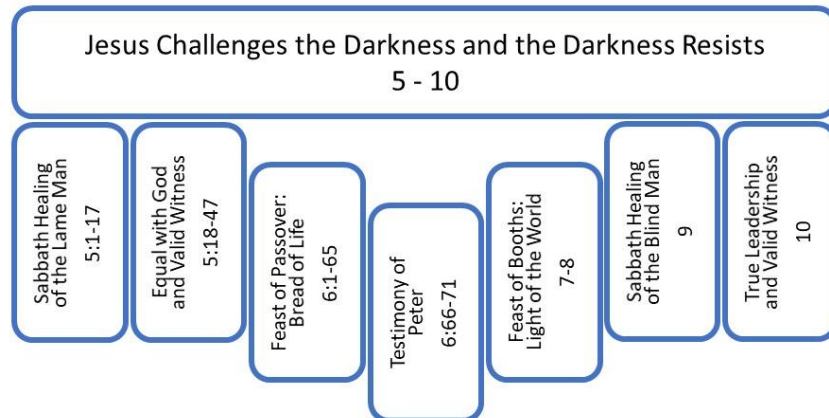


Lesson 17: John 9 The Light of the World and the Blindness of Men

Introduction



John 9 begins, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?” The question by the disciples reveals their theological assumption about a man born with the handicap of blindness. They do not believe his blindness results from purely random, natural factors. They believe God must have a purpose for the blindness. Jesus will affirm that assumption that God is in control of the circumstances of life, including the blindness of a baby. God has a plan for every life.

Where the disciples go wrong is assuming that the blindness is a punishment for sin. That’s the assumption. What is not clear to them is whether it is punishment for their parent’s sin or the sin of the man? It seems they thought it possible even for a baby to be held guilty for sin in the womb.

The Bible would agree that blindness is a result of sin if we mean the corruption that entered creation as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, so that the general source for blindness is sin. But the disciples make the mistake that Job’s friends made assuming that pain and suffering in our lives is always the result of some specific sin that we or a loved one have committed. Jesus rejects that assumption. In this case, the blindness of the man had nothing to do with his sin, or his parents.

³ Jesus answered, “*It was* neither *that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Sometimes God allows suffering in our lives as opportunity for us to participate in a glorious work. God is not just using the blind man for his own end, for his own glory. This man’s blindness is also what prepares him to see. The suffering he has so far experienced in life enables him to enter into something new that may not have been possible at all if he had grown up with normal sight. That normal life might have eventually ended in eternal spiritual death. But the life of blindness, for this man at least, is going to end in eternal spiritual life. God has a plan for him that works both for his good and also for God’s glory. The two purposes are intertwined. Jesus goes on to instruct his disciples saying in verse 4 and 5,

⁴ “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.”

Jesus is always the light of the world and is always at work. These words most apply to the present reality of his incarnation. The day is his present ministry and the night his coming crucifixion. During the day of his present ministry Jesus is the light of the world in a special way. He is revealing the Father and revealing himself through his miraculous signs, through his teaching, and through his interaction with people. He is the light that reveals.

Interestingly, Jesus uses the plural we here. “We must work the works of him who sent me.” Jesus is including his disciples in this ministry of revelation. They are participating together with him. Now, of course, Jesus is central, but this blind man is going to participate and contribute in the display of God’s glory.

For us, living now, Jesus continues to be the light of the world and the Father continues to work for the display of his glory, his nature, his name. And we who believe participate in the display of his glorious name. That display of the glory of God is right and just and good and loving, because God is uniquely the center of all things. He is that which is good and beautiful and true. And it is right and just and good to honor and praise, to point the whole universe to the wonder of his glorious nature. God himself must give attention to his own glory. He is uniquely in the position to do that because he is good and he himself is the source and display of all that which is truly good. So, if God is going to be good, even God must magnify the goodness of his own nature. He cannot deny or reject himself as the source of all truth, all beauty, all goodness. And God is unique in this. We don't point everybody to our own goodness. We point everybody to God's goodness. But God also points people to his own goodness. He is the one for whom it is good and right to magnify himself. It is truly amazing how humbly he does this as the Son Jesus Christ. Yet, he still does it. Jesus displays the glory of his own nature. The light displays the light.

