

SERMONS FOR LENT 2008

The Divine Light is Within You (John 9:1-41)Jerry Truex; March 2, 2008
-----**Introduction**

The text we are looking at today is a narrative on Jesus' claim that he is the *light of the world* (Jn 8:12). In our text, Jesus, the Light of the World, appears only briefly at the beginning and at end of the narrative.

1. Read metaphorically

At the literal level, this passage is about a miraculous healing of a man born blind two thousand years ago. It's a miracle story. However, I believe that we must read the story metaphorically. That is, the story is not primarily about a physical healing, but about our own enlightenment.

Only when we read the text metaphorically—as John intended—will we see the story is about you and I here-and-now. It's about your spiritual enlightenment and mine.

There are two existential questions we are to ask of ourselves:

- a. How does one receive sight (become enlightened)? (9:10, 15)
- b. How does one lose sight (plunge into darkness)? (9:40-41)

2. A series of trials

The story focuses on a man who is born blind who is healed by Jesus. The story is composed of seven scenes or seven trials:

One: Jesus and the man (9:1-7)

Two: The man and his neighbors (9:8-12)

Three: The man and the Pharisees (9:13-17)

Four: The Pharisees and the man's parents (9:18-23)

Five: The man and the Pharisees (9:24-34)

Six: The man and Jesus (9:35-38)

Seven: Jesus and the Pharisees (9:39-41)

Scene One: Jesus and the blind man (9:1-7)

The disciples get the ball rolling by asking Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

In the first scene, two oppositions are expressed. When we discover oppositions in a narrative, it means that the author is, consciously or unconsciously, identifying his/her basic convictions.¹

1. First opposition (9:2-3)

9:2 "Who sinned, this man or his parents...that he was born blind"

9:3 [On the contrary] "Neither this man nor his parentsit was for God's glory."

Convictions:

- Sin does not cause blindness
- Blindness can reveal God's glory

2. Second opposition (9:4)

9:4a "When it is day, we work for God..."

9:4b [But] "When night comes, no one works..."

Convictions:

- Under certain conditions—darkness/Light not present—it's impossible to do God's works
- Under certain conditions—light/Light present—people are able to do God's works

3. Jesus heals the man

When Jesus sees the blind man, he spits on the ground, makes mud with his saliva, and puts it on the man's eyes. After the mud pack, Jesus tells the

¹ To ensure that readers understand properly, authors, wittingly or unwittingly, remove ambiguity by showing, not only what they mean, but also what they do not mean. Patte gives three principles for identifying explicit oppositions of action: (1) "An explicit opposition of actions is expressed in the text by two verbs of doing," (2) "there is an opposition of actions only when, from the point of view of the discourse, one of the actions is positive and the other negative," and (3) in an opposition of actions, the positive and negative actions must be comparable." See Patte, *Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics*, 27-28.

man to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash. The man does exactly what he hears Jesus tell him—he washes and he sees for the first time.

Scene Two: The blind man and his neighbors (9:8-12)

1. Jesus leaves ... or does he?

At this point, Jesus exits the stage ... or does he? As we read further, we sense that Jesus the Light is still present enlightening some people.

2. Some believe ... others do not

New characters are introduced—the man's neighbors—and a trial of sorts begins. The neighbors question the man. Some think he is the same man who they use to know. Others think he is a different person. The point is, the neighbors are divided. Some accept the miracle, others reject it.

3. Jesus is called "the man"

The former blind man can see, but is he very enlightened? Does he understand who Jesus is at this point? No. He simply identifies Jesus simply as *the man* (*ho anthrōpos*). The man sees, but he doesn't see.

Scene Three: The blind man and Pharisees (9:13-17)

1. Enter the Pharisees

In the third scene, the neighbors bring the former blind man to the Pharisees. With the introduction of the Pharisees, the author whispers something important into the ear of the readers: "Now it was on a Sabbath day that Jesus made clay and opened his eyes" (9:14).

