

Exposition of John 9: The man born blind

Richard H Johnston

(Reading: this is my own translation. You will notice one or two significant differences from what is written in most translations, but I can justify those changes from the Greek text.)

v1-7: The healing of the man born blind

v1 Passing along he saw a man blind from his birth.

v2 And his disciples asked him "Teacher, who sinned that man or his parents, that he was born blind"

v3-5 Jesus answered: neither this man sinned nor his parents. In order that the works of God might be manifested in him, it is necessary to work the works of Him who sent me while it is still day, for the night comes when no man can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

v6-7 Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made clay out of the spittle, and put the clay upon the man's eyes, and said to him: Go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means "having been sent"). He went therefore and washed, and came seeing.

v8-34 The inquisition

v8-12 The man is examined by his neighbours

v8-9 Therefore his neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging said "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?". Some said that he was, and others, no, but he is like him. The man said I am the one".

v10-11 Therefore they said to him "How were your eyes opened?" He answered: "The man named Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me to go to Siloam and wash. Going therefore, and washing, I regained sight."

v12 And they said to him: "Where is he?" He says "I do not know"

v13-17 Examination by the Pharisees - the man, first time

v13 They lead the man who had at one time been blind to the Pharisees.

v14 Now it was a sabbath on the day when Jesus made clay and opened his eyes.

v15 Again therefore the Pharisees asked him how he regained his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see".

v16 Therefore some of the Pharisees said "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath". But others said "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

v 17 They say therefore to the blind man again: What do you say about him, because he opened your eyes?" And he said that he is a prophet.

v18-23 Examination by the Pharisees - the parents

v 18-19 Therefore the Jews did not believe about the man that he was blind and had had his sight restored until they called his parents, and asked them "Is this your son whom you say was born blind?. How is it that he sees now?"

v20-21 His parents therefore answered and said "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind, but we do not know how he now sees, nor who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is legally of age, and he will speak for himself."

v 22-23 His parents said these things because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should acknowledge him to be the Christ, he would be expelled from the synagogue. Therefore the parents said he is of age, question him.

v24-34 Examination by the Pharisees - the man, second time

v24 They therefore called the man who had been blind back a second time, and said to him "Give God the glory; we know this man is sinful"

v25 The man therefore answered: I do not know if he is sinful; one thing I do know, that I was blind and now I see.

v26 They therefore said to him: What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?

v27 He answered them: I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear again? You don't want to become his disciples, do you?

v28-29 And they reviled him and said: You are his disciple, but we are Moses's disciples; we know God spoke through Moses; but we do not know where this man is from.

v30-33 The man answered and said to them: "That is truly remarkable, that you don't know where he is from, and he opened my eyes. We know that God does

not listen to sinful men, but does listen to anyone who is God-fearing, and does His will. From the beginning, it has been unheard of that anyone has opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man was not from God, he could not have done it."

v34 They answered and said to him: "You were born wholly in sins, and you would teach us?" And they cast him outside.

v35-38 Jesus brings the man to faith

v35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and finding him said: "You are placing your faith in the son of man".

v36 He answered, saying: And who is he, sir, in order that I may place my faith in him?

v37 Jesus said to him: "You have seen him already and he is the one now speaking to you."

v38 And He said "I believe, Lord", and worshipped him.

v39-41 Judgement on belief or unbelief

v39 And Jesus said: "With a view to judgement I came into this world, that those who don't see might see, and those who do see might become blind.

v40 Some of the Pharisees, being with them, heard these words, and said to him "We are not blind too, are we?"

v41 Jesus said to them: "If you were blind, you would not have had sin; but now that you say that you see, your sin persists."

Introduction

This is the sixth of the seven "signs" in John's gospel. It is the primary biblical text on blindness. It is far longer than any other, and John uses the case to provide a message about our being spiritually born blind. The miracle itself has no biblical parallel.

It is almost entirely dialogue, with a large number of characters. Although I do not generally like drama in a spiritual context, in this case it would be useful to act out the dialogue as a playlet, to see more clearly the interactions that are taking place. At least try to do this for yourself in imagination - or look at my

interpretation as appended below. Note how each person was compelled to respond to the central challenge the miracle presented, and observe how well or badly they responded. We should also try to imagine how we would have responded in their place, given that they did not know what we know now about Jesus. Perhaps, to get the flavour of how it was for them, it would help to think about how we would respond to a similar miracle performed in the name of Jesus today.

The passage breaks naturally into two parts. I consider first the miracle itself (v1-7). Then I consider how people respond to it (v8-41). The way those people responded is characteristic of the various ways we respond to God working. There is only one good way to respond, but there are many bad ones.

