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not" (John 9:12). Equally commendable was the modesty of this man here. He acted up to the light that he had, but he did not go beyond it. He pretended not to possess a knowledge not yet his. O that we were all as simple and honest. When the neighbors enquired, "Is not this he that sat and begged?", he answered, "I am he"—though it is most unseemly for a Christian to advertise the sins of his unregenerate days, yet it is equally wrong for him to deny what he then was when plainly asked. Next, they had asked, "How were thine eyes opened?", and he unhesitatingly told them, not forgetting to boldly confess the name of his Benefactor. Now they said, "Where is he?", and he frankly replied, "I know not." The babe in Christ is guileless and hesitates not

to acknowledge that he is ignorant of much. But it is sad to observe how pride so often comes in and destroys this simplicity and honesty. Christian reader, and especially the babe in Christ, hesitate not to avow your ignorance; when asked a question that you cannot answer, honestly reply, "I know not." Feign not a knowledge you do not possess, and have not recourse to speculation. "They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind" (John 9:13). "Now the former blind beggar was to become an object of special notice by the Pharisees. Very likely many of them had passed him unheeded. A blind beggar! Which of them would bestow a thought on him whose condition they regarded as an evidence that he was born in sin? But the beggar, no longer blind, was quite a different matter. Were they anxious to learn of the favor he had received in order to honor his Benefactor, or to solicit in their turn favors from Him? Quite the contrary. Their efforts were directed to discredit the miracle as being wrought by One sent from God. He who had shortly before affirmed of Himself in the Temple court, that He was God, had now opened that man's eyes. The insult to the Divine Majesty, as the Jews regarded it, in asserting His Deity, was followed by this miracle, of which the beggar in the Temple precincts was the subject. To discredit the Lord was their purpose. He was a Sabbath-breaker they declared; and therefore that miracle must be disowned as being any display of almighty power and benevolence" (C. E. Stuart). "They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind." This was a much more severe trial for him than what he had just passed through at the hands of his neighbors. It was a real test of his faith. The opposition of the Pharisees against the Lord, and their desire to get rid of Him were well known: and their determination to excommunicate any one who confessed Him as the Christ was no secret (see verse 22). To face them, then, was indeed an ordeal. Alas that this part of the history is being repeated today. Repeated it certainly is, for the ones who will treat worst the young believer are not open infidels and atheists, but those who are loudest in their religious professions. These Pharisees have many successors: their tribe is far from being extinct, and their descendants will be found occupying the same position of religious leadership as did their fathers of old. "And it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes" (John 9:14). There are two observations which we would make on this verse. First, our Lord here teaches us that the words of the fourth commandment "In it [the Sabbath] thou shalt not do any work," are not to be taken absolutely, that is, without any modification. By His own example He has shown us that works of necessity and also works of mercy are permissible. This 14th verse therefore reflects the glory of Christ. It was the Sabbath day: how was He occupied? First, (and note the order) He had gone to the Temple, there to minister God's Word; second, now He is seen ministering in mercy to one in need. Perfect example has He left us. In the next place, we would call attention to the fact that our Lord knew full well that His performing of this miracle on the Sabbath would give offense to His enemies. He proceeded to its execution, nevertheless. We have another illustration of the same principle in Mark 7:2: "When they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed hands, they found fault." Though rendering perfect obedience to all the laws of God, Christ paid no regard to the commandments of men. Here too He has left us a perfect example. Let not the believer be brought into bondage by heeding the mandates of religious legislators, when their rules and regulations have no support from the Holy Scriptures. "Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and i washed, and do see" (John 9:15). This was an honest effort on the part of these Pharisees to investigate the teaching of that blessed One whose voice they had recently heard and whose power had now been so signally displayed. They—or the influential among them at least, for in this Gospel "the Jews" ever refer to the religious leaders or their agents—had already agreed that if any did confess that Jesus was the Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue (see verse 22). Thus had they deliberately closed their eyes against the truth, and therefore it was impossible that they should now discern it, blinded by prejudice as they were. Their object here was twofold: to discredit the miracle, and to