We exist to magnify the glory of God. The glory of everything that is good and true and beautiful. He is the center. He is the focus. And the magnification of his name is our greatest calling. It is also our greatest blessing. To magnify him makes us whole. It is also our greatest gift to magnify him to the people around us, we help them see God, to learn to glorify, to love God, to become whole.

Jesus' answer to his disciples applies to us also. Why was I born like this? However I am born, with this personality, these weaknesses, these strengths, these life circumstances, why? I will tell you why. So, that the works of God might be displayed in you. That you might reflect the glory of God. And we must do the works of the one who sent us as long as today is today. Jesus has sent us into the world to do the works that display the glory and goodness of God.

Back to the event at hand. Jesus had already declared himself the light of the world. He declares it again here, "I am the light of the world!" And he performs a sign that is going to highlight the reality of who he is. The account starts with Jesus and the blind man, then it is going to move into a debate. Jesus is not going to be there. It is going to be between the blind man and the religious leaders. But then it is going to come back to Jesus and the blind man.

So, first, Jesus and the blind man, John 9:6-14.

Jesus and the blind man (9:6-14)

⁶ When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing. ⁸ Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Others were saying, "This is he," *still* others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." ¹⁰ So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed, and I received sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know." ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.

The method of this miracle is interesting. Jesus does not simply speak as he does elsewhere. He makes mud to put on the eyes. Spittle is considered in this time as both unclean and also contrary to that as having special properties. So, Jesus' action could be taken as a healer using the properties of clay and spit to bring about sight. But that is not what is going on here. Jesus is adding to the symbolic message of the sign by using the mud. And that is going to come out later. It's very intentional.

It is also interesting that the man does not see until he obeys. So, far in this Gospel, Jesus is the one who is sent. He is sent from the Father. Jesus is also going to be the one who sends. His disciples will become sent ones. This blind man is being sent by Jesus to a pool called Sent. He is a sent one. And it is through obedience that he sees. So, remember John 8:12. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world; he who

follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." Jesus does not simply say he who believes in me will not walk in darkness. He says, "he who follows me will not walk in darkness." To follow is to obey the word of Jesus. As he also said in John 8:31-32, "If you continue in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Jesus has given a word, a task, to the blind man. And if he will abide in that word, if he will follow in that word, he will be set free from his blindness. Obedience to the task does not earn him sight. Obedience shows a yielding to Jesus as Lord and the result is sight. When we yield to Jesus as the light by actually living according to his word, then our sight increases. It seems that Jesus builds this message into the sign. He could have just said, "Open your eyes and see!" Instead, he says, "Go as a sent one and the result will be sight."

Seeing the man people began to debate. Is this the blind man? It is the blind man. It can't be the blind man. He looks like the blind man. The man confirms it. He says, "I am the blind man. I used to be." And when asked, the man explains what Jesus did for him. Then in verse 14 we get a conclusion to this initial report telling us, "Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes." Jesus got in trouble with the religious leaders in chapter 5 when he healed a lame man on a Sabbath. In that case, Jesus did not do work himself, unless it can be argued that miraculous healing is work. But he did instruct the lame man to do what the Pharisees considered work when he told him, "Pick up his mat and go." So, Jesus told him to do work on the Sabbath. That is not really work in the sense of Torah law work. That is no clear at all. But it is work in the sense of the Jewish rules about what defines work. Here, in this passage, Jesus himself does the work by making the clay to use in the healing process. And he does that intentionally. Jesus is setting up this conflict. On Sabbath he intentionally makes mud.

But right now, he is nowhere to be found, so some busy-bodies bring the former blind man to the Pharisees for questioning. The report of the interrogation is in 9:15-34. So we will start it here.

Debate between the blind man and religious leaders (9:15-34)

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ¹⁶ Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath."

Yes, obviously this man is not from God. Because he took some dirt and he spit on it and he made mud and he put it on the eyes of the blind man and that blind man now sees. This is obviously not a man from God because he is working on the Sabbath. He does work. He makes mud. He is evil. He is sinful.

