

“I Was Blind But Now I See”

John 9:1-41

Introduction: (Read John 9:1-41) This narrative is John 1:10-13 being played out before us. It is an example of the interaction of the Incarnate Son of God, the agent in creation, with the world He came to save. The Jewish leadership in this passage serve as an example of 1:10-11. The beggar who was blind from birth and whom Jesus healed is an example of 1:12-13. As we work our way through the narrative I want to follow two lines – The folly and progression of the unbelief of the Pharisees and the unarguable and powerful witness of the personal testimony of transformation.

I want you to watch for the progression in the man who was healed from physical blindness to physical sight and from physical sight to spiritual sight – from the accusation of being a sinner to the transformation of sins forgiven. Contrariwise, watch in the Pharisees the progression from physical sight to confirmed spiritual blindness – from the assumption of righteousness to the confirmation of being in sin.

God Incarnate walked in their midst – He had taken on the fullness of humanity and subjected Himself to His creation and to fallen and rebellious humanity in ways incomprehensible to the mind of man. There was no room in our/their world view, their perspective on the real world, which could manage who this was and what He came to do. He walked among them casting out demons, healing all manner of sickness and limitation, even raising the dead – all the while teaching with an authority/power and from a perspective that challenged most everything they had come to believe – the way they had shaped their “faith” context/world. It was a collision of two worlds. This was all on clear display in this man’s miraculous healing!!

This man is a powerful witness to who Jesus is and the power of Jesus to heal as a picture of redemption, all in the face of fierce and culturally imbedded opposition. He is not that witness based on intellect or sophistication of argument facing argument. Rather, he is so powerful as a truth based witness of personal transformation – an unarguable and resonating witness.

The progression in this text is clear and quite profound and takes place in 6 movements to this narrative.

The Miraculous Sign – 9:1-7 –

- I want to note that this is the first of 2 times in which Jesus is given voice in this sign narrative. He then disappears until the end of the narrative where He meets the man He healed and calls him to faith (cf. 9:35-38) and He gives meaning to the miraculous sign – the work He was sent by the Father to do followed by final and qualifying words (cf. 9:39-41).

There are two things to note from Jesus’ words in this first scene of the narrative.

- First - Jesus puts to rest a cultural misconception about the cause of sickness and suffering. He lifts our eyes much higher by declaring that the ultimate purpose of God in our lives – no matter the “cause” of our circumstances – is that His work be demonstrated or put on display in our lives – effectively that we be unto His glory (cf. 9:3).

- Second - He was urgently doing the work of “the One Who sent Him” (cf. 9:4-5). This was part of that work – He was declaring that He was “sent” by or from the Father (cf. 8:…).

The Witness of the “Once Blind and Now Seeing Man” Among the People Who Knew Him When He was Blind and Begging – 9:8-12 – They had just witnessed the work of the Incarnate Son of God who walked in their midst. It was something they had not seen something like this before (opening the eyes of one blind from birth). They had no real or practical category to explain what had happened.

- The people who knew him (neighbors) and who had seen him begging daily recognized the miraculous transformation. Their questions gave eye-witness credibility to the miracle, while at the same time demonstrating the incredible nature of the transformation and their inability to fit something so “other-worldly” within the categories they knew (cf. 9:8-9a).

- The healing created a superficial division among the people – “Yes, he is the blind man we see begging daily” OR “He can’t be that man. It isn’t possible. There must be another explanation – He just looks like the man.”

Note: This demonstrates just how difficult it is to “see” the hand of God at work in tangible ways in our temporal world. We have seen this in our own lives. (I was just telling a prof who asked me when I thought I would retire from pastoring – “I cannot get over the pleasure of watching the gospel transform lives.” Some of us “know” what we know but we still say, “It would take a miracle for him to become a Christian…”)

- The witness or personal testimony of the man who was healed ended the argument or debate and confirmed the miracle. Effectively he said, “I am the man who was born blind and whom you saw begging.”

- The obvious questions followed – (cf. 9:10) “What happened?” Notice the simplicity and power of his testimony (9:11).

Note: The way he told them of his healing he expressed an initial and fully human understanding of who Jesus was (cf. 9:11 – “*the man* who is called Jesus,” - progression of faith – C. Keener as noted by Kostenberger)

When asked where this Jesus is - he simply says, “I don’t know.” Which leads to the next scene or movement in the narration.

