

'The Blind Beggar of John Nine' ch.9

by Charles Alexander

The sermon explores the significance of the blind beggar in John 9, highlighting the Lord's purpose in creating him and the symbolism of his blindness.

Scripture: Exodus 33:14, Isaiah 42:6, Matthew 28:20, John 9:5, John 12:41

Topics: "Spiritual Blindness", "Divine Redemption"

Description

Charles Alexander preaches about the profound significance of the blind beggar man in John 9, revealing that his physical blindness symbolizes the spiritual blindness of Israel and all of humanity. The miraculous healing of the blind man by Jesus at the pool of Siloam signifies the divine mission of Christ as the light of the world, sent by the Father to bring salvation and reveal God's glory. Through the prophetic symbolism of Immanuel, God with us, the blind man's restoration of sight represents the spiritual enlightenment and redemption offered to all who believe in Christ, fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah and the eternal purpose of God's grace and mercy.

Transcript

He was but a blind beggar man, a recipient of passing charity, useless in the world, nameless, pitiful, disinherited.

But the Lord of glory passing by knows all about this man - his destiny as well as his origin - the purpose of his creation. Why was he born blind? His own fault? (A strange thought this!). Or the fault of his parents? Neither the one nor the other. He is the subject of a great creative purpose. His infirmity is the consequence of a divine decree, destined to issue in eternal joy and felicity. The glorious works of God are to be shown forth in this man, as in the case of that other member of the same begging fraternity who a short time later, at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple would receive through the agency of Peter and John a deliverance equal in wonder and consequence to that of this BLIND BEGGAR OF JOHN NINE.

Moreover the deep, aye fathomless, design of the holy wisdom of God in the case of the man born blind was to serve a purpose beyond the actual personal deliverance enjoyed by this man. The blind beggar man was to be the occasion of one of our Lord's greatest parables - that of the Good Shepherd. He was born blind not for his own sin nor yet the sin of his parents, but that he might first of all symbolize the nation of Israel in the blindness of its unbelief and its beggarly destitution of true righteousness. He was in fact a prophetic person deliberately obtruded into history by the unsearchable counsel of God to vindicate the holy justice of heaven against the people of Israel who asked the contemptuous question, "Are we

blind also?" who received the solemn reply which sealed their doom - "If ye were blind ye should have no sin, but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (v.41).

The works of God manifest in this man, however, did not end there. If he was the symbol of the nation in its spiritual blindness and soon - coming disinheritance, he is also the symbol of that divine grace, the most glorious of all the works of God, which was shortly to be poured upon all the world to turn poor blind souls (be they Jew or Gentile) from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God.

The meaning and purpose of the miracle become abundantly clear in the following chapter (10) - no artificial chapters in the original script of course, for the narrative is one and complete. In chapter 10 is the parable of the Good Shepherd, in which the Lord places Himself before Israel and the world as the Shepherd of Israel (the mystic Israel of Jew and Gentile) foretold in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 - glorious chapters of prophetic vision of the Savior which He claims for Himself with that sublime and divine egoism which declares His own self-knowledge of His own deity and the central place given to Him and to Him alone in the prophetic scriptures. But more of this when we come to chapter 10, wherein we shall find not only a description of the Savior's gracious office in relation to His church, but also a solemn warning to the hireling shepherds of Israel who that day had asked in mocking scorn, "Are we blind also?"

This story of the Blind Beggar of John Nine is inexhaustible in its meaning. It lays bare the entire wisdom of God in the creation of the world and in His toleration of evil. God bends and molds evil to His will, so as to bring out of it the very highest good of all creation. In the holy purpose of God evil has proved, and will yet be proved, to be the hinge upon which the door is opened upon the full glory of the great Creator. Infirmity and suffering, trial and tribulation, are not just causal or accidental conditions of the universe. They have a meaning and a purpose which one day will be fully declared when all the works of God are finished. Then will the inhabitants of Zion shout and be glad, and all evil will shut its mouth, and every ungodly speech which ungodly sinners have ungodly spoken against the great Creator will recoil in shame upon them, who have spoken against the goodness of God and impugned His perfect righteousness

(Jude 15).

Suffering is not in vain, and this applies especially to the sufferings of the people of God who throughout history are the people who have suffered the most. Though with Job their brother they may ask the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" they will learn with Job that behind all suffering is the challenge of the Evil One who asks, "Doth Job serve God for naught?" God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and reserve the unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished.

The entire agony of all creation had been underwritten by the sufferings of God Himself, who in the Person of the only begotten Son has stooped the lowest of all to bear all curse and woe and pain and death, He who alone is qualified to make atonement, raises from the darkness of the tomb a new creation which is beyond death, which cannot fail, and which can never be darkened by sin, never shadowed by death, never disturbed by sorrow and tears - for the former things have passed away.

John in his Gospel records seven miracles performed by the Lord during three years of His earthly ministry. Three of these miracles took place in Galilee, and three in Judea. Then there was the miracle of walking upon the water, inserted between the two series, a private miracle as it were, as distinct from the public miracles comprising the six (for only the disciples in the boat, at the dead of night, were witnesses of the unique display of the Lord's divinity in walking upon the waters of the Lake).