This passage should make us uncomfortable. Do we recognise we are born blind, and so can completely miss the truth, without our even knowing it?

The key verse is v39: *v39 And Jesus said: "With a view to judgement I came into this world, that those who don't see might see, and the ones who do see might become blind.*

Overall this passage is saying that:

If we obey the light of truth we have already and make good use of it we will be given progressively greater light until we worship Jesus as the Messiah (Christ).

If we refuse to obey the light truth we know, we will have our present knowledge removed.

The passage shows that the light is presented to us through **evidence** that we have to evaluate personally, for ourselves, without fear or prejudice. The passage suggests that few people respond well.

John 9 challenges men with the key evidence about who Jesus is: **Jesus is the Messiah to be worshipped!**

PART 1 The Miracle

v1-7: The miracle: The healing of the man born blind

v1 Passing along he saw a man blind from his birth.

How Jesus knew this at the time is not stated, but maybe it was immediately obvious. This was confirmed by the man's later testimony (v32) and that of his parents (v20). Perhaps because the miracle was so important and symbolic of the human condition, the man remains anonymous, he is never named.

v2 And his disciples asked him "Teacher, who sinned that man or his parents, that he was born blind"

Our response is to see this as a silly question. For how can a man be born blind as a result of sin, when he has as yet done neither good nor bad?

People often ask silly questions, but they make sense for the person who asks them.

Blind people, in common with other people with disabilities, were excluded from officiating as priests in the temple (Leviticus 21:18), and to possess such disabilities became regarded as the consequence of sin (John 9:34). If sin was involved, then someone must have sinned, so who was it? Was it the person themselves, or was it an ancestor, with "the sins of the fathers" being visited upon the children" (Exodus 20:5). Hence the only remaining question is it the man (before he was born) or his parents, the rest having been taken as an accurate assessment.

This chapter is full of silly questions based on unsound assumptions. I find that people, including Christians, are very prone to doing the same thing, mainly because of this same sort of blinkered thinking. The logic may be impeccable, but the premises are flawed.

v3-5 Jesus answered: neither this man sinned nor his parents. In order that the works of God might be manifested in him, it is necessary to work the works of Him who sent me while it is still day, for the night comes when no man can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

[In the above, I have adopted different, but equally valid, punctuation in the Greek from that usually used, because it makes better sense of the passage. There was no punctuation in the original manuscripts, and the normally used punctuation (wrongly) implies that God deliberately made the man to be born blind.]

Jesus immediately dismisses the flawed thinking about sin being involved. In the whole passage in his dealings with the man sin is **never** mentioned. There was no sin issue, and Jesus freely accepted him when he fell and worshipped Jesus as messiah (v35-37). Contrast this miracle with the lame man in John 5:14-15, who is told to "sin no more".

Jesus then says that the situation provides an opportunity for the works of God to be manifested, and that He must do that while it is still possible. Jesus recognises that His ministry is coming to its close as a result of persecution. The need is to keep doing the works of God while the opportunity remains. Jesus is the light of

the world whilst He remains here. There will be darkness, when He is taken away (there was a three hour darkness during the crucifixion).

His death terminated His ministry in His own body, but the manifestation of the same light and power continued through the Church, to do the same and greater works than Jesus (John 14:12). Jesus sent us into the world in the same way that the father sent Jesus. Acts 1:1 speaks of what Jesus **began** to do and to teach, and Acts shows how the apostles and early church continued to shine the light and fulfil the same miraculous ministry, a ministry which, where there is genuine faith, continues down to today.

Jesus said also that we are the "*light of the world*" (Matthew 5:14). See how this text provides a commentary on Matthew 5:16 - "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven*". Jesus was then the "*light of the world*", and he was about to do a "good work", a work of power which, as we shall see, could **not** be done other than by the power of God.

v6-7 Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made clay out of the spittle, and put the clay upon the man's eyes, and said to him: Go wash in the pool of Siloam (which is translated "having been sent"). He went therefore and washed, and came seeing.

Jesus used a variety of ways of healing. This one is unusual, and we must try to understand why Jesus chose to use it. For we too may have to use similarly strange healing methods in exceptional cases.

Firstly think about how you would feel about having mud and spit rubbed into your eyes? Ugh! Humanly it is offensive, inadequate to address the problem, and indeed positively harmful! It is "spiritual abuse"! Am I prepared to allow Jesus to do such things to me? Note how this compares with the human view of the gospel. Yet this man makes no objection but meekly accepts what Jesus does in placing this mud in his eyes.

