

John 9:13-41 (NIV2011)

[At the pool of Siloam, there is a man who has been blind since birth. Jesus heals him. But, as at the Pools of Bethesda, the healing takes place on a Sabbath, again incurring the anger of the Pharisees. They don't believe that the man had really been born blind, so they call his parents to testify.]

¹⁸ They 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 Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," 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 person 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.

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.

*Still another in a seemingly unending stream of confrontations with the authorities?
Today's tale is about the dangers of spiritual blindness and the joy of God's grace.*

When the 9th chapter of John's gospel opens, Jesus is walking along and sees a man who is known to have been blind from birth. Jesus' disciples ask him if the man's blindness was caused by his own sin (hence, before his birth!) or by his parents' sin. In a text box in last week's study, we looked at this notion that our infirmities and accidents must result from our sin. This was a view widely held in the ancient world and still is held by many in our own world. N. T. Wright considers this in his comments on this week's passages:

Thinking like this is a way of trying to hold on to a belief in God's justice. If something in the world seems 'unfair', but if you believe in a God who is both all-powerful, all-loving and all-fair, one way of getting round the problem is to say that it

only *seems* 'unfair', but actually isn't. There was after all some secret sin being punished. This is a comfortable sort of thing to believe if you happen to be well-off, well fed and healthy in body and mind. (In other words, if nobody can accuse *you* of some secret previous sin.)

Jesus firmly resists any such analysis of how the world is ordered. The world is stranger than that, and darker than that, and the light of God's powerful, loving justice shines more brightly than that. But to understand it all, we have to be prepared to dismantle some of our cherished assumptions and to let God remake them in a different way.

We have to stop thinking of the world as a kind of moral slot-machine, where people put in a coin (a good act, say, or an evil one) and get out a particular result (a reward or a punishment). Of course, actions always have consequences. Good things often happen as a result of good actions (kindness produces gratitude), and bad things often happen through bad actions (drunkenness causes car accidents). But this isn't inevitable. Kindness is sometimes scorned. Some drunkards always get away with it.

In particular, you can't stretch the point back to a previous 'life', or to someone else's sins. Being born blind doesn't mean you must have sinned, says Jesus. Nor does it mean that your parents must have sinned. No: something much stranger, at once more mysterious and more hopeful, is going on. The chaos and misery of this present world is, it seems, the raw material out of which the loving, wise and just God is making his new creation.¹

Jesus dismisses the idea that sin has anything to do with the man's blindness. Rather, God is making something good from the man's affliction, in that the kingdom of God will be seen by his healing; the light will shine for all to see. So Jesus took a bit of dirt, spit on it, and rubbed the mixture on the man's eyes. Jesus then told the man to go the Pool of Siloam and clean his eyes. "So the man went and washed, and came home seeing." The man had lived in darkness and now lives in the light. The deeper meaning of Jesus' healing is pretty hard to miss.

And so the man came home seeing! Well, you can imagine the ruckus that created. The man lived with his parents and the whole neighborhood is abuzz with questions and speculations about what has happened. Many think that folks are mixed up. Surely, they are confused. The man who claims to now see can't be the one who was born blind. Who had ever heard of such a thing? There was no hope for such a man.

When a few folks asked the formerly blind man who had healed him or, at least, where he had gone, the man didn't know. So the crowd takes the man to the Pharisees, figuring they'll be able to sort it out.

The Pharisees are, typically, angered that the healing took place on the Sabbath, and they refuse to believe that the man had been born blind. Since the man was "obviously" a sinner to have been born blind, and since the supposed healing had taken place on the Sabbath, and since only the power of God could actually accomplish such a miracle – then it follows that the man must be fraud! To make matters worse, when pressed, the poor fellow tells the Pharisees that the man who healed him is a "prophet," probably the most prestigious title the man could think of.