The three Judean miracles were the healing of the impotent man who had lain 38 years (the period of the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness in the porches of Bethesda, waiting vainly for healing. The second was the healing of the blind beggar in chapter 9, and the third was the raising of Lazarus. Beyond all doubt John was inspired to record this perfect cycle of seven miracles for the bearing they all had on the mission of Christ. Those in Judea followed the pattern laid down when the disciples of John the Baptist came asking Him "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another? The Lord showed them that day in demonstration of His messiahship, how 'the lame walk, the blind see, the dead are raised' (Matthew 11:5). John was led carefully to select the three Judean miracles as principal proofs of the divine office of Christ.

From chapter 7 of John we appear to have an unbroken sequence of events and consequents, leading up to the last Passover week and the climax of the Lord's mission.

Chapter 8 (as we have seen in our commentary on that chapter) concludes the great self--declaration of divinity by the Lord, with the notice that the Jewish hearers in Jerusalem took up stones to cast at Him, but Jesus hid himself' and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them AND SO PASSED BY.

THE SAVIOR PASSES ISRAEL BY

Our 9th chapter begins, "And as Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from his birth,"

This "passing by" of the Lord is a prophetic act. John does not record any mere casual act of Christ. The hands which reached for the stones to stone Him were the hands of the unbelieving nation to whom He had revealed Himself by work and word - in vain. He 'hid himself' from the would-be assassins, because that was not the death which He must die. Only by hanging on a tree, crucified, could He be made a curse for us. Assassination by stoning would not exhibit the requirements of divine justice in the atonement for sin. There must be a voluntary yielding of the Victim to death, to show that no man took His life from Him - He must lay it down of Himself, by yielding Himself into the hands of men, voluntarily bowing His head before all evil, calmly and with reverent grace committing Himself to awful death. Gethsemane must precede Calvary. The Supper must precede Gethsemane. The Betrayal must be the means by which the officers of Israel take Him at dead of night and submit Him formally to human judgment. The Roman imperial power - the mightiest power ever to appear on earth up to that time - must formally and judicially commit Him to death by crucifixion with His true accusation (which Pilate steadfastly refused to alter because it spoke the truth) nailed above Him -- "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Only by a lingering death during which He must speak from the cross seven times in mystic words which declare the entire purpose of God in the awful event of the death of the Eternal Son - on1y in the source of such a death with all its horror, shame and suffering could God's justice be SEEN TO BE DONE, with heaven and earth brought together to witness to the fact that the atonement was valid, and met all the required conditions of eternal righteousness.

It was in vain that the Jews took up stones to cast at Him. "He hid Himself" from them, went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Commentators have speculated that the Lord simply mingled with the crowd so that the assassins lost sight of Him. But John does not record trivialities, especially when the Lord was nearing the great climax of His Incarnation. He hid Himself by a divine act, casting a judicial blindness upon the foe, just as the angels did in Sodom when on the eve of the great judgment they prevented the wicked from breaking into the

house of Lot. The men of Sodom were only blind in as far as they could not find the door. The Jews could not touch the Light of the world until He gave them permission. He reserved Himself for that other death which should publicly exhibit sin in all its horror and shame and curse.

So He passed by, for none can hinder the Savior in His work of salvation. With awful dignity He awaited the precise hour when He could lift up His eyes to heaven and pray, "Father the hour is come. Glorify thy Son that thy Son also may glorify thee ..." (John 17:1). His passing by was a token that the sinful nation was being abandoned to its fate. Their powerlessness to take Him before His time, showed His creative power over them - who and what He was. What meaning therefore may we see in that word which He shortly after uttered to His disciples - "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world" (9:4-5).

Thus did He foreshadow His finishing of that work of redemption for which the Father had sent Him into the world. Until everything He came to do on earth had been accomplished He could not be hindered or interrupted by any man or nation. Not even Caesar could interfere, nor yet the Prince of Darkness himself: Satan was without strength or power to arrest the course of the Son of God until that moment when, the works of God having been completed the Son could announce, "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

But we return now to John's narrative and take the events and sayings of that memorable day in their order.

"And as Jesus passed by He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked Him saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The Lord passes the nation by in judgment, but while thus passing by He pauses to exercise mercy and compassion on a poor, indigent man, one of Israel's Sons, for whom Israel had no compassion. Yet what He was about to do was an act far more than that of pity - though who more than He who made man could view such a spectacle of human need with such sorrow and anguish? We have said however, that the Creator and Saviour of men did not work miracles indiscriminately.

For thirty years of His life on earth He worked no miracle and during the three and a half years of His public ministry the wonders He wrought were carefully chosen to advance and illustrate the supreme object of His coming, which was to deal with the root of all evil rather than some of its more obvious fruits. After all, the greatest of all evils is death itself, and the Lord raised from the dead only two men and a child, and each of these with a very special significance. Only by His own death could He abolish death.

The root of all evil is sin, and this even the disciples expressed when beholding the man blind from birth they asked, "Who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" The Savior's reply "Neither this man nor his parents," was not intended to sever all connection between sin and suffering, but to discourage the cruel conclusion (alleged long before by the friends of Job) that suffering in itself is of necessity a token of personal sin. We know in the case of Job that a more profound cause - a cause lying outside of himself altogether - gave rise to that righteous man's calamities. There was in his case, as in the case of all who would sincerely serve and worship their God, a challenge from the powers of evil alleging that they only will serve God who enjoy the convenience of immunity from suffering. That lie was nailed for all time by the example of Job, and supremely in the case of the Son of God Himself, who bore all evil and pain and curse on the tree, that by evil He might destroy evil, and by death declare Himself to be the resurrection and the life.