This man had been born blind. His eyes had never worked, and this had been immediately obvious at his birth. So it would seem that the defect had been immediately highly visible. It suggests the eyes were either completely missing or too small and non-functional. Even today, some people are born with this condition. It may have been commoner then, since these defects have been linked to Vitamin A deficiency in the mother at a critical developmental stage.

So there was a need for a re-creation of something which had never been there. This explains the use of the clay. Here we see Jesus, ever the One to "*do what He saw the Father doing*" (John 5:19), repeating in miniature, the initial creative act

which formed Adam from the ground (Genesis 2:7), and uses the same material. What a clear demonstration that Jesus is the Son of God! Jesus's creative act using clay is then followed by a command to the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. This pool was part of the Temple, and Jesus probably did this to show those Jews obsessed about sabbath keeping that the God of the Temple played an instrumental role in the healing.

One may also see this washing as symbolic of a form of regenerative washing. Jesus does the part that only He can do, but the man must do his own part.

The extraordinary character of this miracle is beyond doubt. The man could now see.

There is much more to seeing than having eyes that focus the light and project an image on the retina. Without a brain miracle, the image on the retina is just meaningless shapes and colours (compare Mark 8:24). The image must be interpreted by the brain, and "make sense". The pair of two-dimensional images have to be interpreted by the brain as a three-dimensional world, otherwise you will bump into things. The brain has to convert the shapes and the colours into meaning, by conceptually mapping them back to the external objects that gave rise to the shapes and colours. He had no experience of any of this, and had never learned anything about seeing. We all learned this by a very lengthy process of practice, by trial and error. For this man the creation of all of this interpretative skill was instant, **just as it was for Adam**.

So **only** God could do such a creative act. Human beings might in principle repair some sorts of birth defects in the eyeball, but no human being can fix the interpretative brain function instantly. It is important to let this truth sink in deeply, before we move on to consider what follows after the miracle, in how people react.

There is no miracle like it in the rest of scripture, and it presents a special challenge to our thinking.

It was a very clear sign to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. There are many relevant Old Testament passages, and healing the blind was a well-established messianic sign in contemporary Jewish popular thought. See Psalm 146:8 (*the LORD opens the eyes of the Blind*); Isaiah 29:18 (*on that day.... the eyes of the blind shall see*); Isaiah 35:4-6 (*Then the eyes of the Blind shall be opened*); Isaiah 42:6-7 (*to open the eyes of the blind*) and Is 61:1-4:

Jesus made restoring sight to the blind part of the foundation of his ministry in Luke 4:18-20 (quoting Isaiah 61:1-4 - *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,... he has sent me ... to recover the sight of the blind*). Jesus proves his Messianic status to

John in Matthew 11:5 and Luke 7:21-22 (*In that same hour he cured... and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answered "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them).* Note how in Luke "*the blind receive their sight*" comes first in the list. No one in the Old Testament was ever cured on blindness, and (apart from Ananias restoring the temporary blindness of Paul (Acts 9:17-18)) only Jesus is recorded as restoring sight to the blind in the New Testament. This type of miracle is thus presented in scripture as a work peculiarly characteristic of the Messiah.

There was now *no excuse for any Jew not to recognise Jesus as Messiah.*

PART 2 How do the people react?

v1-2 The disciples

We should first take a step back, and consider the disciples. When they saw the man they did not see a man needing help, but only as everyone else did, as a write-off, a blind beggar, a case completely hopeless and caused by sin. As a result they only saw him as providing a prompt for a silly religious question. They had no love or compassion. Jesus saw him with compassion, as an opportunity for the demonstration of God's love, power and salvation. How often do we similarly fail to see the hidden potential in others, which the power of God can bring forth?

The disciples are the first of a series of people who all fail to see properly, and only Jesus and the blind man emerge with credit. This is what makes the passage so "scary". Faced with the evidence of Jesus's divinity and messianic character, all these people fail to perceive it. It could equally happen to any of us.

v8-34 The inquisition

v8-12 The man is examined by his neighbours

v8-9 Therefore his neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging said "is not this the man who used to sit and beg?". Some said that he was, and others, no, but he is like him. The man said I am he".

The initial reaction of the neighbours is understandable. There is a conflict of evidence. He looks the same man, and yet how could he possibly be, because he was blind? A man born blind who can now see normally: that's utterly impossible!

Do we react like this sometimes? What are we going to believe? Do we believe the evidence? Or are we "locked out" by our previous experience, and what we regard as possible?

The man ends their questioning by confirming his identity. This should have changed their attitude, but it didn't.