intimidate the one who had been the subject of it. Note the form of their question. They, too, asked the beggar how he had received his sight, not who was the one who had so graciously blest him. "He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see." The enlightened beggar was not to be cowed. He had returned a straightforward answer to the inquiries of his neighbors, he is equally honest and bold now before the open enemies of Christ. His faithful testimony here teaches us an important lesson. Behind his human interrogators it is not difficult to discern the great Enemy of souls. Satan it is who hurls the fiery darts, even though he employs religious professors as his instruments. But they fall powerless upon the shield of faith, and it is this which is illustrated here. One may be the veriest babe in Christ, but so long as he walks according to the measure of light which God has granted, the Devil is powerless to harm him. It is when we quench that light, or when we are unfaithful to Christ, that we become powerless, and fall an easy prey to the Enemy. But the one before us was acting up to the light that he had, therefore the lion roared in vain against him. "Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath day" (John 9:16). A striking contrast is this from what has just been before us. These Pharisees had turned their backs upon the Light, and therefore was their darkness now even more profound. Devoid of spiritual discernment they were altogether incapable of determining what was a right use and lawful employment of the Sabbath and what was not. They understood not that "The sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27), that is, for the benefit of his soul and the good of his body. True, the day which God blest at the beginning was to be kept holy, but it was never intended to bar out works of necessity and works of mercy, as they should have known from the Old Testament Scriptures. In thus finding fault with Christ because He had opened the eyes of this blind beggar on the Sabbath day, they did but expose their ignorance and exhibit their spiritual blindness. "Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them" (John 9:16). We wonder if one of those who spoke up thus was Nicodemus! The argument used here is strictly parallel with the words of that "Master in Israel" which we find in John 3:1, 2. That we are next told, "And there was a division among them" shows that the second speakers held their ground and refused to side-in with the open enemies of our Lord. On this verse the Puritan Bullinger remarked, "All divisions are not necessarily evil, nor all concord and unity necessarily good"! "They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?" (John 9:17). The Devil is powerless in his efforts to gain an advantage over the sheep of Christ. Repulsed for the moment by the unexpected friendliness toward Christ on the part of some of the Pharisees, the Enemy turned his attention once more to the beggar: "They say unto the blind man again": note the frequency with which this word is used in this passage—verses 15, 17, 24, 26. The Devil's perseverance frequently puts our instability to shame. "What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?" A searching question was this. The faith of the beggar was now openly challenged: he must now either confess or deny his Benefactor. But he did not flinch or dissemble. Boldly he answered, "He is a prophet." Divine grace did not fail him in the hour of need, but enabled him to stand firm and witness a good confession. Blessed be His name, the grace of God is as sufficient for the youngest and feeblest as for the most mature and established. "He said. He is a prophet" (John 9:17). There is a decided advance here. When answering his neighbors, the beggar simply referred to Christ as, "A man that is called Jesus" (verse 11); but now he owns Him as One whose word is Divine, for a "prophet" was a mouthpiece of God. This was most blessed. At first he had been occupied solely with the work of Christ, now he is beginning to discern the glory of His person; increased intelligence was his. Nor is God arbitrary in the bestowment of this. When the believer walks faithfully according to the light which he has, more is given to him. It was so here; it is so now. This is the meaning of that verse which has perplexed so many: "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have"