The curious thought which appears to be in the disciples' question that a man could be born blind for his own sin apparently foreseen to take place after his birth has given much difficulty to the commentators. Some have supposed that certain Jews had fallen into the error of pre-natal transmigration of souls, but there is no evidence that such a heathen notion ever obtained rooting among the Jews of Christ's day. An obscure passage from the Apocrypha sometimes quoted in aid, will not really stand up to examination. Likewise the idea of foreseen guilt, as being the cause of congenital defect, is abhorrent.

It is better on the whole to regard the question as arising from the persistent habit of the human mind to ascribe particular evils to particular sins, despite the caution which the Book of Job conveys to the contrary.

The question of the disciples was misconceived in any event, as the Lord's reply shows so plainly. The mystery of human suffering lies ultimately in the sin of the human race as such, and we are not wise to look for answers in the immediate context of the behavior patterns of 'this man or his parents'. Evil goes much further back than that, and often (as in the case of Job) it is the righteous and not the wicked who suffer. As long as that scripture stands, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth..." (Heb. 12:6-11). We should be cautious about drawing false conclusions from special cases.

In the example of the blind man of John 9, we have the whole problem lifted to more sublime regions by the Savior's assurance that in this special case, the man was born blind in order that the glorious works of God might be made manifest in him.

This reply of Christ indicates assuredly that all His acts, when on earth were governed by the one great purpose of His incarnation. The glory of the Father, impugned from the beginning by the apostasy of angels and men, must be established in the only way by which it could be established by the deity Itself making Itself the Victim of the evil introduced to creation by the creature. The incarnation of the Son was as inevitable as the fact of Divine Love.

FOREORDAINED BLINDNESS

The blindness of this man was therefore foreordained that the glory of God should be manifest in his deliverance, and a further indication of this divine selectivity of all the circumstances of the case is conveyed in the preliminary words of the Lord before He proceeded to bestow sight on the unseeing eyes. He utters words of great power and depth: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world" (verses 4 & 5).

What confusion has existed down the ages as to the meaning of these words! What is the night to which the Lord refers? Is it the night of His own death, or the night into which Jewish history was about to pass because of the unbelief of the nation? Is it the night of the cosmic earth when it shall pass away on the great Day of Judgment? These and other possibilities have been canvassed by theologians and divines down the ages without final result. There is so much in the words of the Lord as touching His continued activity ("As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world"), that great difficulty has been found in limiting the Lord's meaning to the events then taking place in Jerusalem, leading to His crucifixion. Where so many have been perplexed, it ill behooves us to venture an opinion, yet the attempt must be made, if our commentary is to be complete.

So then, what we think we see in this baffling passage is a meaning within a meaning -- as so often in the Lord's recorded words. The warning of the coming night and His own identification with the coming night ("I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh ...") should bring before the mind the impending close of His earthly ministry; likewise, His departure from the world as touching His bodily presence 40 days after the resurrection, must also be taken into account. Thereafter He would not be seen again in the world till His second Advent, but in the meantime, and in the lifetime of many to whom He was then speaking in Jerusalem, the night of His temporal judgment would fall upon the nation which even then was rejecting Him and preparing to crucify Him. The night of Israel's rejection was hastening on. It was AD 33, and 40 years hence Jerusalem would be wept away and become the rubbish of history -- city temple, priesthood. Israel's sun would set.

"As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world" (vs. 5)

This is a solemn and clear declaration of His own divinity, and another indication of how the Lord always walked in the prophecies concerning Himself.

The mystery of cosmic light upon which the existence of the whole universe depends, is first indicated in the opening chapter of the Bible: "... and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And God said, Let there be light and there was light...."

The inspired John takes up the theme in the opening chapter to his Gospel; "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not ... That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world".

The prophet Isaiah is full of this great theme. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined"; "I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the gentiles" - "I will give thee for a light to the gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth;" "Arise, shine for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee, For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee" (see Isaiah 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 60: 1-3).

The light which was going out over Israel was rising over the gentile world, hitherto plunged into gross darkness. The true light is that which does not rise merely to enlighten one nation upon earth, but "which lighteth every man" (i.e., the whole world) (John 1:9)

Israel's loss was to be the world's gain. The fall of them would be the riches of the world and the diminishing of them the riches of the gentiles (Rom. 11:12).

Any interpretation of the Messianic mission of our Lord which narrows down the primary purpose of giving light to the whole world is untrue to the prophetic word which declares the essential and identifying sign of Messiah to be this, that He is a light which shines equally for the whole world.

None of this can be excluded from the Savior's warning. If He the light of the world, was rejected (as rejected He in fact was at that very hour), darkness, blindness and night would descend upon the nation. Their sun would be blotted out and their moon would set in blood (as Peter, quoting from Joel, warned the nation on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:16-21).

The ordinances of the heavens, sun, moon and stars, the lightbearers of creation are used in Scripture as symbols of the divine illumination through the Word. The extinguishing of them meant that the time of

Israel's special grace and privilege was ended; the night came when no man can work.

We see therefore that there is a mysterious extension of the Savior's words to be understood only by events and comparisons, for only so can the prophetic Word be understood.

