

Anticipating Our Next Intimate Encounter with Jesus

If you are a Christian, then at some point in your past, Jesus made Himself known to you personally. Now, you know Him and He knows you. If you are a Christian, you can recall moments in which Jesus made Himself known to you in a very intimate way. You can also recall times when it seemed He was far from you. *"How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1)*. The main point of this article is to suggest that there are certain times during which we should anticipate Him making Himself known to us intimately.

In the 9th chapter of John's gospel, we read about Jesus healing a man born blind. One very notable element of this story is the unusual way Jesus healed the man in a two-step fashion. First, He made mud and smeared it on the man's eyes. Then He told the man to go wash them off in the pool of Siloam. When he went and washed his eyes, he received his sight. He could see for the very first time in his life.

From the many stories of Jesus healing people, we know that He could have simply spoken the word and this man would have been healed. But as the story progresses, we learn that Jesus had His reasons for healing him in this two-step fashion. We know that when Jesus walked the earth, He was neither omniscient nor omnipotent.¹ But the entire story of the healing of this man born blind almost makes it seem as if Jesus possessed both of these attributes. While this was not the case while Jesus walked the earth, it does at least seem that Jesus, as prophet, had full knowledge of every single thing that was about to happen even before He healed the man. In fact, He knew it before He even met the man.

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. (v.1)

Someone might assume that Jesus was randomly walking along and just happened to notice a blind man begging. Perhaps if He was momentarily distracted so that He did not notice the man, the succeeding events would not have occurred. But those of us who know Jesus personally realize that this was not how Jesus lived. He believed everything that occurred in his life happened exactly as God planned it. Usually, Jesus knew what was about to happen before it occurred. When He didn't know ahead of time,² He knew that God had a purpose for that also.

As we consider the rest of this chapter, marvel with me at the display of God's manifold wisdom on display in the thoughts, attitudes and actions of Jesus.

His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (V2-5)

Jesus obviously knew that the man's blindness was not a result of either his sin or the sin of his parents. But it also seems like Jesus knew ahead of time that his disciples would ask their question. This chapter focuses on the healing of the man born blind. But even before that miracle takes place, we observe the manifold wisdom of God on display. Neither Jesus or His Father are restricted to doing just one thing at a time as they work. Both of them seem to be doing multiple things all at once as a matter of course. In this story, Jesus not only heals the blind man, He also, at the same time, does a variety of other wonderful

¹ Here are two proof texts: **Mark 6:5** And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them. **Luke 2:52** And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

² One example is the time that a woman snuck up to touch Jesus' garment while many people were next to Him.

things all according to plan. One of the things He did even before the healing took place was designed to provide critical teaching to his disciples.

On the surface, it might seem like Jesus was merely providing information in response to their question. But the truth that Jesus dispensed was not mere information about the blind man or his parents. His short answer was, *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.”* But we should ask ourselves why this is even a part of the story. Is it merely so that the works of God would be revealed in him? And what did Jesus mean by *“that the works of God should be revealed in him?”*

One interpretation is that God’s miracle of healing would be put on display. But if it is that simple, why did Jesus say “the works” (plural) of God? This use should be understood as the collective works of God. This means that John is calling attention to something even greater than the physical healing of this man’s eyes. Later in the chapter, we read how Jesus introduced Himself personally to this man and raised him to new life (spiritual life). It was God’s plan ahead of time to do something even greater than making the blind man see. He desired to give him spiritual sight and life that always results in God’s works being manifest for all to see. *“But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be clearly seen, that they have been wrought in God” (John 3:21).* (Jesus) *gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).*

On another occasion, Jesus said to His disciples, *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).* I am sure that when this man received his sight, people talked about it for a time. But in raising the man to new life in Christ, God lit a lamp for people to see for years to come.

Jesus’ disciples may not have understood all this on the day Jesus healed this man. But their writings indicate that they understood it later. Much of Jesus’ teaching did not sink in at the time He was teaching his disciples. In spite of this, He spent over three years teaching them knowing that after He sent the Holy Spirit, they would understand it all. (See John 14:26.)

In addition to these things, Jesus was teaching them something else that they probably did not grasp at the time. Jesus told his disciples that neither this man’s sin, nor that of his parents caused the blindness. Rather, it was a blindness purposely crafted by God, planned before the man was born. But why this detail? God could have chosen to have Jesus heal a man who was born blind because of the sins of his parents. The healing would have been just as miraculous. But no! God wanted it this way instead. Why?

