

Mud in your Eye
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John 9:6

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Ταῦτα εἰπὼν
ἔπτυσεν χαμαὶ
καὶ ἐποίησεν πηλὸν ἐκ τοῦ πύσματος
καὶ ἐπέχρισεν αὐτοῦ τὸν πηλὸν
ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς

(CSB)

After he said these things
he spit on the ground,
made some mud from the saliva.
and spread the mud
on his eyes

In English, to ptyalize is to spit; ptyalizm = salivation. Or think, “Ptui!”
Pelology is the study of the therapeutic uses of mud; peloid is mud used
therapeutically. And of course, think ophthalmologist for *ophthalmos*.

This whole chapter treats the man born blind. Obviously, if all his eyes
needed were a good washing, that would have happened at some point between
his birth and this event. Jesus went through the procedure of taking various
steps that were probably not medically significant. Yet the steps themselves are
presented as part of the healing process.

The reason the mud was effective was because Jesus was using it for a
purpose. The virtue wasn't really in the mud. What made it “work” was the fact
that Jesus wanted to heal the man. In this respect, the mud was like the staff
of Moses that parted the Red Sea (Exod 14:16). It was like the waters of Jordan
that healed Naaman the leper. It was like the five smooth stones of David that
delivered Israel, like the bronze serpent that saved from death, like the
handkerchiefs that healed (Acts 19:12), like anointing oil (Jms 5:14).

Jesus made the spittle-clay effective, as God seemingly made Jacob's use of whittled sticks efficacious (Gen 30:37 – 39), Elisha's salt curative (2 Kgs 2:21), Nebuchadnezzar's arrows and liver point to Jerusalem (Ezek 21:21), Pharaoh's dream revelatory (Genesis 41), and so on. God in his wisdom used these things as means by which he accomplished his purposes. This is formally called the doctrine of secondary means. Here is a quote from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 5, on Providence:

God is the first cause, and in relationship to him everything happens unchangeably and infallibly. However, by this same providence, he orders things to happen from secondary causes.

God providentially rules the world and is the Lord of history—but often he does so through the use of secondary means. Joseph said, “You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people” (Gen 50:20). God used Judas' betrayal to move events along to their fateful climax resulting in the salvation of the world. “For the Son of Man will go away as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22). God raises up awful people to punish Israel, but in turn will punish those awful people (Habakkuk).

God works through secondary means to accomplish his purposes—and his purposes are well known to his people. They are to save the lost like you and me. Jesus interpreted his own miracle for us this way, “I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind” (John 9:39). Educated and elite people—those who should know better—will be revealed as blind to spiritual things. But around the world those who had never been enlightened will be able to see the truth.

This is God's work until Jesus returns—illuminating the humble and exposing the self-assured. And he does this using all manner of secondary means.

What I am describing is called Providence. God providentially uses everything and anything—even spittle and clay—to move your life forward in the direction he intends. And God providentially moves the whole of human history forward toward its inevitable climax—when Jesus returns and judges the world.

I don't know about you, but this is comforting and encouraging to me when things are going badly. It undergirds me with peace so that I don't panic when, for example, I must face surgery or the loss of income or the like. "For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor 4:17).

And this confidence in the here-and-now is connected with that expectation that we have for the future. Someday, the season of secondary means will be over. The Day will come when we will be able to see past the means to the One who orchestrates them. The providential hand of God will no longer be hidden behind spit and mud. Jesus will descend from heaven as he once ascended, and every eye shall see him. He will directly look you in the eye with love and joy.

It is in that hope that we endure today. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!