Why did Jesus make the mud? He made the mud to show us the Pharisees are blind. A man is standing in front of them who was born blind and they all see him every day at the temple begging. And he is blind. And he can't see. And now he sees. And they don't care that he sees. It doesn't even enter into their conversation. What they care about is that Jesus made some mud out of dirt and spit on the Sabbath day. How twisted is that? How blind? It is not that they are blinded by the rules of the law. They are blinded dark in their hearts. They want to reject Jesus. And they are looking for some way to reject Jesus. And this infraction, not even of the Torah, but of the rules they have made up to create a boundary for Torah, in breaking those rules, they say, "Aha! You see. You see what kind of man he is." And the religious rules of their over-zealous Sabbath keeping provide a pretense for what their hearts want; to condemn Jesus.

But not everyone is wholly blind. The text goes on.

But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet."

That is not untrue. It is an understatement. Jesus is more than a prophet. But he is a prophet. And at this point, that's the best the formerly blind man can conclude. But the opponents of Jesus do not want to concede the point. Going on in verse 18,

¹⁸ The Jews then did not believe *it* of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, ¹⁹ and questioned them, saying, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered them and said, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. ²³ For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

At the beginning of the Feast of Booths in chapter 7, verse 13, we are told people were afraid to debate about Jesus openly for fear of the Jewish leaders. And here we are told more specifically what that fear was all about. The religious leaders had already made it known that confession of Jesus as Christ will result in excommunication from the synagogue. You will be kicked out. And that’s a series threat where so much of life happens around religion, and there is only one acceptable religion. This is a mono-religious culture. There is no other religious community to belong to. You can’t just switch to a different denomination and start attending the church down the street. To be thrown out of the Synagogue means to be truly shut out from society. Understandably the man’s parents are afraid. He is not going to be so afraid. He has been shut out of society all his life. But his parents are afraid. And they do not have the courage to stand up for their adult son, so the Pharisees go at him again. The dialogue is enlightening. This is verse 24,

²⁴ So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, “Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.”

That is what’s called verbal irony. “Give glory to God; we know that Jesus is a sinner.” Claiming to be on God’s side, these leaders detract from the glory of God. They call the Son of God a sinner. But the formerly blind man gives glory to God by rejecting that charge.

²⁵ He then answered, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

Wow. That’s the true testimony of every believer. “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.” This man, though, this man is speaking literally. He is not speaking spiritually, yet. He is speaking literally. I could not see. And then he touched my eyes. He put some mud on me, and he sent me to wash, and now I see.

Every time I read this, I think I read it too fast. A blind man sees. I don’t pause to think about what that like? To never see the sky, those blues. And the greens of the trees. The purple, the lavender, the pink of a flower, the yellow. To never see the face of the person you love most, the smile, the glint in the eyes, the color of the eyes, the response to you, the face, the face that loves you. To only imagine a truth of color but with no reference by which you can even understand what color is. What is beauty? What is that even? That makes no sense, if you have always been blind. And then to see. I just googled right now “a blind man sees”. Try that. And I watched a video of a man who is seeing his wife for the first time in his life. Then I googled “girl that sees her mom for the first time”. So, now I can’t see because I am crying.

But to see! The human heart is born blind and to see the face of God smiling at you, that is what the Spirit of God does for us when he opens the eyes of our heart and know that. At times, before that, we can sense him from the creation. The sun suggests his warmth. Color suggests his beauty. The ocean suggests his power, the night sky his immensity. But to be born again of his spirit is to enable us to see his goodness and his smile and his holiness. It is a spiritual sight we are not born with as human beings. We are born dead blind. We cannot see God unless he grants us sight. And for now when he does, our sight here is like looking through a cloudy glass. We see dimly. But we get a glimpse. We begin to see the smile of his face, the glory of his goodness. But one day, one day, we are going to see God clearly, face to face in glory.

The man said, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

²⁶ So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?"

So, they are stuck on the mud.

²⁷ He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear *it* again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?"