The Pharisees were Jews whose main concern was fulfilling all of God's commands, and they were *especially* concerned about keeping the purity laws.

2. Was the man impure?

Purity is the condition of being free from physical, moral, or ritual contamination. The opposite of purity is defilement. The man born blind was considered impure because he had a physical defect. He could not

associate with other Jews, who kept the purity codes. He couldn't eat or go to the temple with them. He was a social outcast.

Jesus put mud on this man's eyes and he told him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. Any Jew ... every Jew ... would have understood this to be an act of ritual cleansing. In other words, the man who was born blind was no longer impure; after his healing and washing, he could enter mainstream Jewish society for the first time.

That's why the neighbors took the man to the Pharisees. If anyone knew whether the man was ritually pure and could now be included in society, the Pharisees would.

3. The Pharisees had divided opinions

When the man is questioned by the Pharisees, they are concerned with *how* the healing took place. In their purity system, certain types of work were prohibited on the Sabbath. And they want to know if Jesus broke Sabbath laws?

Some Pharisees said Jesus could not be from God. He violated the Sabbath—making clay, anointing, healing chronic illnesses were all considered work that could not be done on the Sabbath. Jesus was a sinner (*harmartōlos*).

Other Pharisees concluded that Jesus was not a sinner. Only someone from God could do a miracle. Like the neighbors, the Pharisees were divided.

4. Jesus is called "a prophet"

In scene three, we see the man's progress in faith. In the previous scene, he identified Jesus as *the man*. But now, he takes another step of faith. He declares that Jesus is a *prophet*.

Scene Four: The blind man's parents and Pharisees (9:18-23)

The fourth scene is the center of the story. The attempt to get Jesus on the charge that he violated the Sabbath has apparently failed. So the parents are summoned to appear before the Jewish authorities. The authorities now try to discredit the miracle.

However, the parents confirm the miracle. The man was born blind and now he sees. But, the parents are not very supportive. In fact, they are afraid. They were afraid of being *kicked out of the synagogue* (*aposynogōgos*).

The religious authorities had decided that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. We are not told why. But it is likely that the non-believing Jews thought that the Jewish Christians blasphemed God, they gave honor and praise to Jesus that should only have been given to God.

Scene Five: The blind man and Pharisees (9:24-34)

In scene five, the former blind man is once again brought back on stage for more interrogation by the religious authorities.

1. The religious authorities plunge into darkness

The authorities have refused to accept the miracle. They refuse “so see”. And so they plunge deeper and deeper into *darkness*. Ironically, the authorities tell the man to give glory to God, when the reader knows the religious authorities are the one’s failing to give glory to God.

This irony is compounded when the religious authorities confidently declare that they *know* that Jesus is a sinner, which for the reader proves their ignorance and lack of enlightenment.

The religious authorities also want to know *how* Jesus healed the man; in this way, they actually admit that Jesus opened the man’s eyes.

2. The man claims to be Jesus’ disciple

In this scene, the man sarcastically asks if the religious authorities want to become Jesus’ disciples also (9:27), which infuriates the authorities.

At this point, the man begins to taunt his accusers. How odd it is, he says, that they don’t know where Jesus is from—this miracle-worker who is obviously sent by God. In essence, he is accusing the religious authorities of being out of touch with God.

The religious authorities lose their cool. They shout at the man: “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they throw him out (*ekballō*) of the synagogue.

3. The spiritual enlightenment of the man

In this scene, the man has taken another step of faith into the light. At first, he identified Jesus merely as *the man* (9:7); then a little latter, he saw Jesus as *a prophet* (9:17); now he sees Jesus as from God (9:32) and even acknowledges that he has become one of Jesus’ disciples (9:27-28).

In contrast, the religious authorities turn face-first into darkness. Ironically, they claim to *know* what they do not know. They *know* that Jesus is a sinner and they *know* that he is not from God. Their darkness is emphasized by the fact that they don’t have a clue about where Jesus is from God.

