

***Remaining in Christ:  
Jesus' 'I AM' Statements in the Gospel of John***

**Session IV**

***The Light of the World (John 8 and 9)***

The video that accompanies this session contains some reflections on John 8, while this handout focuses on the long account of the healing of the blind man in John 9.

**Commentary on the Passage: John 9**

In the introductory video for this series, I spoke of the long period of reflection that lies between the lifetime of Jesus (ca. 4 BCE – ca. 30 CE) and the final composition of the Gospel of John in the last decade of the first century, approximately sixty years. Those decades of reflection and conversation in the company of the Holy Spirit are richly in evidence in John 9. The basic story of the healing of the man born blind has spurred theological reflection on practically every aspect of his experience, filling the whole chapter with questions, responses, accusations:

- How did the man become blind in the first place?
- How did he suddenly become healed and able to see?
- Is healing of sight a violation of the Sabbath?
- Is Jesus a sinner for healing on the Sabbath?
- Who is the greater teacher, Jesus or Moses?
- Where did Jesus really come from?
- Who is the Son of Man?
- What does it mean to believe in the Son of Man?
- Are the Pharisees blind?
- Is a certain kind of blindness (unwillingness to really see Jesus) a sin?

Some of these questions are still important for us today, while others have become less relevant, due to modern understandings of disability, as well as the evolution of Christianity and Judaism as related but separate religions.

**Three good questions we might want to consider are:**

1. What is healing from blindness really *about* in John 9?
2. Who is really blind in the story?
3. How can you tell whether an action is from God or not?

**What is healing from blindness really *about* in John 9?**

To answer this question, it really helps to pay attention to the *whole* chapter, because the man is not really healed in every dimension until the end of the story, when he says, “Lord, I believe.”<sup>1</sup> The first important moment in his healing is his washing in the Pool of Siloam (“which means Sent,” 9:7). So his healing seems to be connected in some way with apostleship, with being someone who is sent out

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by Jesus to do Christ-like ministry in the world. His sight comes to him *in the washing*. Are these waters of baptism? A washing in the “living water” of John 4? In any case, once he has washed the mud from his eyes, he is able to perceive the “light of the world” (9:5). At this point in the story, the man understands Jesus as a prophet (9:17).

A second important stage in the man’s healing occurs when he refuses to take the bait of the Pharisees who want to know whether Jesus is a sinner or not. The man insists on the clarity of his own experience: “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (9:25). He does not have “blind faith,” but rather faith grounded in experience. This experience is the basis for the man’s decision to become a disciple of Jesus, someone willing to be taught by Jesus.

The final stage of the man’s healing comes at the end of the passage when Jesus engages him straightforwardly about the Son of Man. Here, the man’s faith expands to its fullest extent, to understand that the man before him, the man who healed him with mud and water, is at the same time the mediator of God’s presence on earth, the Son of Man. Falling to the ground before Jesus, the man expresses his full healing and recognition of Jesus’ identity. Now he has both sight and insight.

### **Who is really blind in the story?**

One of the most delicious parts of John 9 is the irony of the Pharisees’ blindness, while they dither over how the man was healed, whether he was healed on the right day, whether Jesus is a sinner, etc. Their questions throughout the passage display their blindness and their inability to see what God is doing, even when it is right before their eyes. The passage ends with the ironic question from the Pharisees, “We are not blind, are we?” and Jesus’ blunt response, “If you *were* blind, you would not have sin!” (9:40-41).

### **How can you tell whether an action is from God or not?**

This question is raised by the interaction among the Pharisees, the man who is healed, his parents, and Jesus. The Pharisees’ blindness, as discussed above, gets in the way of their discernment of what is truly from God. Right before them, a man born blind is healed into the fullness of his created life, and they are worried that the healing might offend God because it was done on the Sabbath (“This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath,” 9:16). They have entirely missed the note of urgency in Jesus’ sense of his mission: “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (9:4). Jesus is doing the work of God every day of the week, because he feels the urgency of the whole creation’s deep longing for restoration.

The Pharisees’ reactions are the opposite of those of the healed man, who sees clearly who Jesus is, from his experience of him. The Pharisees are blinded by their preconceived ideas about where God is to be found. Their statement, “we are disciples of Moses,” means that they search for God in the scriptures, which is all well and good. But if scripture study replaces their ability to see what God is doing right in front of their noses, then they have actually misunderstood the scriptures themselves. The Scriptures point to where God may be found, but the place God is *actually* found is in life itself.

<sup>1</sup> See also John 11:27, when Martha says, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”