The conversation is taking a turn here. The formerly blind man is becoming defensive. He is upset. He is tired of them trying to make Jesus into something bad, to twist what he knows is good. And they can use all their learning and all their Bible knowledge, they are the educated ones, they are the ones with power, but he still knows, "I was blind and now I see." But they don't like taking this from him, so they reviled him, verse 28,

²⁸ They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from."

Oh, really? You claim to know Moses, but you don't know where this man is from. Jesus has already leveled this charge. Moses spoke about me. Abraham spoke about me. The Father loves me. If you do not see the Father in me. You do not know the Father. You do not follow Moses. The man does not make such an eloquent argument. He just says,

³⁰ ..."here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. ³² Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."

What do you mean that you know he is a sinner? Do sinners open the eyes of blind men? And the man is not even asking them to give a definitive answer. Could we at least consider this? Will you at least consider that the guy's good? He healed me. You are stuck in the mud. But I see.

And so, the unlearned beggar sees what the educated leaders of society do not see. They are the ones who know the Bible. They are the ones who are tasked as stewards to await the coming king. The king has come, and they reject him. They grope in the darkness with mud caked on their eyes. With no way to respond to the experience and logic of the formerly blind man. And so, emotion overtakes the m. Verse 34,

³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?"

(Yes. He actually is teaching you.)

So they put him out.

Jesus and the blind man (9:35-41)

That, thankfully, is not where the story ends. We have Jesus with the blind man. And then we have the blind man on trial with the pharisees. Now we come back to Jesus and the blind man again. And I love the next part. This will be verse 35-41.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"

That's priceless, that's wonderful! He has no clue who is the Son of Man. Tell me who is the son of man? I think he has an idea of the title, according to the response he is going to give. I think he might understand the Son of Man to be the Son of Man of Daniel 7 who is going to rule over the kingdoms of the earth. But he doesn't know who is the Son of Man. "Tell me which guy it is. Who is the Son of Man?" But he is sure of Jesus. Jesus is from God, and he is at the very least a prophet. "And whatever you tell me Jesus, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?"

³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you."

³⁸ And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.

Is this true belief? That has been a regular question in John. Is this true belief? Yes, this is true belief. Jesus chose to entrust himself to this man, declaring himself “Son of Man” to this man, knowing already his heart. And then the text tells us the man believes, and “he worshiped him.” Now that’s really strange for a Jew to worship a man. A Gentile might get confused about whether or a man is a god-man or not. That fits into their worldview. You could be talking to Apollos or Zeus. You don’t know. So, like when Cornelius received a vision about Peter and Peter shows up, Cornelius bows down and starts to worship him. And Peter has to say, “Get up. I am just a man like you.” Jews do not tend to make that mistake unless it is an angel. And then they might fall down and start worshipping. They are overcome. Maybe what is most surprising here is that Jesus does as Peter does, “Get up, I am just a man.” No, Jesus, even incarnate in the flesh, Jesus receives worship, and he doesn’t correct the guy. This is telling us something both about the heart of the man who has just believed, it is a heart of worship, and about Jesus who understands himself to be worthy of worship, to receive worship. Only God does that.

After this, Jesus makes the last comment of chapter 9, and presumably, it is for this crowd of people that are always around him. He can’t escape. But he must have met this guy in the temple, some public place, and there is a crowd around. And this is verse 39-41.

³⁹ And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.”

⁴⁰ Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, “We are not blind too, are we?”

⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

This is Jesus speaking as in a parable. We have to pay really close attention to what he is saying to work it out. There is tension again as we have already seen in John with the word judgment. Did Jesus come to the world to act as a judge? No, that was not his primary purpose of coming into the world. He is the judge. But he did not come into the world with the purpose of judging. He could have done that from heaven. He came into the world to save the world. That we read in 3:17. But did Jesus’ coming into the world initiate judgment. Yes, you can’t proclaim gospel, you can’t shine light into darkness without revealing the true nature of darkness, and its response to the light. Revealing the true nature of human beings and their need for a Savior inevitably leads to the salvation of some but also to a clarified judgment on those who reject the light. They might say, “Were God to speak directly to me, if God would just tell me that he is, I would believe.” Really? Would you? If you had been there in front of Jesus and you had seen the miracles of Jesus would you do better than these men? Do not be so sure. Were God to speak to you directly, you just might pick up a stone to kill him. Be careful how much stock you put in your own ability to judge and respond to spiritual truth. You are not as good as you like to think you are. You are not as insightful. You are not as spiritual. Those who assume they know or would know do not fare well in most of the history of Jesus on earth.