Trying to expose the fraud, the Pharisees send for the man's parents, who acknowledge him as their son but throw the controversy back on their son. Why don't they stand up for their son? Fear. The Pharisees have already said that anyone who aligns themselves with Jesus will find themselves kicked out of the local synagogue, which would be tantamount to be shunned by the community. Like too many of us, they find themselves frozen by fear, when it is "perfect love" that casts it out (1 John). Few of us are as brave as we'd like to think we'd be.

¹ Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (133–134). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

In desperation, the Pharisees haul the man in a second time and things go from bad to worse. When the man won't back down, they urge him to give glory to God and tell the truth. But the only truth he knows is that he was blind and now he sees. He was in darkness, now he is in the light. He is the recipient of God's grace. How or why he doesn't know. But he embraces the gift; it is the truth.

Tempers flare and accusations fly. In the end, the man is "excommunicated" from the synagogue and sent away.

Now I see

Some time later, when Jesus hears that the man has been removed from the synagogue, he finds him. Now, Jesus reveals to the man the full truth. Jesus is the Son of Man. The man's response? To call Jesus "Lord" and to worship him. How could his response be any other? Jesus has brought him into the light, not only by restoring his vision so that he can see this world, but by bring him into the full light of Christ, who is the light of the world.

As for the Pharisees, some overhear Jesus and the man. They ask Jesus, "Are we blind too?" His response is simple. If they were truly blind, they could hardly be blamed for being in darkness, unable to see Jesus for who he is. But they claim to see well, and their claim only reveals that they are still in the darkness, for they turn a blind eye to Jesus.

In John's gospel, sin isn't a bunch of moral choices we make; sin is living in the darkness rather than in the light of Christ. Thus, gift of rescue is a matter of coming into the light, forsaking blindness and embracing Christ with clear eyes.

"Was blind but now I see" . . . amazing grace, indeed.

"I am the bread of life"

In chapter 6 of John's gospel, he feeds a multitude with a few loaves and fish. He offers them the "food that will endure," better even than the manna that God had provided to their ancestors in the wilderness.

The next day, the crowds are waiting to get their bellies filled again when Jesus declares to them, "I am the bread of life." Jesus himself is the nourishment needed for eternal life. This is the first of seven profound moments in John's gospel when Jesus declares "I am the . . ." Why seven? Because it is the number which signified wholeness and completeness; God created the cosmos in seven days. Why is the "I am" significant? Because it is the name of God given to Moses at the burning bush (see Exodus 3).

This simple statement, "I am the bread of life," had to rock the crowd back on its heels. Jesus, this man from Nazareth, is the bread from heaven, he says, sent by God the Father, so that who believes in him may have eternal life. Jesus is the nourishment, the bread, that sustains eternal life, which neither hunger nor thirst can touch. Further, it is Jesus, he claims, who will raise the dead on the last day!

Let's be clear here: Jesus is claiming to be much more than the miraculous manna of the Exodus. The path to eternal life lies through him. He will do what only God can do - resurrect the dead. To some, even many, who listened, this must have seemed blasphemous. Little wonder that Jesus' claims drew quick opposition.

But Jesus is not through. He is the bread of life, the nourishment needed for eternal life. "Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (6:51). And so Jesus brings the crowd to the cross and to the deep mystery of his body and his blood. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day . . . those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."

One can't miss the sacramental language here, speaking to the deep mystery of what we call Holy Communion. These words help us to understand why most Christians have seen Holy Communion as more than a mere remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. Instead, we embrace that in the bread and the cup, Christ is present. It is the bread of heaven, Jesus the Christ, who nourishes us for eternal life, who will sustain our resurrected bodies. The only question for us is this: Will we trust Jesus?

“I am the light of the world”

Beginning in John 7, we find Jesus in Jerusalem for the fall festival of Booths. As a Law-keeping Jew, Jesus would have come to the temple at least three times a year, for each of the three major festivals. This year’s trip to Booths would be more memorable than most. What we find is a man in an ever-growing confrontation with his opponents. Jesus teaches with authority and the crowds wonder where he could have acquired such learning (7:14-24). Whispers and rumors begin to fly around the city; the people begin to wonder why Jesus hasn’t been arrested, given what he has said and done. They ask, “Can it be that the authorities really know this is Messiah?” (7:26). In response, the temple priests and Pharisees send out officers to arrest Jesus during the festival, though they are unable to do so.

