

Miracles of Jesus 12-11-04b

We pick up our study now in John chapter 9, looking at the healing of the blind man, and this is such a fulsome chapter. There are so many different ways that this particular account is beneficial to us, not only in the details of the healing and the response to the healing on the part of the people and the part of the Pharisees. For that treatment, which I'm really not repeating here, we spent quite a bit of time on this chapter in our Gospel of John study, and that's up on the website, so it was really kind of a whole different view that we took during that account.

But I'm fascinated at this point by the questions that are asked in connection with this miracle. There's nothing like it anywhere in the New Testament that I can find where so many questions are asked about a single event. I pointed out some of the things that you find out in the world of ideas.

There's a man named Michael Hyatt who's got his own website, michaelhyatt.com, and his whole thing is intentional leadership. He's a leadership guy. This is how you get stuff done.

And he's got a recent article on his website called, The Power of Asking the Right Question. A few weeks ago I sat down with an old friend to catch up. He lost his job about nine months ago in a recession-induced layoff and has been unable to find another job.

He's had plenty of interviews but no offers. What's wrong with me, he asked. Why won't someone offer me a job? This happens in a lot of our young ladies and even young men who get up in their mid-20s, late-20s, early-30s.

Dating has not bloomed into long-term romance of a marital nature. And they say, what's wrong with me? Why can't I, why doesn't somebody want to marry me? Why doesn't somebody want to date me? Why doesn't somebody want to play chess with me all the time or whatever it might be? Why doesn't somebody want to spend time with me? What's wrong with me? Why won't someone offer me fill in the blank? He was clearly discouraged, Michael Hyatt says. I am sure he wasn't even conscious of the question he was asking.

It just bubbled up from his subconscious. But it was a good example of a bad question. Questions are powerful tools.

They can ignite hope and lead to new insights. They can also destroy hope and keep us stuck in bad assumptions. The key is to be intentional and choose our questions well.

All of these, by the way, although this is in the realm of business and of career and of leadership from Michael Hyatt, is 100% pertinent in our conversation and our life before

God. Questions are powerful. They can ignite hope and lead to new insights.

We come to a passage. For me and for you, it's all about asking the right questions. What is this passage here for? What is it designed to teach us? Why did God put it in His eternal inspired Word? Why is it here? Ask the right questions of the passage.

Wow, isn't that something? Jesus healed a blind man, and oh, look at those Pharisees. They just didn't want to believe. Then we move on to John 10.

You miss it. You've got to ask the right questions. The key is to be intentional and choose our questions well.

I'm still reading Michael Hyatt here. I think it's a great article. For example, when something bad happens, you could ask, why does this always happen to me? How many times has this happened to you? What did I do to deserve this? Interesting, no? What's the question the disciples ask? What did these people do to deserve this blind guy? Did the parents do something or did the man do something? What did I do to deserve this? What's wrong with me? Three bad questions.

Why does this always happen to me? I mean, you just can't even ask it without whining. What did I do to deserve this? What's wrong with me? As soon as we ask these questions, Michael says, our brains go to work serving up answers. It is almost automatic.

The answers have a way of reinforcing the assumptions behind the question. For example, if you ask, what's wrong with me? You are assuming there is something wrong with you. Your mind immediately begins proposing possible answers.

I'm too old. I'm too young. I'm inexperienced.

I'm overqualified. I'm too assertive. I'm too aggressive.

I'm too forceful. People just can't deal with me. I'm too much.

I'm too much to handle. I'm too passive. I'm too anemic and weak.

I just don't have the personality. I can't think fast enough. I don't say the right things.

I'm just unattractive. I wilt in the light. Whatever the question, the answers reinforce the assumption and provide an excuse.

If I was writing this article, I would put that in all caps. Whatever the question, the answers reinforce the assumption and provide an excuse for why you are not getting the results you want. Our life as believers should be a life of no excuses.

They teach you this in the military. They used to. I don't know what they do now.