I am convinced that He wanted the disciples to learn even more. Jesus’ immediate answer does not convey it but his initial statement speaks of a very important truth that God clearly wanted to communicate. The disciples’ initial question shows that they were assuming that either this man or his parents were guilty of some sin. Jesus quickly corrects their thinking but did not seem to take time at that moment to teach them that such presumption is evil. Perhaps Jesus talked with them about it later and told them to read the book of Job again to see what God thinks about the sin of presuming evil things about other people. But because God purposely wanted Jesus to heal this particular man, we know that He did it for a purpose. He could have chosen a man who was born blind because of the sin of his parents.

Why do I make this point? I do so because God intends for us to see it. I also do it to show how marvelously intricate God’s purposes are and how wonderful it was for Him to carefully craft this entire event and have it precisely recorded. Great is His manifold wisdom! Besides healing the man and raising him to new life, Jesus also taught His disciples that they must not presume evil things about other people.

It is difficult to say with certainty what Jesus meant by *"the night is coming when no one can work."* Perhaps it refers to the short period of time when all time stood still so all creation would behold the Lamb of God lay down His life to redeem sinners. After all, no other work could begin to compare to it its importance. It is fitting that God would make work come to a standstill while the Passover Lamb was sacrificed.³

Whether this was what Jesus meant when He told us that the night was coming I cannot say for sure. But his next statement seems to be in harmony with this conclusion because it speaks about the time period that led up to His death on the cross. *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."* We must stop to note the clear imagery John uses throughout his record of this entire event. On the one hand, apart from Christ, there is only darkness, blindness and spiritual death. In such conditions, unrighteousness and chaos reign producing destruction. The light that Jesus produces reverses the work of the evil one resulting in light and life in redeemed sinners who in turn, glorify God through their lives. The work Jesus was about to do by physically healing the man born blind would only serve to point to the greater work He would do later by raising him to new life. Soon, this man would testify in reference to his physical eyesight, "All I know is that I was once blind but now I see." But later that same day, he would begin proclaiming this very thing in reference to the eyes of his soul. Later in his life, he surely valued the spiritual eyesight he received more because this eyesight would enable him throughout eternity to look upon his Savior Jesus.

Beginning at the sixth verse, we read how Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man in a very unusual, two-step fashion. Before we consider the story, let me ask you a question. Have you ever taken the time to study a freshly bloomed rose? If not, you are missing out on one of life's wholesome pleasures given to us by God. If you have carefully studied a rose, then you know what I am talking about. Not only is it beautiful to look at, it is wonderful to smell. *"Great are the works of the Lord. They are studied by all who delight in them"* (Psalm 111:2).

Like taking time to study a rose, we must also set aside time to examine the Scriptures. If we settle for a basic comprehension of a passage, we will miss out on the wonder and beauty that God desires to show us. In addition, if we casually read a passage without meditating on it, we will not receive the personal communication that He is happy to provide to those who seek to learn from Him. We will have less intimate moments with Jesus if we don't take time to behold His wonder on display in the Scriptures.⁴

Having said this, let us now consider the miracle and how Jesus performed it. It seems as if the man was not expecting to be healed that day. He was begging for money in the place he was normally found. He was not begging to be healed. Suddenly, a man stoops down near him, spits on some dirt and then begins to rub the resulting mud on his eyes. Though it was not mentioned, Jesus probably said something to calm the man because mud was being wiped on his eyes. Or perhaps others told the man that the One doing this to him was Jesus who was known for healing people.

Let me point out a few observations that will manifest the manifold wisdom of God. First, Jesus made mud to serve His ultimate purposes in all the events that followed. Jesus did this on the Sabbath. The Jews believed that it was a violation of the law to make anything on the Sabbath. This includes making mud.

³ Just to note, Moses instructed the children of Israel to do no customary work whenever they observed the Passover feast as a nation. (See Leviticus 23:7.)

⁴ Concerning our careful study of God's Word, I strongly recommend you avoid running to commentaries and even articles like this in order to learn from Jesus. The thoughts expressed in this article were not taken from another's writings. God gave them to me as I prayerfully meditated on this passage. If you don't already do so, I encourage you to spend the time studying God's word while purposely avoiding the use of commentaries and the writings of other people. God desires to bless us directly and personally if we seek Him this way. It is one of the ways He uses to show His love for us personally.