[NOTE: The linguistic form of his confirmation is the same as that used by Jesus in John 8:24; 13:19, passages which are often used to "prove" Jesus is divine. We should be careful not to read too much into the linguistic form of the "I am" declarations.]

v10-11 Therefore they said to him "How were your eyes opened?" He answered: "The man named Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me to go to Siloam and wash. Going therefore, and washing, I regained sight".

[The "regained sight" is a strong version of the verb "to see", that might also be translated as "saw again", or better, "regained sight".]

The man is a very good witness. He gives a clear and accurate testimony to the events that took place (compare v6-7), and places Jesus at the centre of them.

Remarkable! Their reaction is as flat as if they had been told some everyday news. These people do not marvel as one would expect, and as usually happened earlier in Jesus' ministry. (It was already becoming dark (v4)). Instead of rejoicing with the man in his healing, they seem rather to be looking for evidence to use for another purpose. This becomes clear in v12 when they quickly move on to asking where Jesus is, and v13 when they take him to the Pharisees. So these people are not facing up to the personal implications of the miracle, the need to recognise what it says about Jesus as Messiah.

v12 And they said to him: "Where is he?" He says "I do not know"

By the man's own testimony, he had been sent away from Jesus. Even if Jesus had been present, the man could not have identified Jesus, as he had never yet seen him (see also v36-37). So this was another silly question.

v13-17 Examination by the Pharisees - the man, first time

v13 They lead the man who had at one time been blind to the Pharisees.

The neighbours won't make a judgement about the miracle for themselves: they want to rely on the judgement of the "experts". Do we ever do that?

This also suggests that the Pharisees had told the common people that they wanted intelligence about any miracles performed by Jesus, and in view of v12 that they wanted to see Jesus as well in such cases.

v14 Now it was a sabbath on the day when Jesus made clay and opened his eyes.

[Many of Christ's key miracles took place on the sabbath. It is worth considering why, but this is beyond the scope of this study. In outline it relates to the fact that the Jewish sabbath was only a shadow pointing to a reality (Hebrews 4), and that the Father and Jesus, though living in a permanent sabbath (Genesis 2:2), were still in a permanent state of "restful" working (John 5:17).]

The charge of sabbath-breaking will lie at the heart of the prosecution case. It seems an informal court has been set up, in the synagogue (v34-35).

v15 Again therefore the Pharisees asked him how he regained his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see".

The man's account is more compressed this time than his earlier account (v11). His previous account had been fuller, but his hearers got hung up on the details, and thereby avoided the central point. His emphasis this time therefore lies on his present state "I see". That is actually what is important for his hearers to face up to. He is trying to help them not to get hung up about the ways and means.

v16 Therefore some of the Pharisees said "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath". But others said "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

The Pharisees become divided, and so cannot decide the case. The evidence that the man can now see is not important to them. They all ignore the core evidential issue, that a man who heals a man blind from birth must be the Messiah. These men are only interested in their regular habits of thinking, about the "legal principles" for deciding cases involving suspected heresy. But principles often conflict, with one person emphasising one principle, another another. For some, what matters is whether the sabbath law, as they understood it, had been broken. Others however are bothered by another principle: how can a sinful man do such signs, because only God could be behind them, and God does not listen to sinners (Psalm 34:15-16). Which of these (secondary) principles is the more important becomes the crux of their argument. We would judge the latter nearer the truth, but even to say that is to become ensnared in their mindset. They all miss the important issue that this is a **Messianic** sign, which demands a **faith** response.

v 17 They say therefore to the blind man again: What do you say about him, because he opened your eyes?" And he said that he is a prophet"

When people get stuck they ask more questions, even if they aren't all that relevant. Perhaps the Pharisees hoped this question would give them reason to avoid having to make a decision, that the man would make it for them. If so they were disappointed. The man himself makes progress here, by identifying Jesus as a prophet. Under the pressure of persecution, this man is thinking about what had happened to him, and his faith is growing.

v18-23 Examination by the Pharisees - the parents

v 18-19 Therefore the Jews did not believe about the man that he was blind and had had his sight restored until they called the parents of the man who had had his sight restored, and asked them "Is this your son whom you say was born blind?. How is it that he sees now?"

The Jews (the Jewish leadership) objective is to prove that there has been no miracle, so they hope they can prove that the man and Jesus are in a fraudulent plot to pretend there was one. That is the only way they can save their belief position intact. They hope to establish this from the man's parents. It must have taken time to get them into this "court". They therefore want to know from the parents whether he really was born blind and by what process he can now see.

v20-21 His parents therefore answered and said "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind, but we do not know how he now sees, nor who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is legally of age, and he will speak for himself."