But in your five basic responses, it is yes, sir, no, sir, aye, aye, sir, I'll find out, sir, and no excuse, sir. Why are you late to formation? Why does your uniform look like you slept in it? Why does your cover look like it's been dragged behind a car? Why do your shoes look like the entire platoon marched over it before you showed up here? No excuse, sir. It doesn't matter if the entire platoon did march over your shoes and they knocked you unconscious with a bat and you did sleep in your clothes and it was miraculous that you even made it to the formation.

The right answer is no excuse. You should have seen that coming. You should have got your shoes out of the way of the platoon.

You should have avoided the baseball bat and you should have taken your uniform off and hung it up before somebody knocked you unconscious. It's your fault regardless. That's how it works in the military.

You can be the captain of the ship. You can do everything right. You can train your men.

You can be a harsh taskmaster, crack the whip, ship runs aground. It's your fault. No excuse.

We need to think this way as believers. Well, the devil made me do it. The evil people surrounded me.

My bad company corrupted my good moral. No excuse, no excuse, no excuse. And asking the wrong question gives us excuses to justify what's actually wrong.

Whatever the question, the answers reinforce the assumption and provide an excuse for why you're not getting the results you want. What if you ask a different question? Michael Hyatt says, for example, my friend could ask, what could I do to make my interviews more memorable? What are the two or three attributes that make me the best possible candidate for the job? How can I follow up in a way that makes it easier for the prospective employer to say yes? By the way, any time you're in a debate or an argument or a difference of opinion, you can take my approach, which is to basically find the biggest post in the vicinity and beat your opponent over the head with it and force them to admit that you're right, because of course I am right. But if you are in a discussion that reflects a difference of opinion with someone else, how can you express yourself, how can you make your point in a way that makes it easiest for the person on the other side of the table to agree, leave a path for admitting that you might have a point? Don't become so odious that even if the person is convinced you're absolutely right, they're never going to admit it and they will oppose you to their dying day.

They will lift their bony hand out of their grave and shake it in your fist and say, I disagree with you, because you're such a heinously right person. You can be right in a way that's so obnoxious nobody, they wish you were wrong and will never agree with

your position. Leave an opening, make it easy for someone to agree.

How can I follow up in a way that makes it easier for this person I'm dealing with to say yes? And how can my apparent liabilities really be an asset in this situation? This gets right to the heart of our passage, doesn't it? How can what looks like a liability be an asset in this situation? Asking the right questions. This is what Jesus suggested to the disciples right at the beginning. You're asking the wrong question.

Who sinned? We're not here on a moral witch hunt. Find the sinner and see there, you didn't give enough at the temple and that's why your son is born blind. You didn't say enough prayers.

You didn't do something. You didn't support the king enough. You didn't whatever.

No. Ask the right questions. These are constructive questions.

They empower. They create new possibilities. They lead to action and they will produce results.

Learn to ask the right question. Forbes magazine has an article from 9-11 of last year. Learning to ask the right question.

In education, for instance, there's often more emphasis on teaching than learning. The current test-driven system which views teaching as imparting the right answers to the students often does a poor job of equipping students to find the right question. If, as I suggest, the true goal of education is inspiring students with a lifelong capacity and passion for learning, it is at least as important that students be able to ask the right question as it is to know the right answer.

Douglas Thomas, John Seely Brown made the same point in a book called *A New Culture of Learning, Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change*. How will this happen in practice? Encourage students to ask their own questions. A new book being published later this month, that would be a year ago, and this is Dan Rothstein again.

Remember, he's got the Ask the Right Question Institute. He's got a book out called *Make Just One Change, Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions*. He proposes a six-step process for teaching students to formulate their own questions and take ownership of their learning.

You can introduce students to a new unit, assess students' knowledge to see what they need to understand better, let them set a fresh learning agenda for themselves, and so on. Think more deeply. Ask the right questions.

So in many different areas of life, the secular world recognizes this. We need to recognize it from this passage. I said there are 16 questions.

We've looked at the first four. Who sinned? Asked by the disciples. Is this not he who begged? Is this a valid thing? Did this really happen? How did it happen? Those are the two questions asked by the people, questions two and three.