MAKING CLAY - A DRAMA OF CREATION

The narrative proceeds. The Lord spits on the ground, stoops and makes clay of the spittle and therewith anoints the eyes of the blind man and tells him. "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam," The man went his way (no great distance from, the temple precincts where the Lord found him) washed, and came again seeing (verse 6).

This deliberate action of the Lord is most arresting. It is a drama of creation. The Almighty did something like this when He first made in His own image and likeness. Time has traveled on. Here is man descended from that first man, incapable of seeing the glory of creation. Covered with gross darkness, he wanders as a mere pensionary in universal blackness. Light is essential to seeing. Where there is no light there is no vision and all is dark. Who or what has extinguished in this man God's greatest natural gift? To this appalling state has God's image and likeness been reduced in this man - a fair sample he, of men's state through sin, who seeing does not see and perceiving does not understand. If one should come and by an act of new creation give to this man that gift of sight without which he must wander and stray over the face of creation, would not this One be God come down to earth in deep compassion to restore to man his lost inheritance? And would not those assembled to see such an act fall down and acclaim their God and their Creator?

Alas, the wonder wrought by the Lord only aroused the envy, the prejudice, of seeing eyes but unseeing hearts. If it had not been recorded in Holy Writ we could not have believed it, but the incredible becomes the truth. Unbelief is the most incurable blindness of all, for unbelief is the child of hate and pride, the nursling of invincible prejudice. The Pharisees and scribes who were the eyes of the people in their scrutiny of the divine Law, juggled with the niceties of what was proper to be done on the sabbath day - for it was the sabbath day when the blind man received his sight. What better day than this when God rested in the contemplation of that work which He had brought to perfection? Here is a work of His grace to restore that which sin has destroyed. Original sin would have emptied heaven's throne of its glorious Occupant. Man now engages to do the same again when God having become Man enters His own creation to restore and deliver. And which is the greater sin? - the first act of disobedience, or this, when grace and mercy and compassion personified in the Incarnate God is rejected and spurned as an unholy thing?

The preoccupation of the Pharisees with the mere externalism of sabbath observance (going far beyond the Law of Moses) rather than in a great work of mercy wrought by One who at the very least should have appeared to them as a great prophet sent by God, indicates the extent of their proud insistence upon their own righteousness, and their self-confident boast to be beyond the necessity for divine mercy. This was always the fault of their nation and its teachers. It wrought in them to reject their God and king - and still, as a people, they reject the Messiah with unrelenting hate and bitterness.

The mingling of the spittle with the dust, and the spreading of the 'clay' on the eyes of the blind man, is so unusual an act on the part of the Lord that it appears to be a deliberate portrayal of an interior and prophetic truth. He who healed the sick with a word, or raised the dead at a command, could easily have dispensed with so strange a proceeding, unless He had some special lesson to teach. This further

appears in the fact that the process did not end even there. He said to the blind man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam". The man obeyed, went, and returned seeing.

John is careful (for he wrote in Greek whereas Siloam is a Hebrew name with a special meaning which Greek readers would not understand) to tell his readers that there was something special about this act of sending the man to Siloam. For the Hebrew meaning of Siloam is "SENT". By this clue, John carries us at once to the words of the Lord in verse 4:

"I must work the works of HIM THAT SENT ME"

Clearly the Lord is declaring in the whole operation His divine commission from the Father, and His identification with numerous prophecies (wellknown to the Jews) in which the Messiah is promised as one SENT from the Father.

SILOAM IS IMMAUEL

The Prophetic origin of the Lord's act in sending the man to the pool of Siloam is found in Isaiah 8:6-8:

"Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah which go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; now therefore behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river strong and many, even the king of Assyria and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels and go over all his banks. And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even unto the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land O Immanuel".

The symbolism of Shiloah (the same as Siloam) is clear. Hengstenberg writes that this sacred pool is 'consecrated by Isaiah into a figure of the kingdom of God'.

The true Siloam is Immanuel ("God with us"), and the sending of the blind man to the pool of Siloam was a declaration by the One who sent him there, that He, the sender, was none other than the Immanuel of Prophecy, God with us, sent by the Father to establish the new and eternal kingdom of God by His overthrow at the Cross, of sin, Satan, death and hell.

The refusing of the waters of Shiloah by the ten-tribe, or northern, kingdom of Israel indicates their rejection of the Davidic monarchy at Jerusalem, by placing their reliance upon the Syrian confederacy formed to overthrow that legitimate monarchy (see Isa. 7:1-2). The northern ten-tribe kingdom, though in revolt against the house of David since the days of Rehoboam, was still regarded by God as part of the complete nation. Their refusal of the "waters of Shiloah which go softly" did not permit them to contract out of the history and the obligations of the divine law, nor yet did it exclude them from the prophetic significance of the Davidic monarchy to issue at last in the eternal kingdom of Immanuel.

Their evil conspiracy with the heathen to destroy the house of David was therefore to be visited by the great judgment of the Assyrian invasion which would put an end for ever to the revolt of the ten tribes against the legitimate dynasty of David.