Superficially this seems a reasonable answer. Legally they can only testify as witnesses to the facts about the identity of their son and his birth. They confine themselves to that. But they come across as strangely and totally uninvolved. They do not marvel at what has happened, even though you might have expected them to be delighted at their son being able to see, and that they would have been joyful. John tells us fear was the reason for their reticence, and their desire that the questioning should return to their son:

v 22-23 His parents said these things because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should acknowledge him to be the Christ, he would be expelled from the synagogue. Therefore the parents said he is of age, question him.

"The Jews" signifies the Jewish authorities, those responsible for running the synagogues.

The parents are motivated by their fear of man, which brings a snare (Proverbs 29:25). As a result they won't "see" the Messianic sign, and fail to enter into faith,

and or even the joy of seeing their son healed. Do we fear the opinions of those in authority?

"The Jews" had prejudged the status of Jesus, so now they are "locked out" by their prejudice, and no amount of evidence that Jesus is the Messiah can persuade them otherwise. This immovability is compounded by their abuse of their power, in preventing others from knowing the truth. Are we prejudiced like this about anything? Do traditional views bind us from seeing truth? Or do we strive to keep our minds open to the implications of new evidence?

v24-34 Examination by the Pharisees - the man, second time

v24 They therefore called the man who had been blind back a second time, and said to him "Give God the glory; we know this man is sinful"

The invocation to "Give God the glory" may have been a special phrase, akin to demanding a statement on oath. (Compare Revelation 14:7)

The Pharisees try to bully the man into conforming to their own view of the situation. This is a classic abuse of religious power: and this is what results in people believing "six impossible things before breakfast", as it says in Alice in Wonderland. When our religious views are threatened, do we ever do this to other people? Do we allow ourselves to be bullied into conforming to the "accepted" religious view?

v25 The man therefore answered: I do not know if he is sinful; one thing I do know, that I was blind and now I see.

The man's answer cuts straight through the Pharisees' focus on something that, quite frankly, can't ever be proved by men either way. The man tells his experience of what has been done to him, something that cannot be discounted. The man's present ability to see was something that anyone could readily objectively verify if they chose. It is strange that no one tests his sight in the passage. It must therefore have been obvious to everyone that the man really could see perfectly normally.

The man focuses on the core issue, which everyone else wants to evade. He can see.

People often use this text to show the power of personal testimony. But this man's testimony is about something that can be **objectively proved**. It is not something religious, subjective and difficult to verify, which is often the case for most "Christian testimonies", which usually focus on their subjective experience of salvation.

If we testify, we should testify to things that are as equally objectively provable as this man's sight.

v26 They therefore said to him: What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?

They really don't know what to say, and fall back on asking another silly question, silly because the question has been asked already, and answered. They still want to avoid facing the implications of the man's statement that he has regained his sight. Perhaps they hope he will give a different answer, or reveal some inconsistency that would allow them to say his story was a fabrication.

v27 He answered them: I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear again? You don't want to become his disciples, do you?

The form of the language of the last question in Greek, which expects a negative answer, shows that the man recognises their demand for information is not honestly intentioned. That is why he won't repeat himself.

v28-29 And they reviled him and said: You are his disciple, but we are Moses's disciples; we know God spoke through Moses; but we do not know where this man is from.

Their reviling stems from being rumbled about their dishonest intent, and their failure to resolve the situation to their satisfaction. Their response is common amongst religious people, to show great certainty and a positive attitude about an historical event that they cannot assess because they were not there, while at the same time being uncertain and denying reality to a current event that they can assess.

How does our claim to know with certainty what the Bible says compare with our equivocal judgement about modern situations?

v30-3 The man answered and said to them: "That is truly remarkable, that you don't know where he is from, and he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinful men, but does listen to anyone who is God-fearing, and does His will. From the beginning, it has been unheard of that anyone has opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man was not from God, he could not have done it."

The man declares the truth, that this is a Messianic sign. The principles the man enunciates are entirely correct Biblically (compare e.g. Acts 5:32). Through his statement, the man's faith is shown to be growing under the pressure of the hostile questioning. He recognises that only God could do this, because it required a miracle of re-creation, something which only God could do. The barb

in the statement for his hearers is that "*the opening of the eyes of the blind*" is the Messianic sign that they are all steadfastly refusing to acknowledge.

v34 They answered and said to him: "You were born wholly in sins, and you are teaching us?" And they cast him outside

This not referring to any such concept as "original sin", but to their presumption that the man's blindness was the direct consequence of sin. They cast him outside, that is, out of the synagogue (v22), because what he said amounted to a declaration that Jesus is the Messiah.

v35-38 Jesus brings the man to faith

v35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and finding him said: "You are placing your faith in the son of man".

