

The Sixth Sign: Healing the Man Born Blind, John 9

1. When first healed, the man only sees Jesus as “the man they call Jesus” (11). No further miracles or teachings occur between 11 and 38, Jesus himself is conspicuously absent, and the man is not taught or disciplined or enfolded into the community of faith. How does he go from seeing Jesus as a mere “man” to the Son of Man?
2. The unbelieving Pharisees were privy to the same miracle, yet are remarkably certain that Jesus is not from God (note how many times “know” is used in chapter 9). Were the Pharisees hindered by their adherence to tradition, their pride, their reluctance to see their own sin, their absolute confidence in their position (so could not see that they were blind), their unwillingness to risk their wealth and power, or none of the above?
3. Jesus came into the world not to condemn but to save (3:17, 12:47). However, for sinners to respond to his light they must recognize their sin. Those who do not do this stand condemned. Is there any way Jesus could have drawn the man without blinding and driving away the Pharisees (39)? Is there any way you can share the gospel without risking offending and driving some away?
4. Jesus demonstrates truly nonstandard evangelism techniques. Read Mt 5:14-16 and 2 Cor 4:4-12. What is the most profound example you can give of Christians spreading the gospel light Jesus in the way Jesus does here? Can you share any personal examples?
5. Read 2 Cor 5:1-7, 16-21. How does our supernatural spiritual vision affect the way we see other people? Again, if you can, give an example from your own life.
6. Jesus, in John 10, contrasts the good shepherd with thieves and bandits:

The Good Shepherd	The thief (bandit, hireling)
Enters through the gate (1), is recognized by his sheep and knows them by name (4)	Repels the sheep (5)
Leads his sheep out (3), saving his sheep, and giving them abundant life (9)	Comes to steal and kill and destroy (10)
Lays down his life for his sheep (11)	Runs when the wolf comes (12)

Is Jesus describing the Pharisees of John 9? If so, how—and did the Pharisees know they were being wicked leaders?

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Fun fact: The policy in 9:22 of excommunicating Christians was later expressed in this late first-century standard Jewish prayer: “and may the arrogant kingdom soon be rooted out in our days, and the Nazarenes [Christians] and the *minim* [heretics] perish as in a moment and be rooted out from the book of life and with the righteous may they not be inscribed.” [Carson, 370]

Further fun fact: Calvin believed the mud pack was meant to double the degree of blindness to make the cure all the more magnificent.

Extra questions and observations:

1. In 9:35, Jesus asks the blind man if he believes in the Son of Man. (Here “belief” is *pisteuo*, a word which can range from “believe” to “trust”.)
2. Note that Jesus absents himself from most of the drama here. He interacts with the man, then leaves before the man returns, leaving the crowd and eventually the Pharisees to resolve what had happened in his life.
3. The “so that” in 9:3 does not need to mean that God blinded the man in order to glorify himself through his healing. It can also mean “with the result that”: “Formally, the concluding clause could be taken as a result clause (‘with the result that’) or a purpose clause (‘in order that’); either way, John certainly does not think that the occurrence of blindness from birth was outside the sweep of God’s control and therefore his purpose.” (Carson, 362.)
4. Jesus exhorts them to “work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (4). Night came, presumably, when Jesus was killed. Is it now, again, day? Carson: “This does not mean that Jesus stops being the light of the world once he has ascended. It means, rather, that the light shines brightly while he lives out his human life up to the moment of his glorification. Throughout that period he is the light that exposes the world, judges the world, saves the world.”
5. **Q: Why heal with spit and mud? Why send off a blind man on a trip to a pool?** Jesus violates a number of Sabbath traditions in his healing, including the use of spittle, and likely the formation of the paste.
6. **Q: Why Jesus heal just the one blind man, and not all?** One answer is surely that healing the blind was a sign of the Messiah foretold by Isaiah—so the purpose of the healing was to signal unequivocally who he was.
7. Keller: We are born spiritually blind so God can be glorified in us. Furthermore, there is no blindness so deep and incurable as the one we don’t acknowledge.
8. Gary: Belief is not about evidence. Here all parties had the same evidence.
9. **Q: Which party (the crowd, the man, the parents, the Pharisees) do we most identify with?** Too often we are like the man’s parents, who were likely persuaded themselves but unwilling to take a risk based on their belief.
10. When the man “worships”—this is *proskyneo*, which means to prostrate oneself before or do obeisance to, and occurs in contexts where worship isn’t intended, so likely here it is prostration to Jesus as God’s representative more than Jesus as God. [Carson, 377]
11. Gary: The man had nothing to lose and the Pharisees everything to lose, so it is no surprise many of them failed to recognize and follow Jesus. We too, in our ministries, may hold too tightly to power. Dave: Where we should give away our ministries, we hold tight. Rather than teaching others to be teachers, we are happy to remain the sole teacher and let others be students. Rather than training others to be worship leaders we happily lead worship ourselves. Not all churches and not all believers actively oppose equipping others, but few of us actively give away our ministries. **Q: How can we be better at that?**
12. On both sides, people don’t guess, they don’t surmise, they don’t infer, they **know**, a word which comes up repeatedly in this passage.