The Assyrian incursion was in fact the result of the diplomacy of Ahaz, the king then reigning in Jerusalem, who bribed the Assyrian monarch, Tiglath Pileser, to come to his aid. The providence of God which uses as a tool the evil policies of the wicked, caused the policy of Ahaz to succeed, but that very success was foreordained to be the ultimate end of the kingdom of Ahaz. The Assyrians would return to attempt to conquer Judah and Jerusalem in the days of the son of Ahaz, good king Hezekiah. Their armies would fill

the land of Immanuel (see Isa 8:6-8 quoted above) but would be turned back and ultimately be destroyed by the rival power of Babylon, then just coming into the historic picture. Under the Babylonian monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, a century after Hezekiah, Jerusalem would be taken and destroyed, and never again would a descendant of David wear the royal purple. The next king to reign of David's line would be Immanuel, heaven's eternal king, who would not sit on David's throne but on the eternal throne at God's right hand.

The Immanuel prophecy actually begins in Isa. 7, when Isaiah encounters king Ahaz and offers his reassuring sign from God concerning the impending overthrow of the conspiracy to dethrone him. He was urged to ask any sign he wished, either from 'the depth or in the height above'. Ahaz, a thoroughly disreputable and despicable character who did not believe in the God of his fathers, and had already secretly decided upon a surer method of saving his throne, namely, to hire the king of Assyria to come and fight for him, dissembled before the prophet and with affected piety declared he would not tempt God by asking for a sign.

His unbelief brought upon him the searing words of the prophet,

"Hear ye now O house of David: is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

This great prophecy is designed to assure the people of God that the Davidic descent would be preserved until the virgin born Babe of Bethlehem should appear to crown all prophecy, and in whom the divinely ordained Davidic monarchy would issue in a divine Person who would reign forever, without successor, for He would be none other than "God with us" (Immanuel).

On the surface of it the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7 appears to be so linked to King Ahaz and his dilemma that Bible critics have denied that it has any real relevance to the birth of Christ eight centuries later. That the critics overlook is that the fulfillment is not linked to King Ahaz and his times at all, but is addressed to "the house of David" (v. 13). Ahaz is swept aside in the onrush of the prophetic vision. Time ceases to have meaning. The entire dynasty of King David is under judgment in its collective apostasy and unbelief. The sign of Immanuel, born of a virgin, is presented as though it were the next event, but close attention to the words reveals the deep hidden mystery to be received only by faith.

The prophetic notice in Isaiah is not to be confined to the confederates of Syria and Samaria. It is the 'house of David' which "wearies God" by its unbelief (v. 13).

The house of David was therefore informed that God would confound its unbelief by a sign which would denote the complete end of the earthly kingdom. That sign was the Immanuel Child.

But the day of Immanuel, though seemingly imminent at the time of the prophecy, was in fact remote. Both kingdoms in Palestine would vanish long before the time of fulfillment. The Northern kingdom of the ten revolted tribes was to last a bare 10 years longer, to be destroyed forever by the Assyrians. A new population was imported by the conquerors from heathen parts to become the Samaritan people who still occupied the land in the days of Christ. The Davidic monarchy at Jerusalem lasted another century or more till Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar and destroyed along with the temple, after which no king of David's line has ever reigned in Jerusalem. Six centuries rolled by till in Bethlehem, softly, silently, peacefully, secretly, like the waters of Siloam, Immanuel came, in whom all prophecy was fulfilled; who

never sat on David's throne, nor ever will, but instead mounted the eternal throne at the right hand of the Father, henceforth expecting till all His foes be made His footstool. (Psalm 110).

Thus was Isaiah's mysterious sign realized. The land which God 'abhorred' because of its unbelief lost both its kings, and the kingship passed by right to David's greater Son who now reigns from heaven over all the earth 'from the river to the ends of the earth' (that is, universally and eternally).

Immanuel appears again as we have seen in chapter 8 of Isaiah where His kingdom, under the figure of 'the waters of Shiloah which go softly' is contrasted with the kingdom of this world under the figure of the great river Euphrates from which the empires of Assyria and Babylonia took their rise. The Assyrian river (symbolic of that great empire) its waters 'strong and many' burst its banks and in the rush and tumult of its mighty flood inundated the land of Immanuel (v. 7-8). This took place first in the days of Hezekiah the godly son of ungodly Ahaz. The strong and proud waters of the Euphrates flood were stayed, and retreated to their appointed channel for another 100 years. Nevertheless the deliverance was only temporary. Once more the river would rise, and the empire which succeeded the Assyrian, namely that of Babylon would carry away all before it.

The prophecy looked forward to a time yet more remote (Isa. 9) when darkness would cover the earth and gross darkness the people. Then would the Lord arise and His glory be seen. The light would appear first in Galilee of the gentiles (v.1) and spread to all the earth, for He who was named Immanuel would then appear, and now we have His full designation, "Wonderfu1, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (v.6).

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

The Shiloah prophecy therefore foreshadows the passing of the earthly Kingdom of David and the coming in its place of the mystic gospel kingdom of Immanuel, "God with Us," who should bring light where all was darkness:

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and they who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. (Isa. 9:2)

The gentle waters of Shiloah, which rise imperceptibly without ostentation or tumult, symbolizing the peace which passeth all understanding are greater than the destroying flood of the Euphrates. So is the kingdom of Christ which king Ahaz despised and which the children of Israel rejected in the day of Immanuel's incarnation. Had the kingdom of Christ come in like the Euphrates flood to sweep aside all earthly kingdoms, establishing itself in pomp and pride over the monarchies of earth, the priests and scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees and all the people would have received it, but it would not have saved a single soul, for it would not have been a kingdom of repentance and faith.