As we read on, it becomes clear that Jesus planned everything knowing perfectly how the making of this mud would not only play a role in the man's physical healing, but also his spiritual healing.

This two-step healing also kept the man from seeing Jesus until His other purposes were accomplished. Things were about to happen to this man, and to many other people, that would not have been able to happen any other way.

This two-step process also required the man to trust Jesus. In the days of Elisha, a man came from another country to be healed of his leprosy.⁵ Elisha, like Jesus, did not allow that leper to see him. Instead, he simply told others to tell him to go dip himself seven times in the dirty Jordan river and he would be healed. The man was furious with Elisha's response. But the man's servants suggested he follow Elisha's instructions. What did he have to lose? So, with some reluctance, he went to the Jordan and dipped himself seven times and was completely healed. If he had not done so, he would not have been healed. But he eventually chose to trust Elisha by obeying what seemed to be nonsensical instructions.

The man born blind was also told to do something that may have seemed senseless. Jesus told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He was faced with a choice to either do it based upon the hope of being healed, or simply shrug it off as silly and purposeless. What if he went and washed and nothing happened? He would look like a desperate fool to those who knew him. Instead, he acknowledged he was desperate and cast off any concern about how he would be viewed. Being blind, getting to the pool would not be easy and he would probably have to lean upon the help of other people to guide him there. By inserting this requirement for the blind man to act, Jesus was laying the foundation for a future life of faith. This was simply the first of many steps of faith this man would take for the rest of his life.

The gospel call requires this type of faith. At some point, each person must choose to act upon Jesus' invitation to come and receive sight from above. To lay hold of the promise of eternal life, we must cast off our concern about what other people will think about us. We simply must identify ourselves with Jesus and accept the outcome, even if it means rejection and persecution. If we are unwilling, we prove that we really do not believe Jesus' promise of eternal life. (We don't trust His promise.)

John made sure to note the name of the pool and what that name meant. It means "sent." Just like Elisha sent the leper, Jesus sent the blind man. The gospel call involves a command to go. He said, "*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,*" (John 20:21). Those who believe obey His command to go because they truly believe. From the moment they first believe, their lives are filled with going in order to obey His commands. Just one of these commands is to go and make disciples, baptize them and teach them all things that Jesus commands. But since He owns us completely, every single thing we do involves going wherever He leads and doing whatsoever He directs us to do.

John dedicated an entire chapter to this story but the actual miracle is told in only eight words, "*He went and washed, and came back seeing.*" I suggest that, by this brevity, John is conveying that the physical healing is very small in comparison to all the other miraculous things surrounding the physical healing. Let us now consider those things.

Please do not miss the imagery God intends you to see as the story progresses. By the end of the story, we learn that this man was not merely given eyesight, he was also raised to new life in Christ. Much of his testimony was directly in response to questions concerning his physical healing. But one can't help but see the parallel between the physical healing and the spiritual healing. Concerning his physical healing, he testified, "*One thing I know is that at one time I was blind but now I see.*" But if someone had asked him later about his spiritual condition, he surely could have said, "*One thing I know, once I was blind but now I see.*" All those who have experienced regeneration would consider this a perfect answer to anyone who asked them to explain how Jesus made them alive. I know I have used this expression countless times to convey what Jesus did for me. I remember trying to communicate to my father the things Jesus did for

⁵ See II Kings chapter 5.

me. My father observed me as an atheist and drug addict living an aimless life. Suddenly I was a completely different person and he saw it with his own eyes. One afternoon, while riding in his car, I was trying to find words to convey what happened. Finding no better words, I said, "All I know is that once I was blind but now I see!"

As we consider the testimony of the healed man and its impact on those around him, we will see how his physical healing depicts the nature of the spiritual healing known as regeneration. After receiving his sight, he returned at once to where he had been begging. Perhaps he was looking for the man who healed him to thank him. When the neighbors and others who had observed him previously saw him walking around as one who could see, they naturally wanted to know if this was the same man. As they debated among themselves whether this was the same man who used to be blind, the healed man said, "*I am he.*" I can only assume that he was a bit frustrated that everyone didn't already conclude this. His declaration began an avalanche of questions and testimony that reveals God's sovereign superintendence over the entire episode.