The Initial/First Interrogation/Witness of the “Once Blind and Now Seeing Man” By/Before the Pharisees – 9:13-17 – John, in his editorial comment of 9:13-14 sets the stage for confrontation between the unbelief of the Pharisees and the witness of the man who was healed. John notes that the neighbors who corroborated the miraculous transformation brought the man to the Pharisees – followed by noting that the healing, which required Jesus to make mud, took place on the Sabbath. It was obvious to the reader that the making of the mud violated the interpretation of Sabbath law held by the Pharisees. **John identifies the rationale by which the Pharisees will dismiss and indict/denigrate Jesus before the people (in order to dispel any talk of this One being Messiah or “sent from God”).**

- Clearly based upon the witness of the neighbors etc. the Pharisees asked the man – again – how he came to see again. He gave them the same account he gave to the people who knew as the blind beggar (cf. 9:15).

Note: The way he responds is very simple and unarguable, “”He placed mud on my eyes and ***I washed and (now) I see!!***”

- The Jewish leaders had a problem on their hands. Jesus clearly healed this man who was blind from birth (9:1) and the miracle, if left unchallenged, would establish Jesus’ claims to have been sent by His Father – to be the Son of God incarnate. They attempted to discredit him and debunk the miracle by accusing Jesus of being a Sabbath breaker and a sinner and therefore ***He could not be from God (9:16a)***.

This miracle was causing a divide in their ranks (9:16b). On the one hand He has violated the Sabbath and therefore He is “a sinful man” who cannot claim to be sent from God. On the other hand how could a sinner do such a miracle?

What was the Jews’ stated objection – He violated the Sabbath. Who actually stood before them on trial (as it were) – Look at Matthew 12:1-8 and hear the words of Jesus.

Note: This divide reflects, to a deeper degree, the rebellion of unbelief and the resonance of hope and immortality which make up the condition of the human heart – to which we bear witness (truth and testimony).

- They, like the previous group, turned once again to the man to ask him for his testimony (cf. 9:17a). Their question seems to have somewhat of a cynical tone. I don’t know exactly what they hoped to hear – perhaps they wanted a basis for finally and fully putting to rest the threat of this miracle worker to their positions and what they taught (Remember – as we noted before – to embrace Him as He is would be to lose everything - cf. Philippians 3:1-14; Lose his life but gain his soul).

- The man's answer perhaps represents a progression in "faith" – the "man who is called Jesus" to "He is a prophet." Look to Jesus' interaction with His disciples around the very same question – Matthew 16:13-18. The case is being made for the "blindness" of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees Attempt to Verify the Credibility of the Healing (or More Likely to Discredit It) by Interrogating the "Once Blind and Now Seeing Man's" Parents – 9:18-23

- It seems clear that the Pharisees were attempting to call into question – cast doubt on the substance of the miracle itself

- Then they called in his parents and interrogated them (9:19). The tone of the questioning was challenging and accusatory (Kostenberger, 387; Ridderbos, 340).

- The parents affirm that he is their son and he was indeed born blind. As to how his sight was restored – ***they refused to answer for fear the Jews would cast them out of the synagogue***. They knew that the Pharisees had planned to put out of the synagogue anyone who professed faith in Jesus or claimed Him as Messiah. They sent the Pharisees back to their son who was of age and could answer for himself (cf. 9:20-21).

They faced the power/threat of being denied access, of cultural acceptance. They would lose the "praise of man" or the affirmation of culture. They would be effectively canceled – denigrated – marginalized. It has been happening at various threat levels since the advent of the church – in different times and places. It happens on the university campus to students and scholars alike. It happens in public schools – to teachers, students, parents etc. It now happens on social media platforms and in the structures of society. It isn't the Sabbath here – it is the most recent societal norm – bigoted speech or hate speech. However, it also has gone to the level simple "being" – "white evangelicals" have been vilified and marginalize pre-emptively so as to deny a seat at the table and silence the voice/testimony they may have.

Note: John seems to put their faith in contrast to that of their son who indeed was eventually cast out of the synagogue. It seems as though John is emphasizing to his readers the cost of following Jesus (Carson, 372; Beasley-Murray, 158).