Those who do not see but come to see, those are the ones in darkness, but they know they are in darkness, and they see the light. And they respond to the light. They are the sinful who admit their sin, gratefully receive the grace of Jesus and follow him.

Those who see here in this text are those who claim to see, not those who really see. The seeing are those seeing who claim to see. They are people like the Pharisees who say, “Give glory to God; we know this man is a sinner.” They claim to know but do not know, to see without sight.

Jesus concludes, saying, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.” In that sense, “If you were blind” means, “If you acknowledged your blindness, if you would admit you cannot see,” then you could turn to Jesus and in turning to Jesus you would have no sin. You would be placed into grace. The reason their sin remains, reason their sin remains as a result of the claiming to see, is that the claim to see is a claim that “we know this man is a sinner.” In their sight they see that Jesus is not the Messiah. In their self-declared knowledge, sight, seeing, they

reject Jesus. And that is the one thing, the one thing, we must not do. Cannot do. And so, their sin remains.

Conclusion

Concluding, we are on the second “I am” statement of the book of John. We had “I am the Bread of life” and now we have “I am the Light of the World.” And John gives us two instances of Jesus claiming to be the light of the world. The first was in chapter 8:12 at the Feast of Booths. The resulting dialogue highlighted the blindness of the Jewish leaders and the crowds of people interacting with Jesus. Even those who claimed to believe, who claimed to see, by the end of the story they are picking up stones to kill him. They did not get what he was saying, and they were not willing to follow him as the guide to truth. They were not willing to abide in truth and so, be set free.

This second declaration in chapter 9 of “I am the Light” provides a positive opportunity for John to highlight someone who responds to the light. The majority in the story still reject Jesus. And they are going to try to shut out the light. This was declared in the prologue, “He was in the world. And the world was made through him. And the world did not know him. And he came to his own. And those who were his own did not receive him.”

The majority through this gospel do not receive Jesus. Even when we have people who claim to believe, they end up walking away, because they have believed in a Jesus they want, not the Jesus who is. A great response is going to come from this generation. We are mostly negative because that is the reality when Jesus is among them. They reject him. There will be a day at Pentecost when the Spirit is poured out and thousands will be convict of this sin. But that day is not here, yet. Here it is mostly rejection. The majority claim to see and so remain blind. But not everybody. “But to those who receive him, to those who believe in his name...” And here is one. Here is one who had been blind but now truly sees. And seeing, he worships Jesus. Glory to God. Glory to God.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 9:1-41. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind? (You may want to break this up into sections. Start by reading 6:1-14 and making observations. Then 6:15-34. And then 6:35-41.)
2. The pool of Siloam is the pool that the high priest would go and draw from each morning of the Feast of Booths to lead a procession to the temple to give thanks to God for his provision of water and the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. Here we are told that Siloam means “Sent.” How do you understand the significance of being sent and seeing, both in this text and then also in your own Christian experience?
3. Jesus made mud and put it on the eyes of the man that he might see. This act symbolically applies to the Pharisees. They cannot see past the mud in their eyes. They are stuck and cannot see Jesus. How is the blindness of the Pharisees indicated in this text? What do they see? What do they claim to see? What do they not see?
4. In what way do you relate to the Pharisees and in what way do you relate to the blind man?
5. How does this text describing the spiritual state of seeing that applies to the blind man and the spiritual state of blindness that applies to the Pharisees
6. Write a paragraph, or if in a group give a brief description, of how you understand the eyes of your heart to have been opened to Jesus? Would you say that you see with spiritual sight? What do you see that you would not see if you had been left blind?