

# **I Was Blind, Now I See** **(John 9:1-41)**

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

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## **I. A Man Born Blind (Read John 9:1-5)**

- a. A hard question posed to Jesus by his disciples
  - i. Jesus and his disciples a man who had been born blind; later we will find that he is a beggar.
  - ii. The disciples of Jesus ask Him, “Who sinned, this man or his parents?”
    - 1. Jesus’ disciples see something that appears to be unfair, and they want to know the reason for it. They assume that there is a reason. God is just, so perhaps someone is being punished for sins committed?
    - 2. This is one form of the classic question, “If God is all-good and all-powerful, why do bad things happen to good people, who have done nothing wrong?”
      - a. However, in this case those asking are not doubting God’s character. They just are looking for an answer to something they don’t understand.
- b. The question of why such bad things happen also came up in Jesus’ comments regarding Pilate’s slaughter of Galileans and the tower of Siloam catastrophe:
  - i. “There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.’” (**Luke 13:1-5**, NKJV)
    - 1. Jesus said these horrible things did not come upon these people (rather than others) because they were worse sinners than others. Bad things that happen to people are not always the result of their sins. (But in those two cases, Jesus provides no explanation why those people suffered in this unusual way.)

- c. Some of the reasons why “bad things” like this happen, include:
- i. We are in a fallen world, where death and suffering entered the world as a result of the sins of mankind. (**Genesis 3**)
  - ii. We are in a spiritual war. Our battle is against Satan and the forces of evil arrayed against us.
    1. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (**Ephesians 6:12**, NKJV)
    2. In the story of Job, Satan is behind disasters involving a murderous band of thieves, lethal storms, the death of children and debilitating, painful skin disease (**Job 1:13-2:8**). He even complains that Job, in the beginning, was protected by God who had placed a protective hedge around Job and all he had (**Job 1:10**). That implies that Satan had easier access to others, and that he was causing trouble in the lives of many other people in Job’s day. Consequently, it seems reasonable to me to assume that Satan is instigating similar problems today.
    3. After Jesus heals a woman who had been bent over for 18 years, He puts the blame for the infirmity on Satan. (Read **Luke 13:10-16**)
  - iii. Certainly, God can and does use extreme trials and disasters to soften the hearts of people, to help them to see their need for Him, and to bring them to repentance.
    1. Consider the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:11-32**), and
    2. Many examples where God used disasters, such as:
      - a. Drought in the days of Elijah, **1 Kings 17**;
      - b. Ten Plagues to teach Pharaoh and Egypt in **Exodus 7-14**; and
      - c. Israel taken into Captivity, forewarned in **Deuteronomy 28:15-69**; with restoration following as promised in **Deuteronomy 30:1-6**.
  - iv. God even uses infirmity to keep people from sin they otherwise might commit. Consider Balaam’s foot getting crushed by his donkey to keep him from going further down a path of sin that would have led to his death (**Numbers 21:20-35**)

- v. In the story of the blind man in **Luke 9**, Jesus explains that there is yet another reason why this particular misfortune (a man born blind) occurred: to reveal the Messiah and show the power of God. This story was destined to go all over the world, and last for thousands of years after the man died.
- d. Jesus uses this discussion about blindness, darkness and night as an opportunity to teach spiritual lessons. (Read **John 9:4-5**)
  - i. "I must do the works of *Him who sent me* while it is still day."
    - 1. Note that Jesus was *sent by* the Father. There is only one God; the Father and Son are united; yet they are distinct persons. The Father sent the Son.
    - 2. I assume this "day" refers to Jesus' ministry, before He was crucified.
  - ii. "The night is coming when no one can work."
    - 1. I assume this "night" refers to death; the time when Jesus will be taken away, after He is crucified.
  - iii. "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
    - 1. Jesus does not say I am the light of the world (a bold claim that there is only one light, and He is that light. Without Him, the entire world remains in darkness.)
    - 2. Technical note: while the definite article "the" is not in the Greek in **John 9:5** (and Greek not have an indefinite article "a"), it is supplied by the translators based on context. Note that the Greek definite article "the" *does* appear in similar statements regarding being Jesus being "the light" in the same gospel, in **John 3:19** and **John 8:12**.