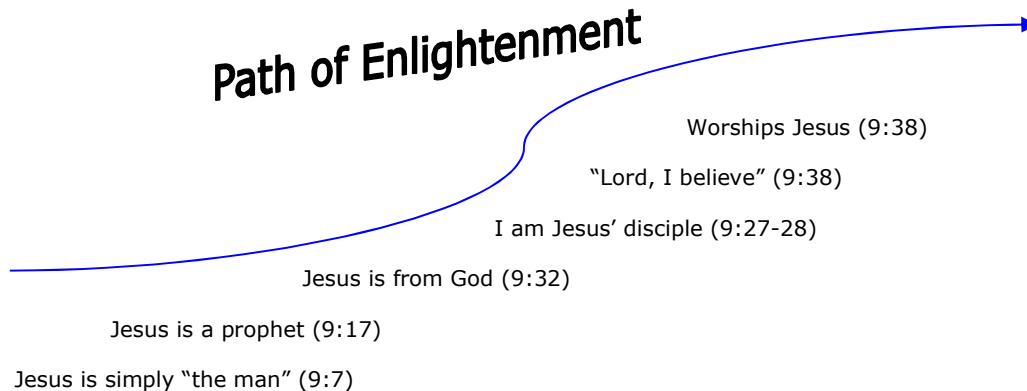
Scene Six: The blind man and Jesus (9:35-38)

Scene six is the end of the man’s trial and the climax to his enlightenment.

Jesus comes to the man and asks him: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (9:35). And when the man asks who is the Son of Man, Jesus says, “You have seen him.”

The original Greek for “you have seen” is *heōrakas*. It is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense refers to past action that continues in the present. The implication is that before Jesus meets the man in 9:35, the man has already seen Jesus! Where did he see Jesus prior to verse 35?

During his trial—during the process of being abandoned and rejected, interrogated and insulted, and finally excluded from the community—the Divine Light was with the man. The Divine Light enlightened the man.



He “saw” that God’s glory—God’s *Shekhinah*—which is Hebrew for God’s Glory or God’s Presence—was manifesting in and through his life. And it was through Jesus that he discovered this Reality. It was not immediate, but

developed over time as he proved faithful and loyal to Jesus, until finally, he received a fully epiphany of Jesus himself.

The *supreme irony* and *great reversal* of this story is that the blind man could see Jesus and the religious authorities could not.

Scene Seven: Jesus and the Pharisees (9:39-41)

1. Judgment as division (*krima*)

The story closes with an enigmatic statement by Jesus:

John 9:39. For judgment (*krima*) I came into the world so that those who do not see [spiritually] may see and those who [claim to] see will become [spiritually] blind.

The word *krima* in Greek can be translated either *judgment* or *division*. Jesus judges the world. But how does he do it? This narrative show us how. Throughout the narrative we have seen the *division* or *judgment* of the world.

Notice that the neighbors were divided; some accepted the miracle, others did not. Notice that the Pharisees were divided; some believed Jesus was from God, others did not. The judgment that Jesus brings is division; some chose to believe, others do not. The judgment/division is a matter choice.

2. Ironic reversal

There is an ironic twist and complete reversal at the end of the story. The man born blind (and Jesus) were put on trial by the Pharisees.

But in the end, the Pharisees were on trial. In fact, they put themselves on trial when they asked, "Surely, we are not blind, are we?" Their question is itself the answer. They are blind. They cannot see the Light that comes into the world. They are blind about the cause of sin.

The ironic reversal of John 9:1-41:

- It is not that sin causes (physical) blindness (the assumption the Disciples & the Pharisees).
- Rather, sin is caused by (spiritual) blindness, which is the refusal to see the Divine Light.

Reflection

We must practice seeing the Divine Light in our lives and in our world. Like the man born blind, we are challenged to see God at work making us whole and bringing us to the light.

There is plenty of darkness in the world—with its wars, poverty, and injustice. It will try to *blind* us. And there are plenty of personal trials associated with work, family, and health. They will try to *destroy* us. We must cultivate the Divine Light within us.