

# John 9:1-23

And so we're beginning a two-week study on John 9, the story of how Jesus healed a man who was born blind. Before we look at the context, I want to spend a few moments asking a question about our text for this week and the next: why does John spend one chapter on one miracle? (And when you consider that only 12 of the 21 chapters of John's Gospel are actually about Jesus' ministry (the last 9 chapters detail the night before his death, the passion, resurrection and post-resurrection appearances), the amount of time John spends on this miracle is all the more impressive.)

For those looking for a little extra credit, notice that this miracle precedes the "Good Shepherd" discourse which precedes the raising of Lazarus from the dead. (Itself a miracle that takes even longer to relate than the healing of the man born blind.)

These three elements of John's gospel can be put together. The healing of the man born blind puts to rest any lingering doubts about Jesus' identity (and relationship to the Father) left over from his conflict with the Jews that was covered last week. The Good Shepherd discourse teaches us more about what the one who is sent from the Father who is before Abraham was born is all about; the raising of Lazarus from the dead shows us what that looks like.

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## 9:1

We do not know how much time passed since Jesus little run-in with the Jews at the end of chapter 8. So what this tells us is that John is starting a new "context" with chapter 9. John sets the stage for the rest of the chapter.

## 9:2

Calling Jesus "Rabbi"... we've been here before.

- 1:38 → Andrew and an unnamed disciple call Jesus "Rabbi" when they first encounter him.
- 1:49 → Nathanael calls Jesus "Rabbi" when he first encounters him.
- 3:2 → Nicodemus calls Jesus "Rabbi" when he first encounters him.
- 4:31 → The disciples call Jesus "Rabbi" after he talks with a Samaritan woman. They cannot figure out why Jesus would have spoken with her.
- 6:25 → The crowd that had been fed on the fish and loaves calls Jesus "Rabbi" when they ask him how he managed to cross over the sea of Galilee.

In none of those instances does "Rabbi" show an understanding of who Jesus is and what his ministry is about. The disciples show this is the case in 9:2 both in calling Jesus "Rabbi" and in the question they ask.

## 9:3

As much as we would like him to, Jesus is not giving a teaching on "generational sin" or the consequences of one person's sin to another. The hideous nature of sin is that, in some ways, it does not act in a predictable fashion. Sometimes the sins of parents play havoc on the lives of their children; other times, they do not. Sin is not an army of British Red Coats who march out in formation and properly address their enemy. Sin is more like terrorist cells that operate unpredictably, sometimes irrationally, but always to do as much damage as possible.

In this one instance, however, Jesus explains why this child had been born blind. He does not look back for a reason, but forward to a resolution. It's as if Jesus was saying: "not going to answer your question, but look at what I'm going to do!"

#### **9:4**

The "night" that Jesus is talking about is his death (that almost came to pass at the end of the previous chapter). As long as Jesus is alive, there is work to be done. Without Christ, nothing can be done. This idea will be brought up again in 15:5 → "apart from me, you can do nothing."

Also, notice, in the healing of the man born blind, what the works of the one who sent Jesus are! What does this say about the nature and character of the one who sent Jesus?

#### **9:5**

John has talked to us about light and darkness before. We made several observations about what this means. Chief among our observations was the realization that light always overcomes darkness; darkness cannot overcome light, it is merely present when there is no light.

The sin of this man's blindness could not stand to be in the presence of Jesus in the same way that darkness cannot be in the presence of light. What does this mean for those of us today who are the "body of Christ?"

#### **9:6**

A lot of ink has been spilled on what it means that Jesus did not simply speak sight into the man, but went to the trouble to make a mixture of spit and dirt to accomplish the healing. Mixing spit with dirt would have been considered "kneading," a practice forbidden by the Pharisees and their ilk on the Sabbath.

#### **9:7**

"Siloam" in Aramaic sounds a lot like "Shiloh," a reference to the Messiah. This play on words is not accidental! More than that, Siloam is also the word for "sent." And we all know by this time that Jesus is the one who is sent!

The result is actually not that surprising. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> sign Jesus has performed. Where there is a 6<sup>th</sup>, there has to be a 7<sup>th</sup>. Stay tuned!