Question four, if this guy did this, where is he? I want to see him for myself. I would like to have a firsthand encounter with this person that seems to have done so much for you. Fifth question, down in verse 13, asked by the Pharisees.

They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. This is my point made in the first session about ideology, being an ideologue, being committed to a point of view. If you are too committed to your own right point of view, you can't ask the right questions.

Pharisees, we know the Pharisees are ingrained. They have a certain view, and the reason they're going to fail in this chapter is they can't shake their preconceptions. They can't shake their self-serving belief.

I am right, and any data that doesn't fit with my grid, something's wrong with the data. There can't be anything wrong with my grid. It was a Sabbath when the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight.

Notice, asked him again. They keep going back, well, how did you receive your sight? He tells them, well, a guy put clay in my eyes. Well, so how did you receive your sight? Dissatisfied with the answer, right? If you understood the answer, you wouldn't keep asking the question.

When you get the answer, deal with the answer. Don't keep asking the question. God does this with us.

We ask a question, Lord, what is the purpose of this challenge? How can I best meet this situation? God gives us an answer. We don't like the answer. We go back and keep asking the question.

Got to learn to recognize a good answer so that we can move on to better questions. So they ask him, how did you receive your sight? So he tells them again. He put clay in my eyes, and I washed, and I see.

Therefore, some of the Pharisees said, this man is not from God. He's not keeping the Sabbath. That's the grid kicking in.

Don't want to consider that he might be from God because let's stack it up. You give sight to a congenitally blind man, but there's a question about whether this ought to be done on the Sabbath. Which thing do you think weighs more heavily in favor of a man being from God? The supernatural ability to grant sight to a full-grown man who's never had it? Or, well, my belief is you can't do something that beneficial on the Sabbath.

Where is the law in the Old Testament that says, thou shalt not make the blind see on the Sabbath? Thou shalt not spit on the ground and make clay and put it on someone's eyes? Did he do too much work on the Sabbath by making the clay? Well, you know, that's just the slippery slope. First thing you know, they'll be making bricks, and then they'll be making buildings, and then they'll be erecting towers on the Sabbath. It all starts with making a little... I mean, come on.

But the ideology, we've got to shake this grounded belief that we're right and everything has to fit into our perceptions. So others said, how can a man who is a sinner do such signs? Good question. How can a man who is a sinner do such signs? That is question number six.

Good question. Question my assumptions. Question my preconceptions.

Maybe I'm looking at this the wrong way. This is a good question from that portion of the Pharisees. You say, to dismiss this and ignore it, I say, you can't get away from this evident power of God.

If he was a sinner, how could he do this? This is constructive. We know the power of evil is destructive. So there was a division among them.

So verse 17, they said to the blind man again, what do you say about him, because he opened your eyes? What do you say? Now this is kind of funny, because later on they're going to rebuke him for trying to tell them anything, but they've asked. They've asked him what do you think. Notice he didn't foment his opinion into the discussion until he was asked.

This is also a good life skill. It speaks of self-discipline. There will be a time.

Those who are interested will ask. So not only do we want to learn how to ask the right questions, but we also want to learn to wait for the right question. In our life as ministers to one another, we say, oh, we're supposed to speak the truth to one another in love.

Well, yes, but. There is an art to waiting until the question is asked. Wait for someone to ask the right question.

If they're asking the wrong questions, like the Pharisees here, the bad part of the Pharisees, good answers aren't going to sway them. You want to wait for, watch for, and have dialogue with people who are asking the right question. That means they've got the right kind of heart.

They're receptive. We want to be people that have the right heart. We ask the right questions.

Watch for that in others, and give answers when the right question is asked. So what do

you say about him? Great opening here in verse 17. He says, real simply, he's a prophet.

Kind of says it all. Nice, succinct answer. He's a prophet.

What is a prophet? An emissary of God, endued with divine power to work God's will and communicate God's message. That's what a prophet is. That's very simple.

Wasn't a hard bridge for me to cross. Wasn't a hard deduction to make. I've been blind since birth.