The Second Interrogation/Witness of the "Once Blind and Now Seeing Man" By/Before the Pharisees – 9:24-34

- The Pharisees call the healed man back for a second questioning. The questioning opens with the exhortation δὸς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ. This was not a call to praise God for the miracle healing he had received but a command to confess his sin – ostensibly the sin of lying about the circumstances of his healing – and to acknowledge that Jesus, the healer, was a sinner (Kostenberger, 289; Beasley-Murray, 158).

- The response this “once blind man” gives disarms these educated legal experts and puts them on the defensive. **Note: This is a picture of how the most educated and skilled opponent to the gospel and the person of Jesus cannot argue against the simple testimony to the truth of transformation – 1. Because it speaks to reality 2. It speaks to and resonates with the beggar spirit in each of us which only Jesus can meet.**

- He refuses initially to address the indictment of Jesus as a sinner. His recourse is to, again, appeal to the irrefutable evidence of his miraculous healing, to speak with the knowledge he had against the knowledge they claimed (Ridderbos, 344) - εἰ ἁμαρτωλὸς ἐστὶν οὐκ οἶδα· ἐν οἷδα ὄτι τυφλὸς ὦν ἄρτι βλέπω. This stubborn miracle and its inexorable power to bear witness to Jesus would be the basis, just a few sentences later, upon which this simple man would use their own law against these experts in the law.

- The power of the truth of the Word of God spoken from or within the testimony of a life transformed is powerful and unarguable (cf. 9:27-33).

- The Pharisees were “blue in the face” at the refusal of this man to fold. He had a testimony!! No matter what happened – He was made to see!! He was touch by Jesus and his life was turned from beggar to the stage on which God had displayed His glory in Jesus (cf. Romans 1:16-17)!!

Mother Theresa once gave an address on the sanctity of human life and the sin of abortion before a sitting President of the United States who was openly pro-abortion. When he subsequently stood to address the crowd he could only say, “It is hard to argue with a life so well lived.” The testimony of the blind man who was healed is the testimony of every believer in Jesus (9:39). It is powerful and unarguable to the glory of God.

Go to Reno Gospel Mission; Prison Fellowship; Missionary Testimonies

So in his *Autobiography* John Patton tells stories of particular converts like Kowia, a chief on Tanna. When he was dying he came to say farewell to Paton.

“Farewell, Missi, I am very near death now; we will meet again in Jesus and with Jesus!” . . . Abraham sustained him, tottering to the place of graves; there he lay down . . . and slept in Jesus; and there the faithful Abraham buried him beside his wife and children. Thus died a man who had been a cannibal chief, but by the grace of God and the love of Jesus changed, transfigured into a character of light and beauty. What think ye of this, ye skeptics as to the reality of conversion? . . . I knew that day, and I know now, that there is one soul at least from Tanna to sing the glories of Jesus in Heaven — and, oh, the rapture when I meet him there! (p. 160)

The Miracle Defined in Redemptive Terms – The Moral of the Story – 9:35-41 – Note: The progression from one “born physically blind” miraculously given sight, is given redemptive/gospel meaning in this moment where genuine faith/life revealing faith is birthed. It

also becomes the occasion for Jesus, in an ironic twist, to teach the Pharisees of their condition of being born spiritually blind. Ironically, the man Jesus healed knew he was unsighted or physically blind and unable to help himself – reduced to the status of an outcast and a beggar for the basic resources for life. The Pharisees, on the other hand – those born spiritually blind didn't know they were blind nor did they understand that they did not have the basic resources for true life – life in the fullness of the life and love of God – and that they were themselves outcasts from the life and love of God AND with respect to God, they were beggars.

Our task is to carry that story to the world around us in the absolute confidence that what Jesus did for this man – He also did for me. In addition, I know, that you know, that the world without Jesus is born into blindness and they are outcasts and reduced to begging for the very things God has given us and offers them in Jesus. They/we all know we are more than this flesh – we are eternal!! We know that we are made for relationship with our Creator – to know a love and nobility beyond anything this fallen world can offer. We make our appeal from transformed lives – from the experience of the fullness of His love – souls that are satisfied, deeply contented, thirst quenched by His indwelling Spirit. We make our appeal to hearts which ache/groan for the very life we have experienced in Jesus.

We herald sight and identify blindness by the quality and character of our life in Jesus - Food for the starving (eat but have no fill) and water for those dying of thirst (cisterns – broken cisterns that hold no water) because we know that they crave sustenance (satisfaction of appetites) and life giving water...