(Luke 8:18): the reference here being to light used and unused—note the "therefore" which looks back to verse 16. In Matthew's account it reads, "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." A striking illustration of this is furnished in John 9. Light the beggar now had; and that light he let shine forth, consequently more was given to him; later, we shall see how a more abundance" was vouchsafed to him. "He said, He is a prophet." This is not the first time we have had Christ owned as "prophet" in this Gospel. In John 4:19 we read that the woman of Samaria said to the Savior at the well, "I perceive that thou art a prophet." In John 6:14 we are told, "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." Once more, in John 7:40 we read, "Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the prophet." These references are in striking accord with the character and theme of this fourth Gospel. A prophet was the mouthpiece of God, and the great purpose of John's Gospel, as intimated in its opening verse, is to portray the Lord Jesus as "the Word"! "But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight" (John 9:18). How skeptical are the unregenerate! "Children in whom is no faith (Deut. 32:20) is what the Scriptures term them. A wonderful miracle had been performed, but these Jews were determined not to believe it. The simple but emphatic testimony of the one on whom it had been wrought went for nothing. What a lesson is this for the young convert. Marvelling at what the Savior has so graciously done for and in him, anxious that others should know Him for themselves, he goes forth testifying of His grace and power. Full of zeal and hope, he expects that it will be a simple matter to convince others of the reality of what the Lord has done for him. Ah! it will not be long before his bright expectations meet with disappointment. He will soon discover something of that dreadful and inveterate unbelief which fills the hearts of his unsaved fellows. He must be shown that he has no power to convince them; that nothing but a miracle of mercy, the putting forth of invincible power by God Himself, is sufficient to overcome the enmity of the carnal mind. "And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?" (John 9:19). This was a desperate move. They had been unable to intimidate the one who had been dealt with so graciously by Christ. They were unable to meet the arguments which had been made by some of the more friendly Pharisees. They now decide to summon the beggar's parents. It was their last hope. If they could succeed in getting them to deny that their son had been born blind, the miracle would be discredited. With this object in view they arraign the parents. And Satan still seeks to discredit the witness of the young Christian by getting his relatives to testify against him! This is an oft-used device of his. Let us daily seek grace from God that we may so act in the home that those nearest to us will have no just ground for condemning our profession. "His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself" (John 9:20, 21). How this serves to expose the folly of a wish we have often heard expressed. People say, "O that I had lived in Palestine during the days of Christ's public ministry; it had been so much easier to have believed in Him!" They suppose that if only they had witnessed some of the wonderful works of our Lord, unbelief had been impossible. How little such people know about the real nature and seat of unbelief; and how little acquainted must they be with the four Gospels. These plainly record the fact (making no effort at all either to conceal or excuse it) that again and again the Lord Jesus put forth His supernatural power, producing the most amazing effects, and yet the great majority of those who stood by were nothing more than temporarily impressed. It was so here in the passage before us. Even the parents of this man born blind believed not on Christ. They were evidently afraid of their inquisitors; and yet their answer nonplussed the Pharisees. "These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews" (John 9:22). They represented a large class of religious professors who surround us on every side today—in such

bondage are men and women, otherwise intelligent, to religious leaders and authorities. How true it is that "the fear of man bringeth a snare." The only ones who are fearless before men are those who truly fear God. This is one of our daily needs: to cry earnestly unto the Lord that He will put His "fear" upon us. "These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). Mark here the desperate lengths to which prejudice will carry men. They were determined not to believe. They had made up their minds that no evidence should change their opinions, that no testimony should have any weight with them. It reminds us very much of what we read of in Acts 7. At the close of Stephen's address we read that his enemies "stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord" (verse 57). This is just what these Pharisees did, and it is what many are doing today. And this is the most dangerous attitude a sinner can assume. So long as a man is honest and open-minded, there is hope for him, no matter how ignorant or vicious he may be. But when a man has deliberately turned his back upon the truth, and refuses to be influenced by any evidence, it is very rare indeed that such an one is ever brought into the light. "Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him" (John 9:23). Typically, this tells us that the young and tried believer must not look to man for help; his resources must be in God alone. This man might well have expected his parents to be filled with gratitude at their son's eyes being opened, that they would perceive how God had wrought a miracle of mercy upon him, and that they would readily stand by and corroborate his witness before this unfriendly tribunal. But little help did he receive from them. The onus was thrown back upon himself. And this line in the picture is not without its due significance. The young believer might well expect his loved ones to appreciate and rejoice over the blessed change they must see in him; but oftentimes they are quite indifferent if not openly antagonistic. So too with our fellow-Christians. If we look to them for help when we get in a tight place, they will generally fail us. And it is perhaps well that it should be so. Anything that really casts us upon God Himself is a blessing, even though it be disguised and appear to us a calamity at the time. Let us learn then to "have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3), but let our expectation be in the Lord, who will fail us not. Let the interested student ponder the following questions: 1. What is meant by "Give God the praise" (verse 24)? Cf. Joshua 7:19. 2. Explain the first half of verse 25 so as not to conflict with verse 33. 3. What other verse in John's Gospel does the second half of verse 29 call to mind? 4. What connection is there between verse 31 and what has gone before? 5. Why did Christ wait till the beggar had been "cast out" (verse 34) before He revealed Himself as the Son of God (verse 35)? 6. Why are we told nothing more about the beggar after what is said in verse 38? 7. What is the meaning of verse 39? Contrast John 3:17.

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