The man sends me to the Pool of Siloam with this mud on my eyes, tells me to wash it off. Now I can see he's from God. How hard is that? But this man is not burdened by a giant set of theological preconceptions.

A simple man. Sometimes the simple answer is the best. He's a prophet.

But the Jews did not believe concerning him that he had been blind and received his sight until they called the parents. You know, if you don't like the data, then you question how the data was arrived at. We look at the presidential polls and we say, wait a minute.

How can they be saying that it's dead even or this one? Well, you go and look at how the data is arrived at and you say, ah, well, there either is or isn't a flaw in the way the facts are being presented. So they say, well, there must be a flaw here. This can't be what it appears to be.

Let's dig into it. Well, it's not a bad idea. If the data seems questionable in your mind, research it.

It's not a bad thing to do. So they call the parents and they ask them, saying, is this your son who you say was born blind? How then does he now see? Two questions. Is this your son? Are you qualified to tell us things about him? Oh, no, we're not.

He's not our son. Who told you he was? They establish that these people are qualified to speak and then they say, how does he now see? They want a second testimony, a second witness. This is a biblical principle.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing is established. The man has said how he was able to receive his sight. So they ask the parents.

Parents answered and said, we know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We will verify what we can verify, but we weren't there. We didn't see this healing.

We weren't on hand for the conversation, so we're not going to speak about what we don't know. They're also afraid to go out on a limb because of being kicked out of the synagogue. Therefore, his parents said, he's of age.

Ask him. So they again called the man who was blind and said to him, give God the glory. We know that this man is a sinner.

Notice, now they're not asking a question. This is the predilection, the preconceptions, the persuasions kicking in. I'm not even asking a question.

I'm telling you the answer. Well, this is bad practice. This is something we want to avoid.

Many times we go to God in prayer and we try to tell God the answer. Lord, this can't be right. I shouldn't have to go through this.

My family shouldn't have to go through this. Lord, I know that it ought to be this way. And we push our view into the divine plan without adequately balancing it and without asking the right questions.

So, question number 10 in verse 26, the man says, whether he's a sinner, I don't know. One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see. So they said to him again, what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? This is repeating the questions that have already been asked and answered.

And question 11 is, why do you want to hear that again? Are you, you know, are they going to pick through it? Now what they're doing is they're going to try to find something wrong with him. Well, you didn't answer quite the same way this time that you did last time. There's a discrepancy in your testimony.

You're an unreliable witness. We don't have to listen to you. So they're now getting ready for a personal attack.

They want him to tell it again so that they can find a flaw. Ignoring the larger issue, ignoring who Jesus must be, ignoring what Jesus has done, they want to find a flaw in the process. They want to find a flaw in the testimony so that they can find a grounds on which to do what they've already made up their minds to do, which is reject it.

We have to see this in ourselves and avoid it. Don't. Find a way to be right.

Find a way to ask good questions. Do you want to hear it? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to be his disciples? That's question number 12. Good question.

Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to be his disciples? Do you want to be, you want to write your own gospel account and you want to be sure you have all the details down? You want to be a follower and a fourth teller of all that Jesus has said and done? They reviled him. Very consistent sign of people who are not in the wrong. Sometimes you can hold a right position, but you can still be in the wrong because you're right in a wrong way.

If you resort to personal attack, you are wrong. Anytime you watch the news, when you

hear people making personal slights, personal remarks about someone's appearance, about their style, about their memory, about their choices, about their family, imputing motives to them. I heard this endlessly back when President Bush went into Iraq and they said, Oh, he's just going in there to avenge the threat made against his father.

Saddam Hussein threatened George Bush Sr. He's just going in there because of that. That's a personal attack. That's an innuendo.

It's an assumption with no evidence, no way to prove it. It belittles and demeans the person. When you hear reviling, belittling, demeaning talk, personally insulting, personally denigrating, and it's always got a real bitter tang to it.

It's a grouching kind of a critical, negative, tearing down aspect. That person you want to be highly suspicious of whatever else they're arguing for because that is evil. So they reviled him and said, You are his disciple.

We are Moses' disciples. We are better than you. As for this fellow, we do not know where he's from.