After he declared himself to be the one who was blind, the bystanders asked how he received his sight. The man's response was precise. "*A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight.*" They then asked him where the man was who healed him. Again, he answered accurately, "*I don't know.*"

Based upon the conclusion of the story, we know with certainty that God intended to warn us about the danger of a condition more serious than physical blindness, namely, spiritual blindness. An astounding display of it is provided by the Pharisees. These men assumed themselves superior to Jesus, the very One who orchestrated from a distance what was about to unfold. Here, Jesus puts his divinity on display for anyone to see. But the ones who would soon prove themselves utterly blind were not able to see it at all.

As planned by Jesus, some of these decrepit blind ones said that Jesus could not possibly be from God because He made mud with spit and dirt on the Sabbath to heal the blind man. Making mud was not necessary for the physical healing. Jesus did it for multiple reasons but one of them was to set up the exchange between the Pharisees and to teach us about spiritual blindness rooted in pride. Countless times, I have observed Christians make similar judgments because things they observed did not fit perfectly into their tiny theological construct. The story of these Pharisees should cause us to see the great danger of pride and cause us to pursue a humility that is slow to assume the worst of others who don't seem to fit our neat little theological box. To their credit, some of the Pharisees at least questioned the conclusion that some of them made and asked how Jesus could perform such a miracle if He were not from God.

Just before He ascended to the right hand of His Father in heaven, Jesus said, "*You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.*"⁶ As the story progresses, we observe the healed man thrust into the role of witness. He did not need to learn what to say in order to be a witness for Jesus. He merely had to testify about what happened and he did this accurately. As it often turns out, his witness brought about rejection. But the ultimate outcome was great rejoicing. "*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*" (Matthew 5:11-12).

The Pharisees asked the man what he thought about the man who opened his eyes. Besides his healing, he did not have much information on which to base his answer. He concluded that the man who healed him was a prophet because only prophets had been known to perform such miracles. Perhaps this was not the answer the Pharisees had hoped for. If the man had said that Jesus was the Messiah, they could have wrapped up the meeting by simply excommunicating the man from the Synagogue. *The Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue*" (John 9:22).

⁶ See Acts 1:8.

The Pharisees concluded that the man was either lying or crazy because they did not believe his testimony. So, they called for his parents to come and verify that their son was previously blind. They asked them, *“Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 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 sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself’”* (John 9:19-21). (They answered this way because they were afraid of being excommunicated from the Synagogue.)

By this point, the Pharisees should have concluded that a genuine miracle had indeed taken place. A man born blind received his sight. They should have praised God for His wondrous works because even according to their own understanding, only the Messiah could open the eyes of a man born blind. But pride gets in the way. To acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah would force them to admit that they were wrong. They had already concluded that Jesus was an imposter. Often, men in positions of power do whatever is necessary to hold on to their status. If they admitted they were wrong about Jesus, they would risk losing credibility. At this point, they were not even able to entertain the idea that Jesus might indeed be the Messiah.

One might wonder why they pursued the matter further with the man who was healed. From the subsequent events, it almost seems as if they had to make a point in order to save face among the people. They were intent on making an example of the man that had been healed. He hadn't done anything to deserve what was about to happen to him. He was not looking for an argument with anyone. The Pharisees didn't care about this man in the very least. They were selfish and prideful and wanted to have the last word. Their pride ultimately betrayed them because their hypocrisy was made manifest for all to see. Jesus was about to rebuke them openly without even being present. Instead, He would use the mouth of the man He had healed.

Notice the blindness and pride of the Pharisees. They called the man back in and said, *“Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner.”* They should have let it go. Now they are digging a deeper hole for themselves. He answered, *“Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.”* Perfect answer! It was simple and true while at the same time unarguable. The Pharisees should have shut their mouths. What more could they say? But their pride would not let them shut their mouths. They are the ones who were sinning but Jesus was orchestrating it all remotely to bring about all of his purposes including a major rebuke for their arrogance. Everything was going according to plan.

Though it made no sense to do so, they asked him again, *“What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?”* At this point, they seemed to be angry that the man had received his sight. That tells us everything we need to know about their hearts. This man's position in life was near the bottom of society. He had been a beggar for years. Imagine how the Pharisees must have felt when he put them in their place.

