

John: sermon #10
The miracle of seeing Jesus
(John 9)

Introduction

Jesus performed miracles to meet human needs. But through those miracles he also conveyed truth concerning his identity as Son of God and Messiah. One of the biblical signs of the Messiah was healing of the blind (see Matt. 11:5 from Isa. 35:5-6), and here in John chapter 9 Jesus fulfills the sign. But he also used the miracle to say something about the human condition, for in John 'to see' physically is a metaphor for understanding spiritually. And so chapter 9 is about spiritual blindness as well as physical blindness and about how Jesus, the Messiah heals both physical blindness and spiritual blindness.

The man we meet in chapter 9 was both physically and spiritually blind from birth. But Jesus changed both conditions: The healing of his physical blindness was instantaneous; but the healing of his spiritual blindness unfolded in stages as he progressively came to 'see' Jesus for who he truly is—the Son of God. Let's walk through those stages of unfolding vision with him. May we too see Jesus clearly!

1. Jesus: man (9:1–12)

¹ As he [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

⁶ Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." ¹⁰ "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. ¹¹ He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." ¹² "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

About the only thing a blind man could do in that day was beg, and that is what this man was doing when Jesus passed by. No doubt there were many blind people who would have rejoiced to be healed, but Jesus selected this man. Apparently the man and his parents were well known in the community. It was on the Sabbath when Jesus healed this man (verse 14), so that once again he was deliberately challenging the religious leaders (5:9ff).

The disciples did not look at the man as an object of mercy but rather as a subject for theological discussion. They were sure that the man's congenital blindness was caused by sin, either his own or his parents', but Jesus disagreed. Jesus' comment here in verse three is punctuated in the NIV to suggest that the man's disability was caused by God so that Jesus might heal him. But there is no punctuation in the Greek original, and an alternative punctuation reads like this: "Neither has this man sinned nor his parents. But that the works of God should be made manifest in him, I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day. In any case, **contrary to popular Jewish belief of the time, not all disability is punishment for sin (or the person or their parents). Sometimes bad things just happen.**

Jesus' method of healing was unique: He combined his spit with dirt and made clay; then smeared it on the man's eyes and told him to go wash. This was one of several means Jesus used to heal. Why several means? Perhaps so people would focus on his message rather than on his method. What is the message here? Consider this: God made the first man out of the miry clay, and then sent his Eternal Son in the 'clay' of human flesh. And note the emphasis on the meaning of "Siloam"—"sent." And relate this to "the works of him that sent me" (verse 4). Perhaps Jesus

is enacting a ‘mini-drama’ about his own incarnation as a man (made of clay) sent by the Father.

In any case the healing meant not only deliverance for the blind man; it also meant a crisis of identification surrounding both the blind man and Jesus. Was this really the blind beggar? And who caused him to see? Throughout the rest of John 9, a growing conflict takes place around these two questions. The religious leaders did not want to face the fact that Jesus healed the man, or even that the man had been healed because they could not deny the greatness of this miracle.

Four times in this chapter people asked the man how he was healed (verses 10, 15, 19, 26). First the neighbors asked the man, and then the Pharisees asked him. Not satisfied with his reply, the Pharisees then asked the man’s parents and then gave the son one final interrogation. All of this looked very official and efficient, but it was really an evasive maneuver on the part of both the people and the leaders. The Pharisees wanted to get rid of the evidence, and the people were afraid to speak the truth.

When asked to describe his experience, the man simply told what had happened. All he knew about the person who had done the miracle was that he was “a man called Jesus.” He had not seen our Lord, of course; but he had heard his voice. Not only was the beggar ignorant of Jesus’ identity, but he did not know where Jesus had gone. At this point, the man has been healed, but he has not been saved. The light had dawned, but it would grow brighter when he saw the face of the Lord and worshiped him.

At least twelve times in the Gospel of John, Jesus is called “a man” (4:29; 5:12; 8:40; 9:11, 24; 10:33; 11:47, 50; 18:14, 17, 29; 19:5). John’s emphasis is that Jesus Christ is God, but the apostle John balances it beautifully by reminding us that Jesus is also fully human. The incarnation was not an illusion (1 John 1:1–4).

2. Jesus: prophet (9:13–23) (16-17)

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the

man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. ¹⁷ Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" ²⁰ "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't 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 already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

As custodians of the faith, the Pharisees appropriately investigated this claim of healing. The fact that they studied this miracle in such detail is only further proof that Jesus did indeed heal the man. Since the man was *born blind*, the miracle was even greater, for blindness caused by sickness or injury might suddenly go away.