The confrontation continues to grow. The crowds are divided about Jesus, as are even the priests and Pharisees. When Jesus comes upon a crowd beginning to stone a woman for adultery, he confronts them, suggesting that whoever is without sin throw the first stone . . . and the crowd slinks away, one by one.

Then, with the seemingly innocent statement, “I am the light of the world,” Jesus rocks the crowds again. Just as Jesus claimed to be the true “bread of life,” the nourishment needed for eternal life, Jesus now takes upon himself the fulfillment of what the light represents. The Law is the light . . . now, Jesus is the Law. Isaiah’s servant of God is the light . . . now, Jesus is that servant. God is the light that banishes the darkness . . . now, Jesus is the incarnation of God.

Anyone with ears to hear would understand the weight of Jesus’ words. Indeed, those who would charge him with blasphemy would be right in doing so, unless Jesus is the One whom he is claiming to be.

The Pharisees understand Jesus’ claim and demand to know why they should believe him. Jesus says this about himself, but where is the second witness wisely demanded by the Law of Moses?

Jesus’ first response seems almost non-responsive. He need not produce a witness because he knows from whence he has come (8:14-15). That alone makes his testimony valid. Of course, such an answer wouldn’t satisfy the Pharisees. Why should they believe the implied claim he came from above, any more than the claim that he is the light? Then, Jesus tells them he does have another witness who can testify to the truth of Jesus’ claims.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Our Connection Groups have been watching segments of the film, *The Gospel of John*, each week. Chapter 9 of John’s gospel begins at 1:16:17 of the film and ends at 1:24:15.

1. The story of the blind man who then sees is one of the most dramatic pieces of story-telling in John’s gospel. There are no long theological discussions or presentations; the story itself, as John tells it, carries the theological meaning. It is a meaning grounded in the acknowledgment that without Jesus we are blind and live in darkness.

a. Have you ever encountered an event that seemed beyond explanation? How open are you, really, to seeing things as works of God? How do you think you’d know one if you saw one? How could we improve our “vision” of God and his work in this world?

b. In the view of John’s gospel, much of the world lives in darkness but, tragically, doesn’t even know it. Do you agree with this? What is some evidence of this darkness? . . . And don’t fall back on the “easy-to-see” evidence of murder and violence. What evidence do you see in your own daily life?

2. The parents of the blind man fear being made outcasts. That is perfectly understandable. Most of us are pretty ordinary folks and not given over to startling acts of bravery. Still, what acts of courage have you personally seen when it comes to matters of faith? How could we all become more courageous Christians?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, John 10:1-19 Jesus takes upon himself the image of God as the Good Shepherd. Why do those who oppose him (“the Jews”) think he must be possessed by a demon?</p>	<p>Tuesday, John 10:22-42 Jesus’ revelation of his relationship with God culminates in v.38: “The Father and I are one.” Why do you think that so many do not believe? Why do some believe?</p>
<p>Wednesday, John 11:1-27 Why do you think Jesus delays in going to Lazarus? What do you think he does for those two days? Why is Jesus glad that he wasn’t there when Lazarus died? Why is Martha and later Mary so caught up in “If only . . .”? What does Jesus mean by saying that those who believe in him will never die? Why does Jesus weep?</p>	<p>Thursday, John 11:28-44 Again, why is Jesus deeply disturbed? How does this resuscitation of Lazarus show the glory of God (v. 40)? Does Jesus ever pray for Lazarus’ raising? How does this raising differ from Jesus’ resurrection?</p>
<p>Friday, John 11:45-57 The Jewish high council passes a death sentence on Jesus. What is the irony in Caiaphas’ talk of letting one man die? What does this scene say about Jesus’ later appearance before the Jewish authorities after his arrest?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