He said, *“I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?”* We should not assume that he said this with an attitude. He may have been trying to answer their question with honesty and humility. But his question pushed them over the edge. As they become increasingly enraged, they begin to impugn and revile him. They probably were thinking, *“How dare he talk to us like that!”* They answered, *“You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.”*

Jesus is not finished rebuking them (from a distance). The lowly man again opens his mouth and speaks simple truth that is unanswerable. *“Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened*

the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing” (John 9:30-33).

The pride of the Pharisees seemed to increase as this exchange progressed. Everything went from bad to worse. But rather than repent and admit they were totally out of line, they doubled down and exercised their power over the lowly, innocent man. They said, *“You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?”* Then they cast him out of the Synagogue. When it was finished, they were more hardened than when it began. Their condition was worse. The man born blind received his sight while these men lost whatever spiritual eyesight they might have possessed previously. We observe a basic principle on display, *“God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (I Corinthians 1:27).* Let this serve as a warning to us to walk humbly before God lest blindness overtakes us through pride. There is a danger sitting in the higher seats because pride and hypocrisy have overtaken many in leadership positions.

While the Pharisees were losing their spiritual eyesight, I wish to note that Jesus’ other purposes for this exchange were being fulfilled. He used this exchange to further refine the faith of the man who had been healed. At first, he used his words sparingly. Perhaps he, like his parents, feared being excommunicated for being a disciple of Jesus. But as the conversation continued, he was almost forced to take a stand on the side of Jesus. At the same time, he was observing the spiritual blindness of his so-called spiritual leaders. This served to teach the man about the reality of sin and its effect on the lives of men.

God uses our witness in many ways. He uses it to save lost sinners. He uses it to rebuke those who are prideful. But He also uses it to refine our faith. To witness, we must choose to open our mouths at the risk of being rejected. It is a trial of our faith every time we do it. The process serves to settle our resolve more and more so that we tend towards a more serious walk with Jesus.

While the exchange progressed, the faith of this man was being formed by Jesus (from a distance). This prepared the man for what would follow. I suppose to some, it may seem as if the man’s excommunication was a surprise. But I definitely see it as something Jesus had planned before healing the man. All the things that occurred seem too carefully scripted, including the two-step healing process. It was no accident that up until this point, the man had never seen Jesus before. It was no accident that he had gone through a very troubling interrogation by supposed wise men who proved themselves fools. It was no accident that he was forced to ultimately identify more with the man who had healed him than everyone else around him.

Everything that occurred was carefully planned out by Jesus to bring about a glorious outcome. Knowing that the man would be cast out, Jesus waited until it was accomplished. Then He proceeded to do the thing that pleased Him the most. This lowly man was the treasure Jesus sought. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Once everything was set in place, He purposely went to complete His work. He found the man and said to him, *“Do you believe in the Son of God?”* The man, never having seen Jesus asked, *“Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”* With great joy, Jesus said, *“You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.”* With excitement, he said, *“Lord, I believe!”* Then he worshiped Him.

In the beginning of this article, I suggested that as Christians, there are certain times during which we should anticipate Jesus making Himself known to us intimately. He prepares us for those moments using trying circumstances and especially rejection. This entire event was orchestrated by Jesus so that He could make Himself known to this lowly man in a very intimate way. We too should expect rejection but also expect Jesus to come to us shortly afterward. In other words, as it is happening, we should rejoice because we will soon receive a personal visitation from Jesus.

The Scriptures are full of examples of believers finding themselves alone after suffering rejection. Elijah in the cave⁷, Hagar in the desert,⁸ David after his army began to threaten to stone him⁹ are three examples. But you also should be able to recall to mind times when people close to us rejected you and caused deep emotional pain. Hopefully, you can recall that while in that pain, Jesus came to you to make Himself known in a very intimate way. It is a pattern we see in the Scriptures and one we know by experience. Let us use this pattern to arm ourselves ahead of time for the next round of rejection. Let us rejoice as it is happening, knowing that Jesus will soon make a very personal visit to show His abounding love.

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Οὐαὶ μοὶ ἔστιν ἂν μὴ εὐαγγελίζωμαι (Προς Κορινθίους Α 9:16)

⁷ I Kings 19:1-18.

⁸ Genesis 16:6-13.

⁹ I Samuel 30:1-6.