But Jesus' act of deliberately healing the man on the Sabbath caused the Pharisees great concern. It was illegal to work on the Sabbath; and by making clay, applying it, and healing the man, Jesus had performed three unlawful "works." **The Pharisees should have been praising God for a miracle; instead, they sought evidence to prosecute Jesus. They were judging on the basis of one conclusion: nobody who breaks the Sabbath could be a true prophet of God.** The Pharisees did not realize that Jesus was offering something far greater than the Sabbath Day—the true spiritual rest that comes from God (Matt. 11:28–30).

But the beggar was not intimidated by the threats of the Pharisees. When asked who he thought Jesus was, he boldly said, “He is a prophet!” Some of the Old Testament prophets, such as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, did perform miracles. But the religious leaders did not want to see Jesus given that kind of high designation. “This man is not from God!” (9:16). Perhaps they could discredit the miracle. If so, then they could convince the people that Jesus had plotted the whole thing and was really deceiving the people. He had craftily “switched” beggars so that the sighted man was not the man who had been known as the blind beggar.

The best way to get that kind of evidence would be to interrogate the parents of the beggar, so they called them in and asked them two questions: (1) “Is this your son?” And (2) “How is it that now he can see?” If they refused to answer either question, they were in trouble; or if they answered with replies contrary to what the leaders wanted, they were in trouble.

They answered the first question honestly: he was their son and he had been born blind. They answered the second question evasively: they did not know how he was healed or who healed him. The parents then used the old-fashioned tactic called “passing the buck” by suggesting that the Pharisees ask the man himself. After all, he was of age!

Behind all this evasion lay human fear. People were seeking the honor of men and not the honor that comes from God (5:44). To be sure, it was a serious thing to be excommunicated from the synagogue, but it was far more serious to reject the truth. “The fear of man brings a snare” (Prov. 29:25, NASB). The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus, and the parents were trying to avoid a trap; but the Pharisees and the parents were only ensnaring themselves!

The Pharisees could present a “good case” for their position. After all, they did have the Law of Moses as well as centuries of Jewish tradition. What they failed to understand was that Jesus Christ had fulfilled all of this law and was now bringing something new. In Moses there is preparation; in Jesus there is consummation (see 1:17).

3. Jesus: man from God (9:24–34) (31-34)

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Anxious to settle the case, the Pharisees called the man in and put him under oath. "Give God the glory" is a form of Jewish "swearing in" at court. But here the judges prejudiced everybody from the start. "We know this Man is a sinner." They were warning the witness that he had better cooperate with the court, or he might be excommunicated. But the beggar had experienced a miracle, and he was not afraid to tell them what had happened. He did not debate the character of Jesus Christ, because that was beyond his knowledge and experience. But one thing he did know: now he could see.

For the fourth time, the question is asked, "How did He open your eyes?" (9:10, 15, 19, and 26) I can imagine the man getting quite impatient at this point. After all, he had been blind all his life, and there was so much now to see. **He certainly did not want to spend much longer in a synagogue court, looking at angry faces and answering the same questions.**

We admire the boldness of the man in asking those irate Pharisees if they wanted to follow Jesus. The man expected a negative answer, but he was courageous even to ask it. Unable to refute the evidence, the judges began to revile the witness; and once again Moses is brought into the picture (5:46). They were sure about Moses (though in actuality they

misunderstood Moses who pointed to Jesus), but they were not sure about Jesus. They did not know where he came from. He had already told them that he had come from heaven, sent by the Father (6:33, 38, 41–42, 50–51). They were sure that he was the natural son of Mary and Joseph, and that he was from the city of Nazareth (6:42; 7:41–42). They were judging “after the flesh” (8:15) and not exercising spiritual discernment.

It seemed incredible to the healed man that the Pharisees would not know this Man who had opened his eyes. How many people were going around Jerusalem, opening the eyes of blind people? Instead of investigating the miracle, these religious leaders should have been investigating the person who did the miracle and learning from him. The “experts” were rejecting the stone that was sent to them (Acts 4:11).