In the Greek, this is not a question, but a statement, "*You believe in the Son of man*". Jesus recognises that with the Pharisees throwing him out, he must have confessed Jesus as Messiah, and so placed his faith in Him.

v36 He answered, saying: And who is he, sir, in order that I may place my faith in him?

The man has not yet seen Jesus with his eyes, and so presumably does not know who is speaking to him. He has faith in the One who healed him, but as yet does not know His identity. So he cannot worship Him (compare John 4:22).

v37 Jesus said to him: "You have seen him already and he is the one now speaking to you."

Jesus confirms who the man should place his faith in, giving him the necessary confirmatory double witness, which comes from both seeing and hearing. (Compare 1 John 1:3)

v38 And He said "I believe, Lord", and worshipped him.

This is the only proper response to recognising and identifying Jesus as Messiah. Note how Jesus accepts his faith and worship, without the need for any confession of sin. That is because true faith is directed towards God and His Son Jesus Christ. Sin is a side issue, shown here to be inessential for saving faith in Jesus Christ.

v39-41 Judgement on belief or unbelief

v39 And Jesus said: "With a view to judgement I came into this world, that those who don't see might see, and the ones who do see might become blind.

Jesus says in John 3:17 that he did not come to condemn the world but to save it, but how we respond to his actions creates a judgement situation in itself. This is made clear in John 3:18-21 (*He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And in this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God*). Jesus is the light of the world (v5). The man, consistently honest in his intentions, comes to Jesus, the light. The other actors in the story, the neighbours, the Pharisees, the Jews, the man's parents, they all loved darkness rather than light. They refused the light revealed through the evidence of the man's healing.

Whenever someone looks at what Jesus does, he either responds positively to that light, and sees better, or responds negatively, and is able to see less and less.

How do we respond to evidence of any sort? Do we let it inform our judgement, or do we refuse the evidence before us. We judge ourselves in making our judgements. The way we judge what we see determines what we become, and God's judgement on us, whether for or against us. This is very sobering. Every time we judge a situation, or even fail to do so like the neighbours, we are judged by that decision.

This verse is the key to the whole passage.

v40 Some of the Pharisees, being with them, heard these words, and said to him "We are not blind too, are we?"

Their question expects the answer no. They don't want to admit to Jesus's opinion that they are blind.

v41 Jesus said to them: "If you were blind, you would not have had sin; but now that you say that you see, your sin persists."

There is a huge peril in believing you see and understand when in fact you don't. The Pharisees were self-righteous, as shown in the story of the two men who went to pray (Luke 18:10-14). Everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he that humbles himself will be exalted.

What does this have to teach us?

Our judgement of evidence, especially of Christ's works, determines how we will be judged. Prejudice, and subservience to authority, makes you blind. We must make our own assessments of the evidence before us, on its merits.

Many Christians today have been taught, by theologians and church leaders (the Christian equivalent of the scribes, Pharisees and Jewish authorities) that similar miracles cannot happen today in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus prophesied that believers would do his works, and on a scale greater than He did (e.g. John 14:12), and that we should be the same light in the world as He was (Matthew 5:14). This passage shows how our attitudes can be wrong when, like the disciples, we see human problems that need solving, or when, like the onlookers, we can respond badly when a miracle is performed.

When I was a student, I was involved in healing a student in the university Christian Union, and she really needed it. There wasn't, at that time, a human solution for her medical condition, which was at times extremely painful and incapacitating. It was a sign miracle, instant, and fully medically attested, and indeed her healing proved to have been far more extensive than what I thought we were praying for at the time! The Calvinist faction, who believed that divine miracles were impossible today, publicly called it Satanic, and would not face up to what had happened within their own Christian community. It was not pretty watching what happened to them as God dealt with them and many fell into open sin during the period that followed. Prejudice makes you blind.

Let us draw things together and summarise the way judgement worked itself out for the people mentioned in this chapter.

- 1) **The disciples.** They see the blind man, and regard his situation as hopelessly unchangeable, the consequence of sin. They feel no compassion, and just take it as an opportunity to discuss a silly, unanswerable religious question.
- 2) **The neighbours.** Rather than face the miracle, they dispute the man's identity, and even after it was confirmed, they express no wonder, nor do they recognise what the sign means. Because of their desire to stay "on side" with the authorities (v22) they will not make a personal decision about what the evidence says about Jesus, but take the man to the "religious experts", the Pharisees, for them to decide the question for them.
- 3) **The Pharisees.** They are divided, but are stuck on Moses, and so more interested in their "legal principles for deciding cases" than with facing up to the evidence before them, and its implications for what it says about Jesus as Messiah. They are looking for any reason to deny that a miracle occurred.