## II. An Unusual Way to Heal Blindness (Read **John 9:6-15**)

- a. What happens here:
  - i. There is no mention of the man asking to be healed, nor of him requesting to receive his sight before the miracle occurred.
    - 1. If the man was born blind, no way for him to even know what he was missing out on!
  - ii. Jesus spits on ground, makes mud and tells him to wash it off in one specific place: the pool at Siloam.

- iii. The man goes and does it, and his blindness is cured. He is able to see, for the first time in his life.
  - iv. People are amazed at the miracle and ask the man formerly blind how it happened.
    - 1. Jesus is not in sight. The man does not know where He is.
  - v. The man recounts the story to the Pharisees.
  - vi. This miracle was done on the Sabbath.
    - 1. Recall that according to the Law of Moses, no “work” to be done on the Sabbath. (**Deuteronomy 5:12-14**)
- b. **Question:** Is there any special significance of Jesus healing blindness? (Might it be connected to a sign that He is the Messiah, the Christ?)
  - i. Note that while many of the miracles done by Jesus were foreshadowed by Moses (showing fulfillment of **Deuteronomy 18:15-18** that a prophet “like Moses” would come), there is no account of Moses ever curing blindness.
  - ii. Read **Luke 4:16-21**
    - 1. Jesus reads from the Book of Isaiah in the synagogue in Galilee.
    - 2. “He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind.” (**Luke 4:18**)
    - 3. Jesus says this prophecy is fulfilled in their hearing.
    - 4. Note that Jesus is reading from **Isaiah 61:1-2**.
      - a. Note that it says “recovery of sight to the blind” in the Septuagint (LXX), but not in the Masoretic Text.
      - b. In case anyone was wondering why we tend to favor the LXX when reading the Old Testament, here is one example of the reason why.
    - 5. Read **Isaiah 29:18-19**.
    - 6. Read **Isaiah 35:1-6**.
  - iii. Jesus pointed to His healing blindness as a sign confirming Who He was, when John the Baptist’s disciples asked whether Jesus was the One they had been waiting for.

1. "And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." (**Matthew 11:2-6**, NKJV)
- iv. Therefore, Jesus bringing recovery of sight to the blind was a sign showing He was the One that Isaiah foretold would come. John the Baptist, who knew the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures, would have understood the significance of Jesus' answer in **Matthew 11**.
- c. **Questions:** Why did Jesus bring about the healing in this unusual, 2-part way (mud from dirt and saliva place on the eyes, followed by washing in the pool at Siloam)? Why didn't He just speak some words or lay hands on the man and heal him that way?
  - i. Irenaeus (c. 130-200 AD) was bishop of the church in Lyon, in Gaul (modern-day France). In his youth he had been a disciple of Polycarp, who in turn had been a personal disciple of the apostle John. Therefore, Irenaeus was only one link removed from the author of the gospel of John. (For that reason, I find what he writes on this subject to be particularly of interest). Irenaeus wrote regarding the events of **John 9**:
    1. "To that man, however, who had been blind from his birth, He gave sight, not by means of a word, but by an outward action; doing this not without a purpose, or because it so happened, but that He might show forth the hand of God, that which at the beginning had molded man. And therefore, when His disciples asked Him for what cause the man had been born blind, whether for his own or his parents' fault, He replied, 'Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.'
    2. "Now the work of God is the fashioning of man. For, as the Scripture says, He made [man] by a kind of process: 'And the Lord took day from the earth, and formed man.' (**Genesis 2:7**)
    3. "Wherefore also the Lord spat on the ground and made clay, and smeared it upon the eyes, pointing out the original fashioning [of man], how it was effected, and manifesting the hand of God to those who can understand by what [hand] man was formed out of the dust.

