

The Gospel of John

Lesson 14: The Healing of the Man Born Blind -- John 9:1-41

The disciples see a problem to be explained; Jesus sees a person to be healed. They pass a man who has been blind since birth, and their first instinct is theological dissection: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" They want to assign blame, to fit the suffering into a tidy formula. Jesus refuses the formula. "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Then He spits on the ground, makes mud, spreads it on the man's eyes, and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man goes, washes, and comes back seeing for the first time in his life.

What follows is one of the most human and almost comic chapters in the Gospel, as the religious authorities tie themselves in knots trying to explain away a miracle they cannot deny. They interrogate the man. They interrogate his parents, who are so afraid of being thrown out of the synagogue that they say, "Ask him; he is of age." They drag the healed man back for a second interrogation, trying to get him to denounce Jesus as a sinner. And this man, who knows almost no theology, gives one of the great answers in all of Scripture: "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

You can watch his faith grow right before your eyes under all that pressure. At first Jesus is just "the man called Jesus." Then He is "a prophet." Then, as the man reasons it through, he declares that this healer must be "from God." The harder they push him to deny Christ, the more clearly he sees who Christ is. And when they finally throw him out of the synagogue for it, Jesus seeks him out, the way He always seeks out the ones the religious system rejects, and reveals Himself fully, and the man falls down and worships Him.

And then Jesus says the line that turns the whole story inside out: "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." The man born physically blind ends the chapter seeing in every sense. The religious leaders who could see physically end the chapter blind to the Son of God standing in front of them. This is a story about two kinds of blindness, and only one of them is healed by mud and water. Read it and ask honestly which blindness is the more dangerous, and whether you are as sure as you think you are that you can see.

Group Discussion: The disciples wanted to know whose sin caused the man's blindness, but Jesus pointed instead to what God would do through it (vv. 2-3). Why are we so quick to look for someone to blame in suffering, and how does Jesus' response reshape the way we think about hardship?

Personal Reflection: The healed man kept it simple under pressure: "though I was blind, now I see" (v. 25). What is the "I was blind, now I see" of your own story, the change Christ has made that you can testify to even if you cannot explain everything?

Read John 9:1–41

Study Questions

1. When asked who sinned to cause the man's blindness, Jesus answered that it was "that the works of God might be displayed in him" (v. 3). What does this teach us about the relationship between suffering and sin, and about God's purposes in our hardships?
2. The man's testimony was disarmingly simple: "though I was blind, now I see" (v. 25). When you are pressed about your faith and feel you do not have all the answers, how can the simple testimony of what Christ has done in you be enough?
3. As the man was questioned, his understanding of Jesus grew from "the man called Jesus," to "a prophet," to one who is "from God," until he worshiped Him (vv. 11, 17, 33, 38). What does this growth teach us about how faith deepens, especially under opposition?
4. The healed man's parents were afraid to speak because they feared being "put out of the synagogue" (vv. 22–23). Where does fear of rejection or exclusion tempt you to stay silent about Christ, and what would courage look like for you?
5. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind" (v. 39). What are the two kinds of blindness and sight in this chapter, and why is spiritual blindness more dangerous than physical blindness?
6. The religious leaders were confident they could see, yet were blind to the Son of God in front of them (vv. 40–41). Where might you be overconfident that you "see" clearly, and how do you guard against that kind of blindness?
7. Jesus deliberately healed on the Sabbath again, and the leaders said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath" (v. 16). What does their reaction reveal about how rules can blind us to the works and heart of God?
8. After the man was cast out, "Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and... found him" (v. 35). When have you felt cast out or rejected, and how does it comfort you that Jesus seeks out those whom others push away?
9. The chapter contrasts a man with little theological training who came to see and worship Christ, with learned leaders who remained blind. Jesus told them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (v. 41). What does this teach about the kind of humility that receives spiritual sight, and the kind of proud self-sufficiency that keeps people in darkness?
10. Look back over this story of a man who moved from darkness to sight to worship. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to see Him more clearly and to worship Him more truly?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 42:6-7, the servant who opens blind eyes; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6, the god of this world blinding minds, and God shining light in our hearts; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, God choosing the lowly to shame the wise; Psalm 146:8, the Lord who opens the eyes of the blind; 1 John 1:6-7, walking in the light versus claiming light while in darkness.