4) **The Jews (the Jewish synagogue leadership)**. They had already prejudged the issue of who Jesus is (saying he is not the Messiah (9:22)), and act politically and abuse their power to ensure their judgement will prevail irrespective of whatever evidence speaks to the contrary. Why? Because their own authority and status are at stake.

5) **The man's parents**. They don't want to get involved. They fail to acknowledge the miracle) even in their own son. They fear being thought to declare Jesus as Messiah, through fear of the authorities. They fail to enter their son's joy and salvation. The fear of man is a snare.

6) **The man**. He surrenders to Jesus' will in allowing the clay to be applied, and obeys the instruction to go and wash. Then he consistently relies on his objective personal experience of being able to see. Under the pressure of persecution for Christ's sake his confession and faith grow, to give him ever more spiritual sight and finally saving faith that falls down and worships Jesus as Messiah. Apart from Jesus, he is the only one who isn't blind.

7) **Jesus**. Shows deep compassion to meet the need of the man, and demonstrate the true character of God, demonstrates His creative power, and makes sure the work of spiritual as well as physical salvation is fully completed.

Which of these people are you and I most like?

Summary

This miracle is important as the key Messianic sign in John's gospel. In scripture only Jesus is recorded as healing blind people like this. In v30 it was a marvel to the man that no one else could see this as a Messianic sign! Do we?

Spiritually we are all born blind. Do we realise that, and know that for those born blind to see requires a re-creative miracle?

We cannot escape making an assessment of everything we experience. The passage shows that as we judge, so we shall be judged. We shall thereby receive more light or less. The key verse is v39. Are we blind or seeing, or perhaps, though in blindness, still see ourselves as uncertain like the Pharisees?

How do we make judgements, when faced with evidence? Do we see what is important, or evade the issues, either by refusing to judge or by focusing on side issues?

The impact of light and truth on our lives either makes us see better, or become more blinded. This is true of everything, not just "religious" truth. We should find this "scary".

How do I respond to uncomfortable or challenging truth, positively, changing in response to the light, or do I evade it, and choose to walk in darkness?

It often explains why people's opinions, including those of Christians, differ. Our opinions depend on our previous attitude to the light that we received. If we rejected light in the past, our mistaken opinions in that area of truth may have become impossible for us to change.

One final warning: blindness can overwhelm churches, just as happened to the Jews and Pharisees. In Revelation 3:17-18 Jesus, speaking to the church of Laodicea, says "*For you say I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.*" He therefore enjoined them to buy, "*eyesalve to anoint their eyes that they might see*".

Don't presume you can see! No one can see without Christ's miracle.

This paper supports ministry to Victoria Hall Christian Fellowship, Camberley on 4.4.2004. (The elders of Victoria Hall Christian Fellowship do not necessarily endorse the opinions expressed in this paper, which are entirely the responsibility of the author)

Readers are responsible to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:21-2).

(4.4.2004,6.4.2004,5.9.2018)

You may make COMPLETE copies for yourself, but you may not alter the material, or publish it in whole or in part without written permission. (email: rhjbibpap@rhj.org.uk)

© R H Johnston, 2004, 2018.

**A dramatisation of the Sign Healing of the Man born Blind.
(John 9:1-41)
R H Johnston**

Characters in order of appearance

Narrator

Blind Man

Jesus

Group of at least 3 Disciples – disciple 1 speaks

Group of at least 3 neighbours – neighbour 1, 2 and 3 speak

Group of at least 3 Jews and Pharisees - Pharisee 1 2 and 3 speak

Synagogue official

Parents – father speaks

(Total of at least 15 characters, 10 of which are speaking parts. Most are on stage together at some time or other.)

(Open stage, no props required, except for material on floor for Jesus to use as clay, and a chair for the judge at the trial. Characters should wear clothes suitable to indicate their characters)

(A blind man sits begging centre stage. Jesus and his disciples enter stage left, and stop in front of him.)

Narrator: And as He passed by, Jesus saw a man blind from birth.

Disciple 1: Rabbi..., who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus (firmly): Neither this man sinned..., nor his parents.

(normal voice) In order that the works of God might be displayed in him, we must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day.

(reflectively) Night is coming, when no man can work.

(firmly) While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

(Jesus then spits on the ground, crouches down, and makes a ball of clay using the spit, he then goes up to blind man and applies the clay to the man's eyes, then says to him:)

Go, and wash in the pool of Siloam.

Narrator: which being translated means "sent"

(Blind man goes off stage right, uncertainly as a blind man would.

Jesus and disciples leave stage left.

Group of neighbours enter stage left, talking to each other, and occupy left side of stage.