Now we begin to see why the Lord sent the blind beggar to the pool of Siloam. The blind man is the representative not only of darkened Israel; he is the representative of a world sunken in sin and darkness and the shadow of death. He is the type of all those darkened souls of whom the prophetic Word speaks, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." We now understand also what the Lord meant when He said, "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents that he should be born blind, but that the works of God should be manifest in him." As to his physical blindness, this was not the direct consequence of anyone's sin, but as to his spiritual blindness, which he shares with all mankind, this arises from the original sin of our race in Adam, till the Second Adam comes and by creative act opens the

eyes of the soul which are the eyes of faith and repentance, to see and understand so great a light.

The Lord has made clay with the moisture of His own mouth as an eye salve of the soul to give sight where all is dark. He has sent the man to Siloam's pool to wash, that the prophetic word of Isaiah should be understood and that all should comprehend that here is Immanuel, God with us, and this is the nature of His kingdom, even as the waters of Siloam which go softly, rising from mysterious and unfathomed depths in the life of God and pouring themselves out in lifegiving sweetness and healing ministry.

NO EARTHLY MILLENNIUM

Those who meddle in the illusion of a kingdom of Christ still to come, which will impose itself by force and not by gentle persuasion upon an unwilling and unrepentant world where sullen obedience to iron rule maintains a feigned and artificial peace between God and the world (for that, dear reader is an accurate description of the so-called millennial reign of Christ on earth as taught by its most respected advocates who have not yet discovered the spiritual nature of prophecy and the invisible nature of the kingdom which Christ came to establish) - these, we say, have need to go back to the 9th chapter of John, and the pool of Siloam, and the chapters 7-9 of Isaiah, and the 10th of John (which crowns the whole). They will then surely learn (for they are honest and good men) that the Church fulfills all predictions of the kingdom of Christ, and that kingdom is not one which comes by observation, neither is it in the dimension of 'lo here' or 'lo there' but the kingdom of God is within us.

The waters of Siloam always flow softly. They are that new kingdom of grace and power and of the Spirit within us creating, renewing, regenerating; a stream of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

"If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" John 7:37-39.

This is the kingdom of Christ, brethren. Why look we for another?

HE WHO WAS SENT

Like an opening flower the acted prophecy proceeds in John 9 to interpret itself in all its heavenly fullness.

Siloam means 'Sent' and in commanding the Blind Beggar to go there and wash the Lord was pointing to Himself, that all succeeding generations might know the reason why He was in the world, and know also the eternal consequences flowing therefrom, The sinner in his need is sent to Him whom the Father sent into the world to be the Savior of the world.

Christ came into the world not by His own will, but by the will of the Father who SENT him. The gospel of John is rich in its allusions to this great fact. It is made abundantly clear that the mission of our Savior was not an Independent act. He did not by His own volition come to stand between the sinner and an angry God. This derogatory view of the atonement lies at the root of much of our evangelistic impotence today. In our booklet "The Concert of the Trinity" [Editor's note: See Serial Number 022 & 023] we have tried to show that the initiative in redemption is properly to be ascribed to the Father as the First Person of the glorious Trinity. "I came not to do Mine own will but the will of Him that SENT me," declares the Son when He comes to fulfill His mission as the obedient Servant sent from the bosom of the Eternal.

(John 6:38).

The great text says, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" The initiative of mercy and grace is properly to be ascribed to the First Person, else there is no atonement.

Again, in the solemn dedicatory prayer uttered by the Lord as He left the Upper Room on the way to Gethsemane and the Cross. He declares, "This is life eternal that they should know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast SENT" (John 17:3).

In his first epistle (1 John 4:9-10) the apostle writes,

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Five times in John 17 (verses 3, 9, 21, 23, and 25) the Lord repeats in His great prayer the statement that His sufferings and the outcome thereof were the consequence of the Father's will who had SENT the Son into the world for this glorious and redeeming purpose.

Five times in John chapter 6 the Lord repeats that He had come into the world on the initiative of the Father who had SENT Him: (Verses 29, 38, 39, 40, 44).

Four times in chapter 5, we have the same declaration (30, 36, 37, 38). See also the important occurrences in John 3:17 and 34; John 7:28-29, and John 8:29, 42. We quote especially the last reference,

I proceeded forth and came from God.

Neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

In the Concert of the Holy Trinity there is eternal unity of purpose. The uncreated Son is always the expression of the Father's love and the fulfillment of His purpose. Eternally Begotten, not created or made, the Son is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person, and as such He reveals the Father's nature and fulfills the Father's will - as is proper to the filial nature of His Sonship. The Third Person is the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son (Romans 8:9) proceeding from both, yet because he is of both yet is neither the Father nor the Son, is therefore a Third Person whose office in the Godhead is to glorify the Father and the Son. It is proper to the three Persons therefore that the Father should be the First in order, the Son the second, and the Holy Spirit the Third - an order existing not in time nor yet in varying excellence, but in propriety. That is, we must not imagine that the Father was the first in time, because God is not in time, but is eternal and changeless. He is what He always is and ever must be. Therefore He never began to be Father, for that would mean a change in His essential Being. Nor did the Son ever begin to be the Son. His relationship to the Father is One of eternal generation. Likewise the procession (proceeding forth) of the Holy Spirit is an eternal procession. Yet inasmuch as Sonship must in order of propriety follow that of Fatherhood, and the Procession of the Holy Spirit that of the Father and the Son, we must speak of the Godhead in those terms of First, Second and Third Persons.