13. Q: Is the Pharisees' blindness due to their adherence to tradition, their pride, their unwillingness to acknowledge their sin, their absolute confidence in their position (they could not see that they were blind), their unwillingness to risk their wealth and power, etc.?

14. Jesus shines his light here not through sermons or lectures or arguments but through an act of God's power, calling to mind two other passages:

- a. Mt 5:14-16: "14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."
- b. 2 Cor 4: "4 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
- c. 7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. 11 For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you."

15. Jesus teaches the man to see. This phenomenon is what Paul describes in 2 Cor 5, and extends beyond our ability to see Jesus as the Son of Man to the way we see all of humanity:

- a. 2 Cor 5: "16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;[b] even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,[c] we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,[d] not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
- b. And a bit earlier in 2 Cor, "5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— 3 if indeed,

when we have taken it off[a] we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

- c. 6 So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.”

This is what Lewis described in his great sermon *The Weight of Glory*: We see not what each of us is now, but what eternity will bring, and we do so because we first saw in Christ not merely the suffering servant but the great Messiah.

16. Two arguments surface in this passage: That Jesus must be from God to have performed such a miracle (16, 30, 33), and that Jesus can't be from God because he is breaking the Sabbath (16). While it's true that our obedience can affect how God receives our prayers (Job 27:9, 35:13; Ps 66:18, 109:7; Prov 15:29; Isa 1:15; Jn 14:13-14, 16:23-27; 1 Jn 3:21-22), miracles “cannot be an infallible guide to spiritual authority” (Carson, 368; cf. Dt 13:1-5; Mt 7:21-23; 2 Thess 2:9).

For his part, Jesus does not engage with the Pharisees until the very end, and even then he does not address their Sabbath-breaking allegations, but only points out their blindness.

Q: In this account everyone comes to recognize the miraculous healing, yet only some believe. So why does the man believe, while some of the Pharisees do not?

17. ...

Leader's Intro:

- Summarize/contrast this man with the lame man healed in ch. 5.
- Background on the feast of Tabernacles, which had as a theme the guiding of Israel through the desert by a pillar of flame, which was represented symbolically by lighting lanterns around Jerusalem, esp. near the Temple. It's in this context that Jesus says he is the light of the world. (Gary)
- Dave Boris notes that the pool of Siloam had pagan healing shrines right next to it, so that when Jesus directed the man to go *there* to be healed, he was making him a very visible witness to God's power in the midst of powerless superstition. I think he is getting this mixed up with the pool of Bethsaida (Jn 5). While there appears to have been a healing shrine (to the 4 nymphs) it was built by Hadrian in the 2nd cent.

Back in chapter 5 we read a similar story of the lame man healed by the pool of Bethsaida. If you recall, that was another of the non-faith healings, another Sabbath healing, and another healing which brought Jesus into conflict with the authorities—and in that case the response of the man who is healed is left vague. Does he follow Jesus? Commentators are divided. The differences here are important.

The context here is also important, and Jesus chose his timing carefully. To quote Selvaggio,

The setting for this sign was the Feast of Tabernacles, which featured light as a primary element. During each night of the feast, four giant bowls, each containing approximately 120 logs, were set on fire to illuminate Jerusalem. In addition, men danced each night with blazing torches in their hands. Prior to the age of electricity, it must have been quite a spectacle to see the night skies of Jerusalem filled with flashes of light during the Feast of Tabernacles.

This light imagery recalled the pillar of fire which guided Israel through the desert. In this context you can imagine the power of Jesus' claim to be the light of the world.

Like many of the signs, Jesus behaves in ways we would be unlikely to predict, one minute enigmatically vanishing, only to appear at a key moment in the life of the man whose sight he restores. This sign operates on many levels, and it's easy to think we have seen them when more lurks unseen.

Notes

I. Background

a. ...

II. Words and Phrases

a. ...

III. Themes

a. ...

IV. Observations

a. ...

V. Questions

a. ...

VI. To do

a. ...