4. "...And inasmuch as man, with respect to that formation which, was after Adam, having fallen into transgression, needed the laver of regeneration, [the Lord] said to him [upon whom He had conferred sight], after He had smeared his eyes with the clay, 'Go to Siloam, and wash;' thus restoring to him both [his perfect] confirmation, and that regeneration which takes place by means of the laver. And for this reason when he was washed he came seeing, that he might both know Him who had fashioned him, and that man might learn [to know] Him who has conferred upon him life."
  - a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 543)
5. Irenaeus is saying that the unusual method by which the blind man in **John 9** was given sight was deliberate, and pointed to two things:
  - a. Making the mud *pointed back* to the creation of man in **Genesis 2:7**, connecting Jesus with the creation of man in the beginning.
  - b. The command to go and wash in the pool *pointed forward* to Christian baptism, which he calls our "laver of regeneration", by which we are born again and our sins are forgiven. (**John 3:3-5, Acts 22:16**)
    - i. Note that a "laver" is a vessel in which things are washed. Our English word "lavatory" comes from the same root.
    - ii. Tertullian (c. 160-230 AD), a Christian writer from North Africa, began his work *On Baptism* by stating:
      1. "Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life!" (Source: Tertullian, *On Baptism*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, p. 669)

### III. Problems After the Miracle (Read **John 9:16-38**)

- a. What happens after the healing (recounting the main points):
  - i. Pharisees are upset at this, accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath.
  - ii. Others disagree and conclude that this sign shows Jesus is approved by God.
  - iii. They grill the formerly blind man who says, "He is a prophet."
  - iv. Next, the Pharisees question the miracle itself.
    1. Parents confirm that it is indeed their son.
    2. Parents are afraid to confess that Jesus did the miracle and that He is the Christ, due to fear of being cast out of the synagogue.
    3. The parents direct the Pharisees back to their son; tell the Pharisees to ask him.
  - v. Pharisees grill the son; they tell him that Jesus must be a sinner.
    1. The son says all he knows is that he was blind, but now he sees (a line famous from the song *Amazing Grace*).
    2. Son challenges the Pharisees, who then revile the young man who had been given sight.
    3. The man says that God does not listen to sinners (**John 9:31**), that God only listens to those who do His will.
    4. The man says Jesus must be from God. No one ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a man *born blind*.
    5. The Pharisees are furious at the young man lecturing them, accuse him of being "completely born in sins", and cast him out.
  - vi. Jesus hears about what happened to the young man, finds him, and speaks to him.
    1. Jesus asks the young man if he "believes in the Son of God".
      - a. Jesus reveals that He is the Son of God; the young man believes and worships Him.
      - b. The Son of God was prophesied in the Old Testament.
        - i. "Why do the nations rage...the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers gather together

against the Lord and against His Christ...The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you...."' (from **Psalm 2:1-7**)

- ii. "I shall be a Father to him and he shall be to me a son" (**2 Samuel 7:14**)

- 1. This was an important part of the prophecy given to David by Nathan, that one descended from David would become king over the eternal kingdom.

- vii. There are many lessons for us to learn from here:

- 1. Don't be cowards like the young man's parents, who were afraid to stand up for Jesus and the truth because they were afraid of the religious leaders casting them out of the synagogue.
- 2. Imitate the courage of the young man, who speaks up on behalf of Jesus in the face of opposition from the religious authorities. Although he was kicked out of the synagogue, Jesus made a point of seeking him out, and revealed wonderful things to the courageous young man.
- 3. Recognize in this story yet another place where the divinity of Christ is demonstrated. In this encounter, Jesus clearly states that He is the Son of God (directly refuting the claims of Muslims today that "God *can't have* a Son"). Also, He receives worship from the young man.