In the words of the Athanasian Creed, "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance ... The Father is made of none: neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone: not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and the Son: neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding ... And in this Trinity none is

afore or after another: none is greater or less than another. But the whole Three Persons are coeternal together, and co-equal.

THE SENDING OF THE SON

Hence there is not one will of the Father, another will of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. It is proper to the Father to send His Son into the world for the purpose of redemption, that by such a manifestation of divine love and meekness and humble obedience in Christ, the glory of the Godhead should be displayed and all creation recognize its God. The world was made for Calvary.

Thy sending of the Son into the world is wonderfully and prophetically realized and described in the chapter before us (John 9). It is the whole of blinded and darkened humanity which stands before the Savior in the person of the Blind Beggar. He stands there in physical blindness, not for any particular sin committed by him or his parents, but that the work of God should be manifest in Him. That is, his blindness was parabolic of that darkness which enveloped the whole world in blindness and ignorance. For this the Father sent the Son into the world that He should be the light of the world (v.5). The making of the clay by the mingling of the spittle with the dust was symbolic of the creation of man, for here stands man's Creator and God. Now He becomes clay Himself that as true Man He might yield Himself to death, and by death destroy death and become the Resurrection and the Life.

He confirms it all by sending the man to Siloam's Pool to indicate that He is the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah in chapters 7 to 9 of that prophetic revelation. If Israel did not believe, their unbelief also was the subject of the same prophecy from which His own identity was declared.

All those scriptures we have quoted from the writings of John declaring that here is the One whom God decreed to send into the world are drawn from the one prophetic stream of prophecy which began in the Garden of Eden - the Seed of the Woman must bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15).

Perhaps the most remarkable of all the O.T. prophecies concerning the SENDING of the Son into the world, is that found in Isaiah 48:16:

Come ye near unto me. Hear ye this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I. And now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me.

Here we have the Concert of the Trinity of which we have been speaking. It is Christ, the Son who, is speaking of His own eternal Being ("From the time that it was THERE AM I - that is, "I was in the beginning the great I AM") He is inseparable from the Father and the Holy Spirit ("The Lord God and his Spirit hath sent Me). Before all time He is there, in the bosom of the Father. Now, He who is from eternity enters into time in the energy of the Three Persons - "And now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me".

It will be noted that this verse in Isaiah 48 is in that glorious second part of Isaiah which begins in chapter 40 with the prediction of the coming of the forerunner (John the Baptist) - "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord". He who is thus heralded by John the Baptist is none other than the eternal God Himself (see verse 9 - "Behold your God"). In chapter 42 He who is SENT from the Father is described as the Servant of Jehovah in whom the Father delights". "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delights". Thus the Hebrew, but in the Greek it becomes, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". The designation "servant" of course is not here a designation of inferiority, but of honor, as being the Only Person capable of faithfully representing the Father, therefore,

the Beloved Son.

GENTILE SALVATION DOMINANT

This is the SENDING forth of Christ into the world, and it is to be noted as a matter of extreme importance that at the very beginning of the prophetic description of the inauguration of Christ to His office, it is made clear that gentile salvation is the dominating object of His commission, "He shall bring forth judgment to the gentiles" Isaiah 42:1. His mission and His Kingdom were not to be limited to a Jewish interpretation; He comes to lighten the whole world, and this He has done as the history of the Christian Church for the last 2,000 years has proved. "God so loved THE WORLD that he gave his only begotten Son that WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The SENDING of Christ as described in Isa. 48:16 quoted above, stands at the threshold of that climactic section of Isaiah's prophecy which culminates in the rejection of Christ by those to whom He was first sent. The virgin birth at Bethlehem is indicated in 49:1: "Listen O isles unto me, and hearken ye people from far (that is, the gentile races). The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name". The rejection of the earthly Israel follows in verse 5, and the receiving of the gentiles in verse 6.

And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

The substitution of the mystic Israel for the earthly nation is plainly declared in v. 20:

The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.

That these children who take the place of lost Israel are the gentile church gathered in from all the earth, is plain from what follows:

Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone these; where had they been?

Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet and thou shalt know that I am the Lord for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

The strange notion current among millennialists that the words just quoted describe the bringing back of Jewry in the arms and on the backs of gentiles, could only have arisen from the development of a preconceived system of futurism resting upon no known or attempted principle of Biblical interpretation.

Chapter 50 introduces the submission of Christ to degradation and death: "I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (v.6).

A new Jerusalem rises in chapters 51 and 52. The gospel is proclaimed (52:7). Chapter 53 is the crucifixion chapter, and chapter 54 describes the new Israel which would rise from the ashes of the earthly nation, as the true Jerusalem - Jerusalem which is from above (Cf. Galatians 4:27). So the new and spiritual Israel is the everlasting purpose of God, the Church of Jew and gentile with all national privilege and distinction abolished for ever (Ephesians 3:9-11).

Thy mission of Christ as the SENT of the Father, is further revealed by Isaiah 61:1- the verse with which the Lord identified Himself at the opening of His public ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; HE HATH SENT ME to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (See also Luke 4:16-21)

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The blindness of the poor beggar, therefore is the blindness of unbelieving Israel and the darkness of ignorance in which all the world lay. The mission of Christ was to be that great light, the light of the world, which rises upon the whole world sunk in the grossness of that darkness. The purpose of the gospel is realized in the alteration of that state, as Paul declared before Festus and Agrippa:

"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God"
Acts 26:18.

