

“Exponential: Finite Strength Extended”

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9 April 2023 Easter Sunday

Texts: Acts 3:11-26 & John 9:35-41

Here is an astonishing thing that after Pentecost, and following the post-resurrection ministry of Jesus (ending with His ascension), we come to Acts 3 and 4 and they are focused on the healing of a forty-year old who is **lame from his mother’s womb** (3:2)—**a certain man**, a conspicuous and notorious beggar! This is a large section of scripture at a very significant place: a first act of public ministry by any emboldened Peter and John! This healing is reminiscent of an earlier miracle Jesus, who heals **a man blind from birth** at least thirteen years old in 9—a man who was also familiar around the gates of the temple **where Jesus was passing by** (John 9:1). Now the setting for this earlier miracle was one of great controversy. (John 8:13-20) Jesus had defended His self-witness for **I know where I came from** (from the Father’s side, or throne in heaven!) **and I know where I am going** (which is a matter of spiritual truth and discernment). Jesus then declares to the accusatory Pharisees that they don’t know *these vital truths about Him because you judge according to the flesh* (this could mean by “appearances,” limited experience and knowledge, or by human standards of history, origin, or causation—none of which are adequate, or sufficient!). **I judge no one** in like manner—only by the standard of reality and truth *which is a righteous standard!*. Reality and truth are the standards by which we assess both our identity and Jesus’ identity—they are how we know who He is. Reality and true inform the word of God—both the incarnate word and the revealed word. Jesus asserts that His judgment is true because **He is with the Father who sent Me.** (v. 16)

This exchange takes place in the treasury, **as He taught in the temple**. We know, when, where and what Jesus was doing at the time. This is one of several temple controversies. It is also an occasion when Jesus prophesies: **I am going away, and you will seek Me and die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.** (v. 21) This is a judgment very plainly and that is why Jesus’ **I judge no one** (v. 15) cannot mean an absolute prohibition on judgment (as witnessed here.)! The Jews are confounded by this declaration, taking it to mean *Jesus would commit suicide!* Stuff and nonsense! The unity of John 8:13-around identity politics—something analogous to what we are going through in today’s culture!—**you are not getting who I am because you are from beneath, I am from above . . . for you do not believe I am He.** (v. 24) **And you do not believe that I speak to the world those things which I heard** (directly, in person, through our spiritual union) **from Him.** *They disavow the unity of the Godhead, of the Father and the Son. We, being spiritual, being born from above, do not deny Jesus’ identity.* In fact, we affirm Jesus’ identity as the very Son of God and so we know where we are from, and where we are going! And Easter is the great magnetic north by which we orient ourselves, find our way and know ourselves.

Both men, the blind and the lame, were suffering from what we would describe as congenital defects. Such things can be self-defining, we can take them on as our identities! ***But Easter, the power of the resurrection, alters all that; by the***

power of the risen Christ, we may be born from above. Blind, halt, paralyzed or lame—no physical condition excludes us from our spiritual urging, or our destination. Besides, natural evils (blindness, lameness) which Jesus in John 9 clarifies are not moral evils—**neither this man nor his parents sinned**—they do not exclude us. These defects were not the consequence of sin directly; they were not the consequence of moral evil—that is, sinful choices, or acts of human will. How liberating this is! Rather these unhappy, or unfortunate conditions which result from sin indirectly—they are manifestations of this disorder which comes from a lack of alignment with God’s pre-Fall design—the original goodness and perfection. Congenital lameness, and blindness, are of the same order as hurricanes, earthquakes and tidal waves—they are signs of chaos, disorder and confusion in the natural order. Those who are handicapped, or disabled in these ways are not morally culpable or responsible for their conditions. **There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, (set their minds on) the things of the Spirit. (v. 5)**

Please attend to how closely Paul’s theology in Romans aligns with the truth we have been expounding in John 8. How it is that we must be born from above! Then we know who we are—where we are from and where we are going. Those born of God are united with God—it happens in the here and now and it persists forever. It is the impact and aftermath of Easter!

And yet these afflictions do occur, and what are we to do about that? Embrace them as *occasions* for **the works of God to be revealed in him** (them, 9:3)—in other words God, in His tender mercy, can and sometimes does heal them miraculously and, this is not to be overlooked, God also stirs up creativity, inventiveness and compassion *on the natural level* through medical interventions and technological advances. We have accessibility, and we have equipment to assist those who are impaired to live a fuller life of activity and engagement.

And all of this is **from the hand of God**—by which I mean it doesn’t just happen. It is all compassion, purposeful and intentional.

Now the incident in John 9, although it involves a blind beggar, isn’t presented to us as Jesus’ response to a request. And yet the corresponding incident in Acts 3, presents the lame man as begging for alms—that is, private support through public volunteerism—not healing, not wholeness, not strength to walk. Alms are an avenue for able people to show compassion to the disadvantaged; it is encouraged in our faith. But Acts 3 follows John 9 in this: that both supply occasion for the **works of God to be revealed**. Such occasions fill our world today. What will we do?

The lame beggar asked for alms. Peter doesn’t have the wealth, gold or silver, to make a contribution. Peter says, **Look at us.** When the man complies, **expecting two receive something from them (v.5), Peter says, what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.** When the

man obeys, and is lifted up, **immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them** (v. 5-8).

This is quite striking! In John 9, Jesus commands the blind beggar, **Go, wash in the pool of Siloam. So he went and washed, and came back seeing.** (v.7) Interestingly, we are back at the temple—the ensuing dialogue is in the temple where Jesus taught. The formerly blind man has gone where he was previously forbidden to go *for worship* and, while it is not stated explicitly, we may infer, gently, that perhaps he went in to worship and that what transpired—the controversy, debate and suspicious accusations—all that followed were not anticipated. But doesn't the same pattern unfold in the uproar surrounding the healing of the lame beggar?! Isn't it ironic that similar dynamics surround instances of miraculous healing to this day! Healing is controversial, identity is controversial—Jesus is controversial and so is Easter. Shall we seek to live as if it never happened?

Be that controversy what it may, we note neither man asked for divine healing and both received favor.

Further, we note that the finite condition of man (in strength to stand, or sight to see) was addressed—finite strength was enhanced by infinite strength! God intervened. Of course, God intervened. That is what God does. Yes, even Easter is about God adding strength to our weakness, thoroughly, seamlessly—so blending it all that it becomes quite impossible for us to say where our weakness ended, and God's strengthening began. It is all so instant, momentary, real. Seriously, one moment the man who has never seen before gains his sight . . . *and now he sees*. A man who has never been able to stand, or walk . . . suddenly knows well enough how to both run and leap? His inner ear had never, prior to this moment, stabilized his balance *but it does now!* It did not take weeks of physical theory; it didn't take a series of operations to restore the other's sight. *It took no time at all.*

And both men come to saving belief in Jesus. John 9 details that development in person, explicitly, Peter explains the second instance implicitly: **Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.** (Acts 3:16)

Now the account in John 9 is about human blindness in particular and more generally, the blindness of the Pharisees who insist that they are actually “seeing men.” They are not. And we might observe, they have been blind from birth, raised blind because they were born into a sin condition that necessarily blinded them. The gospel account is about the blindness of the human condition. And the same may be concluded about the healing of the man **lame from his mother's womb.**

We are all “lame, halt and blind,” We are all needy but God, seeing and hearing our distress, send His Son to save and mend us. And that is the essence of Easter. Amen