And this is casting aspersions on Jesus. They know who Jesus is. The Pharisees are well aware of who he is.

And now they're going back to his birth. These are the original birthers. His birth is not legitimate.

For all we know, that girl Mary got with a Roman soldier. This is a widespread belief that it wasn't a virgin birth at all. The reason Joseph was surprised is that she kept company with a Roman soldier and got pregnant.

And that's where Jesus came from. So we don't know where he's from. So they insult the man and they insult Jesus all in one breath.

And the man says, This is marvelous that you don't know where he's from, yet he's opened my eyes. We know God doesn't hear sinners, but if anyone's a worshiper of God and does his will, he hears him. Since the world began, it's unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind.

If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. They answered and said to him, You were completely born in sins. Remember the very first question? Who sinned? This man or his parents? Well, the Pharisees say, They're all sinful.

The whole family is sinful. He was born in sins. And are you teaching us? That's another question.

That is question 13. Are you teaching us? It's a personal insult. They ask him, What do you say? Well, he tells them.

And then they say, Are you teaching us? There are three final questions in this last little section. This is when Jesus heard that he had been cast out and found him and said to him, Do you believe in the Son of God? This is interesting because in the entire set of 16 questions, there's only one question that Jesus asks. Jesus asks the most pertinent question in the whole account.

Do you believe in the Son of God? That's Jesus' question. Best question in the whole chapter. Do you believe or not? Ask it of the people.

Ask it of the Pharisees. Jesus asks it of the blind man. Do you believe in the Son of God? The man responds with a question, Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him? Jesus says, You have both seen him and it is he who is talking with you.

You have seen him. Why? Because Jesus opened his eyes to see. This is a receptive man.

Jesus knew he's a receptive man, knew that he would believe if he could see. This is why God sends the Holy Spirit to the heart of every man so that we can all see, sin, righteousness, and judgment. Then he said, Lord, I believe.

And he worshiped him. Jesus said, For judgment I have come into the world that those who do not see may see, and those who see, who say they see, who think they see, who are persuaded that they are right, may become blind. And they're stuck in that blindness.

So some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these words and said to him, and this is the last question in the chapter, Are we blind also? The answer is, If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say we see, therefore your sin remains. To fail to recognize our need, to fail to recognize our deficit, to fail to recognize that there is a question that needs answering, and to ask that question is to be in the situation of the Pharisees, to remain in sin.

If they recognize that they were blind, this is the disciples, they're constantly coming to the Lord Jesus, Lord, we don't get that parable. Can you explain it? We don't see the meaning. We don't see the point.

But they go to the Lord Jesus and they ask, and he explains the parables to them afterward. He says, To those who are outside, everything is in parables, so that seeing they see and do not perceive, hearing they hear and don't understand, but to you it is revealed. Why? Because they ask.

Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened.

So if there's one thing to bring away from this miracle in John chapter 9, how can we not be blind? How can we not get off on the wrong track? How can we not ask the right questions? Step back. Where is the plan and purpose of God? Where is the glory of God

in this? I know that God's strength is made manifest in my weakness, so rather than praying as Paul did three times that the thorn in our flesh be removed, what does God say? No, you're keeping the thorn. My grace is sufficient for you.

Without the need, without the thorn, without the deficit, grace is unnecessary. We are the beneficiaries and the recipients of God's grace, and through God's grace comes God's glory, and that is our purpose. That's our goal.

Well, I hope this has been helpful. I think it certainly for all of us has great application as we navigate the circumstances and challenges that God puts in our path, even our blessings. We can ask, is this blessing just because God's smiling on me and I'm supposed to have a good time, or does this create an opportunity for me? Is there a potential here? Where is the glory of God in this? Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for this passage and the truth that it reveals to us. We pray that you will continue to open our eyes and enable us to see things that our carnal hearts and minds cannot understand, but through the ministry of your Spirit, through the power of your Word, our eyes are opened and we are enabled to enter into things of eternal value and of eternal weight, and that partake of the eternal glory that belongs to you and is reflected in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name.

Amen.