

The Gospel of John
Lesson 13 – John 9
Blindness and Sight

Chapter 9 begins as many of the previous chapters, with a story that sets the table for all that is to follow. The story is of a man born blind which means that the chapter is about seeing and not seeing, or in this case being blind.

Jesus gives sight to the blind, but people still can't see (vs. 1-12): the chapter begins and ends with a conversation about sin. The opening is that people ask Jesus if the reason that a man was born blind was because the man, or the man's parents sinned. This would have been a typical question coming from the Wisdom tradition that assumed sin=suffering and faithfulness=blessing. Jesus answers this query by denying that either sinned, but that the man's blindness is an opportunity for Jesus to "work" by helping the man see. This work would show that Jesus is the light of the world that helps people see in the darkness. After the man receives his sight, people can't see that it is the same man. "No, but it is someone like him," they say. This shows that people cannot see the work that Jesus and God are doing in the world. And, importantly, even though the man was given physical sight, he still does not have spiritual sight.

The Pharisees are blind to Jesus' work (vs.13-17): The Pharisees are blinded to Jesus because they have already made up their minds about who he is...a sinner. Even though the evidence of Jesus doing the work of God is right there in front of them, they refuse to see it. All they can see is a "violation" of the Sabbath. The man who was born blind, and now physically sees, begins his journey to seeing Jesus for who Jesus is, by declaring Jesus to be a prophet.

The parents pretend to be blind out of fear (vs.18-23): Once again the blind Pharisees want to prove that Jesus is not capable of giving sight. So, they challenge the parents to testify that their son was indeed born blind. The parents however, even though they know that their son was born blind, and thus was miraculously given sight, refuse to speak because of fear; because they will be excommunicated (which was a constant reality of Jews who came to profess Jesus in the first centuries of the church).

The Pharisees want to stop the formerly blind man from spiritually seeing (vs.24-34): The Pharisees once again call the formerly blind man back to their conclave (which by the way would never have happened because the Pharisees were merely a political party and not a ruling power) to have the man rescind his story about Jesus. They ask to hear the story again. He repeats the story with an openness to a new way of seeing Jesus (that Jesus may not be a sinner as the Pharisees claim). The man continues by asking if the Pharisees want to see like he does and become disciples of Jesus (this is the critical question to those who see the power of Jesus at work). The Pharisees then admit their blindness in that they don't know where Jesus came from. The man then shows them the truth that only someone who has come from God could do what Jesus did. The response reinforces their blindness in that they will not "see" what the man is saying.

The formerly blind man gains spiritual sight (vs.35-41): When Jesus hears that the man has been driven out (again a reality for many Jews who became Christians) Jesus goes to him. Jesus then asks the critical question about sight, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man is not sure who that is, and it is at that moment that Jesus points to himself and says, "You have seen him, and the one speaking to you is he." The response is one of true sight, "Lord, I believe" and then an act of worship.

Questions:

1. Where do you see the work of God in the world?
2. When did you first begin to see who Jesus is as messiah of the world?
3. Why do you think it was important to mention that the man worshipped after professing Jesus as messiah?