The beggar then gave the “experts” a lesson in practical theology. Perhaps he had Psalm 66:18 in mind: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” The leaders called Jesus a sinner (9:24), yet Jesus was used of God to open the blind man’s eyes. He added another telling argument: Jesus healed a man *born* blind. Never, to their knowledge, had this occurred before. So, God not only heard Jesus, but he enabled him to give the man sight. How, then, could Jesus be a sinner?

Again, the leaders reviled the man and told him he was born in sin and then officially excommunicated him from the local synagogue. This meant that the man was cut off from friends and family and looked on by the Jews as a “publican and sinner.” But Jesus came for the “outcasts” and never let them down.

4. Jesus: Lord and God (9:35–41) (35-38)

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If

you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”

The Good Shepherd cares for his sheep. And now Jesus knowing that the formerly blind beggar had been excommunicated, sought him out and opened his spiritual eyes to now see him fully for who he truly is: the Son of God our Lord and Savior, the Light of the world.

It is not enough to know that Jesus is a man (though he is), or a prophet or man of God (though he is both). “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). And John wrote this Gospel to prove that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and Messiah. Here Jesus proclaims to the beggar that he is “The Son of Man” (verse 35). Son of man, as John 5:27 shows, is a designation associated with the role of judgment which the Father has committed to the Son. And here the Son of Man is acknowledging before the Father that this formerly blind beggar is his true follower—which the beggar affirms by proclaiming “Lord, I believe” and worshipping Jesus (verse 38).

“My sheep hear My voice” says Jesus in 10:27. And here the beggar hears and believes. Not only did he trust his Savior, but he worshiped him. Only God is to be worshipped, and Jesus accepted this worship. Indeed Jesus is God as affirmed by John the Baptist (1:34), Nathanael (1:49), Peter (6:69) and now this healed blind beggar.

Wherever Jesus went, some of the Pharisees tried to be present so they could catch him in something he said or did. Seeing them, Jesus now closes this episode by preaching a brief but penetrating sermon on spiritual blindness.

As we learned in John 3:16–17, the *reason* for our Lord’s coming was salvation, but here he reminds us that the *result* of his coming was condemnation of those who seeing refuse to believe. These religious leaders were willfully turning a blind eye to the reality of Jesus’ identity. Therefore, the light of truth only made them more blind. The beggar admitted his need, and he received both physical and spiritual sight. No one is so blind as he who will not see—who thinks he has “all truth” and has nothing more to learn about God (9:28, 34).

The listening Pharisees heard what Jesus said and it disturbed them. “Are we blind too?” they asked, expecting a negative answer. Jesus had already called them “blind leaders of the blind” (Matt. 15:14), so they had their answer. They were blinded by their pride, their self-righteousness, their tradition, and their false interpretation of the Word of God.

Jesus’ reply was a paradox: “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains” (verse 41).

Blindness would at least be an excuse for not knowing what was going on. But they *did* know. Jesus had performed many miracles, yet they ignored the evidence. Jesus is the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) and only those who are blind or refuse to look cannot see the light. The beggar was willing to see and chose to respond and was healed. The Pharisees could see, but were unwilling to believe in Jesus—they made the wrong choice and remained spiritually blind.

Conclusion Prov. 4:18

John has shown us in this sermon lesson that Jesus is a man, a prophet, the man from God, sent as the Messiah, and the Lord God, worthy of worship by those who have now had their eyes healed and opened to know him.

We never meet the healed beggar again in Scripture, but we assume that he became a faithful witness to others about Jesus.

Life was probably difficult for him because of his excommunication from the synagogue. But perhaps he found a new ‘place’ —a new and eternal identity in Christ. Perhaps he led his parents to Christ. Perhaps many others.

Like his call to the blind beggar and to the obstinate Pharisees, Jesus calls people today to see the evidence and to decide to believe in him. The choice is often one between Jesus and family; or Jesus and religious tradition. The blind beggar made the right choice, even though the cost was great. But his reward is great—a reward that he began to experience on earth as he followed the light of Jesus the righteous one.

“The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day” (Proverbs 4:18).

Sermon Series is provided by Ted Johnston via the Senior Pastor Team of Tom and Alberta Ecker to assist ... Bible studies in series covering a book of the Bible.

This issue continues a series in the gospel of John with material from *The Bible Expository Commentary* by Warren Wiersbe, *The New Bible Commentary*, *The Parable of Joy* by Michael Card, and *The Gospel of John* by F.F. Bruce.

Note: Bold script above covered in Worship Services.