After a short interval, the man returns, entering from stage right running, and by his looking around him obviously seeing, and occupies a position centre stage)

Neighbour1: (To the other neighbours) Isn't this man the one who used to sit here and beg?

Neighbour2: Yes that's him,

Neighbour3: No, I don't think so, but he looks very like him.

Formerly blind man: Yes, I am the one.

(Neighbours shake their heads in disbelief

Blind man moves towards neighbours at left of stage)

Formerly blind man (insistently): I really am the one.

Neighbour1: So..., how **were** your eyes opened?

Formerly Blind Man (quite slowly): The man called Jesus made clay, anointed my eyes, and then said to me, 'Go to Siloam, and wash'.

(more normally) So I went away and washed, and I received my sight.

Neighbour1: Where is He, then?

Formerly Blind man: (shrugging shoulders) I've no idea.

(Pharisees enter stage right, one brings a chair which he will sit upon as a judge (Pharisee1), and the rest including will stand about him. They stay at the right edge of stage.

The group of neighbours bring formerly blind man before the group of Pharisees)

Neighbour1 (towards the judge and Pharisees): Today is the sabbath. This man says he has received his sight.

Pharisee1 (to formerly blind man): How did you receive your sight?

Formerly Blind man: He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see.

Pharisee2 (dismissively): This man isn't from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.

Pharisee3 (more measuredly): But how can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?

(The Pharisees huddle together around the judge and murmur with each other, then retreat)

Pharisee1 (to everyone): We don't seem able to reach a decision

(pause, then turning to the blind man) What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?

Formerly Blind Man: He's a prophet.

(Pharisees shake their heads, and look frustrated and doubtful)

Pharisee1: It's all quite incredible. Call his parents!

(Neighbour1 runs off stage left and shortly returns with parents stage left)

Pharisee1 (to male parent): Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?

Male parent: We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind.

But how he now sees, we do not know.

Nor do we know who opened his eyes.

Ask him, he's an adult. He can speak for himself.

Narrator: His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews. The Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Messiah, he would be put out of the synagogue. That's why his parents said, "He's an adult, ask him."

Pharisee1 (getting exasperated): Call the man forward again

(Formerly blind man comes forward, loudly)

Give glory to God; we **know** that this man is a sinner.

Formerly Blind Man: Whether He is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know though, is that whereas I was blind, now I see.

Pharisee1 (after a pause, when he clearly trying to think of something useful to say): So what did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?

Formerly Blind Man (a little irritated): I've told you already, and you didn't listen.

Why do you want to hear it again?

You don't want to become His disciples too, do you?"

(Pharisees all grumble and insult the man)

Pharisee1 (scornfully and sarcastically): **You** are **His** disciple, but **we** are disciples of **Moses**.

(more normal voice) We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know **where** He is from.

Formerly Blind man: Well, that's an amazing thing!

You don't know where He is from, and yet He **opened** my eyes.

We know that God doesn't listen to sinners. But if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, God listens to him.

Since the beginning of time it is unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of someone born blind.

If this man were not from God, He couldn't do a thing.

Pharisee1: (very angry) **You** were born in **utter sin**, and you now **dare** to teach **us**?

*(A **synagogue official** escorts the man roughly off stage left. Everyone else exit stage right)*

(After short delay blind man enters on stage left and goes to forward stage left. Jesus then enters on stage right, looking around for the man and comes up to the man.

Meanwhile the Pharisees and neighbours then all enter stage right and stay

there, listening)

Jesus (to blind man): Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Formerly Blind Man (somewhat puzzled): And who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?

Jesus: You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.

Formerly Blind man (enthusiastically and passionately): Lord, I believe.
(Man falls on his knees and worships Jesus)

Jesus (turning to speak to the crowd assembled, slowly): For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind.

(Pharisees then move to centre stage, with their spokesman to fore)

Pharisee1 (to Jesus): We aren't blind too, are we?

Jesus (sorrowfully): If you were blind, you would have no sin. But since you **insist** that you can see, you remain in sin.

*(All leave stage right, leaving Jesus and the man behind talking quietly.
Then Jesus and man exit stage left.)*

This appendix supports ministry to Victoria Hall Christian Fellowship, Camberley on 4.4.2004.
(The elders of Victoria Hall Christian Fellowship do not necessarily endorse the opinions expressed, which are entirely the responsibility of the author)

Readers are responsible to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:21-2).

(6.4.2004, 5.9.2018)

You may make COMPLETE copies for yourself, but you may not alter the material, or publish it in whole or in part without written permission. (email: rhjbibpap@rhj.org.uk)

© R H Johnston, 2004, 2018.