#### **9:8**

Those who knew the man observe that something is different.

#### **9:9**

The different reactions from the people show that the miracle was so unprecedented that, even though they had seen him daily begging for food, it was more probable that he had a stunt-double than that he was healed from congenital blindness. But the man BORE WITNESS about himself... and you will see that there is a connection between the witness he bore and being a disciple of Jesus!

#### **9:10**

The set-up question...

### **9:11**

The testimony the man gave accords with what John has recorded. His witness is reliable. In recording this, John gives us a favorable impression of this man, as opposed to the healing at the pool in chapter 5, where Jesus has to admonish the one who was healed because he kept on sinning!

### **9:12**

Just like the man at the pool in chapter 5, Jesus has disappeared.

### **9:13**

We are not told why the neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar brought the man to the Pharisees. Several reasons are probable:

- They wanted their religious leaders to rejoice that he had been healed.
- They knew the healing took place on the Sabbath and believed him to be a lawbreaker.
- They had questions; they looked to the Pharisees for answers.

I believe the most probable reason is the last one: something had never happened before to someone they believed was sinful (because of his condition). They went to the Pharisees to have their questions answered. This raises the question for the reader of John: will the Pharisees be able to see the works of God displayed by Jesus in the healing of this man?

### **9:14**

OK, so I jumped the gun on this one... let the cat out of the bag and everything before John told you.

### **9:15**

Like John the Baptist did when the priests and Levites came to him to ask him who he was, the answers by the man born blind get shorter with time. His answer to the Pharisees' question is shorter than it was when the people from his town asked him the same thing.

### **9:16**

The division of the Pharisees illustrates the dilemma this healing creates. On the one hand, only God (or one sent by God) could have done the healing. On the other hand, healing on the Sabbath was a violation of their understanding of the Sabbath law, and would have rendered the healer a sinner.

John includes the fact that there was a division between them to move the story along: will the Pharisees see Jesus as being sent from the Father, or will they see him as a sinner. It might be worth noting that this group, the Pharisees, was not the same group of "Jews" who took umbrage to Jesus in chapter 8.

### **9:17**

Notice the brevity of the man's reply to the third question he is asked. This clearly mirrors the replies of John the Baptist. In doing so John (the author) wants us to see that this man is behaving not only like a disciple, but one who BEARS WITNESS to Jesus.

The response that Jesus is a prophet is actually better than what his disciples called him (Rabbi) in 9:2. The Samaritan woman calls Jesus a prophet, as do some of the people who heard him speak in 7:40. In both cases, we are meant to have a favorable response to people who call Jesus a "prophet," and the same goes for the man born blind.

### **9:18**

I believe this begins a new section of the story of the man Jesus healed who had been born blind. I do not believe Jesus is using “Pharisees” and “Jews” as synonyms. (For example, the Pharisees “asked him how he had received his sight,” whereas the Jews “did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight.” These are two different groups of people.) I think there are two different groups of people who investigate the healing. 9:17 ends powerfully with his testimony that Jesus is a prophet. But now things get rolling again because the Jews, a group that is more antagonistic towards Jesus than the Pharisees, wants to get in on the act. (And last time we heard from them, they wanted to kill Jesus.) This could get interesting!

Notice they do not go to the man, but to his parents! This could have happened at the same time the man is testifying to the Pharisees, or it could be some later time. My guess is that all of this happened relatively quickly.

### **9:19-20**

We have not had a chance to meet the parents up to this point, nor do we know what they think of the matter. (John will drop a hint that they knew it was Jesus and were afraid to testify about him for fear of retribution from the Jews.)

### **9:21**

The parents give good advice to the Jews: ask the man who had been cured of blindness yourselves! Their answer also gives more credence to the belief that the group of Pharisees who interviewed the man born blind and the group of Jews who interrogated the parents are different people.

### **9:22-23**

John hints that the parents knew that it was Jesus AND that they believed Jesus to be the Christ. But John does not tell us explicitly that this is what they believed. Why not?

The passage ends on a note of suspense: will the Jews go and ask the man born blind? If so, how will he respond?

And why is John taking so long in building suspense for the eventual encounter between the man born blind and the Jews?

If you had to give ONE purpose for this text, what would it be?