The nation of the Jews boasted of its vision and its heritage of light and knowledge. "Are we blind also?" they cried (John 9:40). Their boast that they had no need of the work of Christ as the light of the world becomes their doom - as it must be the doom of all who turn from the light when it shines upon them.

"If ye were blind ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see. Therefore your sin remaineth."

IMMANUEL IS JEHOVAH

Our Lord's assumption of the prophetic symbolism of Siloam to Himself was a plain declaration that He was the Immanuel who was the subject of the series of prophetic utterances beginning with Isaiah's vision in chapter 6, following the death of the great king Uzziah. He saw the 'Lord high and lifted up and his train filled the temple.' That Lord was the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, as John plainly declares in 12:41 of his Gospel. There he tells us that despite the many miracles performed by Christ, the Jewish nation did not believe on Him. "That the sayings of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled which He spake: Lord who both believed our report and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart and be converted, and I should heal them. THESE THINGS SAID ESAIAS WHEN HE SAW HIS GLORY AND SPAKE OF HIM" (John 12:37-41).

Immanuel is only known by faith, that is by those whose eyes have been opened and their hearts renewed by divine grace so as to understand. This is shown dramatically in the story of the blind man of John 9. The man was cast out of the synagogue by the false shepherds of Israel. The Lord sought out His sheep and asked him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The man answered, "Who is he Lord that I might believe on Him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And the man said, Lord I believe. And he worshipped Him (9:35-38).

Blessed words indeed. Blessed light which shone upon this man and gave him not only his natural sight, but eyes to behold and a heart to understand, who He is who is Immanuel, God with us.

We now understand also the next words of Christ:

"For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind."

Still moving in the prophecies the Lord goes back to that 6th chapter of Isaiah and tells the nation which then stood before Him in the person of their teachers and leaders, that the dire words of the prophet were being fulfilled then and there, for Israel was even then judicially blinded and

Hardened by the righteous judgment of God.

THE GOD WHO IS EVER WITH US

It remains but to show the wondrous extent of meaning in the Immanuel prophecy. Immanu - el consists of the two Hebrew words: "With us (is) God".

This was the sign which Ahaz was invited to ask whether in the depth or the height. And Immanuel partakes of the two dimensions. As Ireneus one of the earliest of the Church Fathers so clearly discerned, "This was the sign in the depth and in the height. In the depth He was very man; in the height He was very God. In the depth, for He condescended to endure not only human misery but the wrath of God, the abyss of death and Hades. In the height for He took our human nature with Him into the glory which He had before the world was."

JACOB'S VISION OF IMMANUEL

Then Jacob fled from his father's home to escape the wrath of Esau, he slept that night in the wilderness and dreamed of the ladder set up from earth to heaven with the Lord seated enthroned above it, and the angels of God ascending and descending thereupon. The Lord spoke to him and said, "I am with thee". That is the same word as is used in the name Immanuel, and the Lord Christ identifies Himself with the vision when He tells Nathaniel, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51). Undoubtedly we have here in Jacob's vision a preview of the incarnation, with Immanuel Himself declaring His name in the promise made to Jacob.

Immanuel appears again in that remarkable dialog between Jehovah and Moses in Exodus 33:12-16:

And Moses said unto the Lord, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now, therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall be with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.

The word Moses uses for 'goest with us' is IMMANU. Moses was speaking there and then with Immanuel.

And what shall we say of that gracious promise made by Immanuel in Person when taking leave of His apostles on the day of His ascension into heaven, He said, "Lo, I AM WITH YOU always, even unto the end of the world"? (Matthew 28:20).

A WORD FOR THE CHURCH TO EXPLORE

Very few people could have known at the time, of the blind man's brief journey to the Pool of Siloam, and it was recorded only by John when he wrote his gospel long after the destruction of Jerusalem. To what purpose then was all this elaboration of the miracle and the prophetic symbolism of Siloam, seeing it was without value at the time except to those who were immediately concerned? The answer lies at a very deep level indeed. The fact was recorded as something to be pondered and understood in later times, when it pleased God to enrich the Church through the ministry of her theologians, doctors and divines, who with infinite pains and patience have searched the inspired Word and from it brought forth treasures new and old. After the death of the apostles theology languished. The men who succeeded the apostles were good men and holy men, but it pleased God that there should be such a gulf opened between thus and the apostles in their apprehension and use of divine knowledge, as to show beyond the shadow of a doubt that to the apostles alone was committed the task of guiding the Church and ruling in her congregations by their written and inspired remains. It has taken all the intervening centuries to explore and establish that knowledge the principles of which were committed to the apostles but which have to be learned by us through dedicated labor and consecrated gifts.

We are now nearing the end of the twentieth century after Christ. The hour is waxing late. The darkness of heathenism is returning fast. We no longer see our signs. The carved work of the holy temple of divine knowledge is broken down with the axes and hammers of unbelief and apostasy. Now is the time for the people of God to cry mightily for divine aid, and to support those pulpits where water is still being drawn from the wells of salvation.

(Our next installment will have to do with the 10th chapter of John -- the parable of the Good Shepherd, in which the Lord continues to enlarge on the prophetic meaning of His action in the giving of sight to the Blind Beggar of John Nine).

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