#### IV. The Dangers of Spiritual Blindness (Read **John 9:39-41**)

- a. Jesus says the reason He came into the world was to address spiritual blindness. (**John 6:39**)
  - i. Here He tells the Pharisees that they are blind.
    - 1. Consider also what Jesus says in **Matthew 23**: "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also." (**Matthew 23:26**, NKJV)
  - ii. He also says the world is blind.
    - 1. "For judgement I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." (from **John 9:39**, NKJV)



- b. **Question:** Do you see the world around you as it really is in the eyes of Jesus, namely with people who are *spiritually blind*?
- c. **Question:** There is *no account* of someone (before the time of Jesus) having his sight restored who was *born* blind (**John 9:32**). However, can you think of any other healing of blindness in Scripture (of someone who became blind during their life, but had their sight restored later)?
  - i. I can think of two instances from the Old Testament:
  - ii. Tobit
    - 1. This is in the book of **Tobit**, which is contained in Catholic, Orthodox Bibles; it is also found in old versions of the King James Bible (generally from the 1800's or earlier), including the original version of the King James (Authorized) Version.
  - iii. Elisha. (Read **2 Kings 6:8-23**), where sight is restored on two occasions.
    - 1. First, Elisha prays for the Lord to "open the eyes" of his assistant, when they are surrounded by the enemy at Dothan. When his eyes are "opened" he is able to see the spiritual forces arrayed around them: the armies of God.
    - 2. Second, Elisha prays to have his enemies struck with blindness. Later, after the blind men are led into the Israel stronghold in Samaria, Elisha has their sight restored.
    - 3. As an aside, consider the significance of Elisha.
      - a. Note that Elijah (who came before Elisha) clearly foreshadowed John the Baptist. (**Malachi 4:5, Luke 1:17, Matthew 11:14**)
      - b. Consequently, it makes sense that Elisha, the prophet who was anointed by Elijah (**1 Kings 19:16**) and continued his ministry after his forerunner's departure, foreshadowed Jesus. We can see interesting parallels in the miracles performed by Elisha (see **2 Kings 2-5**) to those performed by Jesus.
        - i. Consider the account of the healing of Naaman, who *also is told to go and wash in a certain location* in order to be healed of his infirmity. (**2 Kings 5**)

d. Other passages that talk about spiritual blindness

i. Read **Acts 28:23-29**

1. As a prisoner in Rome, Paul lays out the evidence of the prophecies (“from both the Law and the Prophets”) to persuade the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ.
2. Many of the Jews disagree with Paul.
3. Paul rebukes them, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, saying that they have “closed their eyes” so that they are unable to see the truth.
4. He then goes on to teach the Gentiles.

ii. Read **2 Corinthians 3:7-4:6**.

1. Paul says that his fellow Jews who reject Christ have had their minds blinded.
2. They have, in effect, a veil covering their hearts (like the veil Moses had covering his face after his encounters with the Lord).
3. The “god of this age” (Satan) has blinded the minds of those who do not believe. (**2 Corinthians 4:3-4**)

**V. Conclusion and Some Take-Aways for Us**

a. Let us see the world around us as it really is: filled with the *spiritually blind*.

i. Jesus offers sight.

ii. The religious can be the most blind.

1. “Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.” (**Matthew 23:26**, NKJV)
2. “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—” (**Revelation 3:17**, NKJV)
  - a. Here, the lukewarm Christians in the church in Laodicea have succumbed to *spiritual blindness*. Jesus urges them to repent and be healed with the eye salve He can provide, before it is too late!

b. We need to know how to bring others into the light, knowing that many who do not want to see will reject it.

- c. In order to see better, three things we can pray for:
  - i. Pray for open eyes to see the spiritual battle around us (as Elisha prayed for his assistant).
  - ii. Pray to remove the plank of sin from our own eyes, so we can see more clearly. Ask God to show us what sin we need to repent of, and then go after it! (I also ask that He not show me *too much at one time*, so that I do not become overwhelmed and discouraged!)
    - 1. “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (**Matthew 7:4-5**, NKJV)
  - iii. Pray that God will open our eyes whenever we look into His Word.
    - 1. “Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.” (**Psalms 119:18**, NKJV)
    - 2. The best way to know the Bible well (in my opinion) is not to look to commentaries, “study Bibles”, or seminary training. I believe the best way is to meditate on the pure and simple Word day and night (**Psalms 1:1-3**), and to ask the Lord to open our eyes to see wonderful things in it.