

## John 9 - “He Opened My Eyes” - Sixth Sign <sup>1</sup>

**Before the lesson** – Prepare the handout, “A Reading in Six Voices/The Light of the World is Jesus!” Prepare AV equipment to play the 3:51 minute hymn, “The Light of the World is Jesus” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8J98AoG57I> for the Transformational Exercise.

**Fellowship Question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

For those who wear corrective lenses: How well can you see without glasses or contact lenses?

Tell us about a friend or family member who is/was blind. How much is/was blindness a handicap for them?

### Information

Today’s text is a long one - the entire 41 verses of John 9. We will read through the entire story of Jesus’ healing of a blind man using several readers.

- Distribute the handout and choose six readers. If you have fewer readers, you may combine the readings with Narrator/Jesus; Other speakers/Parents.

John takes several of his threads and weaves them through this story:

- The world offers darkness and death. Jesus offers light and life.
- Jesus is who he says he is. And there are plenty of witnesses who will testify on his behalf.
- We must “judge with right judgment” (7:24). “In order to judge rightly, one must see rightly, and the narrative also raises a question: What does it take to see?”<sup>2</sup>
- Jesus has the divine authority to interpret the Law, including the Sabbath laws.
- Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life - but he will need to go to the cross and be resurrected to prove that truth.
- Some will not believe in Jesus even after witnessing the most miraculous of signs.

“Just as in the Synoptic Gospels, here in John, Jesus is described as a successful folk healer [as opposed to a professional physician or public health maintainer]. Yet John’s selection of Jesus’ successes highlights truly extreme cases: a boy healed at a distance, a man crippled for thirty-eight years, a man born blind, a person dead and buried for four days.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc., 2023. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 204.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 177.

“In antiquity, light was ‘stuff.’ It was an entity with no other source other than itself...The eyes were made of fire, the ‘stuff’ that causes light, and it was this fire that emanated from the eyes that enabled a person to see...To be blind was to have eyes from which darkness emanated; darkness was the presence of dark (also ‘stuff’) rather than the absence of light. Blind people were those people whose hearts were full of darkness, hence those from whose eyes ‘dark’ emanated.”<sup>4</sup>

- A key question in this story is, “who is the sinner?” Circle the words “sin” or “sinner” in this chapter. (Hint: These words are used nine times.)

“This discourse is punctuated by queries about who can properly be called a ‘sinner’: the healed man (9:2-3, 34), Jesus (vv. 16, 24, 25, 31), or the Pharisees (v. 41)? The connection between ‘sin’ and ‘sight’ shows that the true sinners are those who fail to perceive God's work of giving light in darkness through the work of Jesus...Those who do not believe are not labeled wicked, immoral, or unjust: their sin is their unbelief. (cf. 8:24).”<sup>5</sup>

The argument about who was or was not a sinner was foundational to a never-ending debate. How pure is pure? How important is purity to God? There were scriptural bases for making the points that illness was a penalty for sin, that fetuses could sin, and that God grants health to the righteous.

- Have a class member read Exodus 4:10-12.
- Have a class member read Exodus 20:4-5.
- Have a class member read Genesis 25:21-23.
- Have a class member read Isaiah 58:9-11.

“Whose sin accounts for the blindness of an infant? The view that one can suffer the consequences of the sins of one’s parents or ancestors can be found throughout the literature of the ancient world. Latter rabbinic commentary assumed that one’s disposition may have already been fixed in the womb [footnote ‘Gen 25:22: that Esau and Jacob “struggled together” in Rebekah’s womb signals Esau’s antenatal tendency toward idolatry and wickedness.’] or that a fetus could commit idolatry if his mother entered the temple of an idol.”<sup>6</sup>

“The ‘work’ of spitting and smearing (perhaps together with that of traveling to the pool and washing) means that later there can be an accusation against Jesus of breaking the Sabbath.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, 170.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, 217.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, 206.

<sup>7</sup> David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 191.

“That Jesus declares both him and his parents innocent at the beginning of the story is important later, when they face opponents of Jesus and choose different courses - the man becomes a courageous witness, while his parents are dominated by fear.”<sup>8</sup>

“John’s Gospel does not even concede the charge that Jesus violates the Sabbath. Part of what it means to ‘judge with right judgment’ is to discern that, when Jesus works on the Sabbath, his work reveals that his Sabbath works are God’s Sabbath works: they are done with God’s authority (5:19-20; 26-27) and are the kind of life-giving and sustaining work that God himself does on the Sabbath (cf. 5:17). Jesus ‘does the works of him who sent me’ by bringing light to darkness, even on the day of rest.”<sup>9</sup>

“Is he from God or not? One side voices the question that this sign provokes: ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’ *The division shows a basic truth of the Gospel; even spectacular signs do not compel faith.* The vital thing is the one who is doing the signs; and the man, showing increasing insight, outrageously testifies of Jesus, ‘He is a prophet.’ This can be taken to mean that he is someone close to God or sent by God.”<sup>10</sup>

“[In] the newly sighted man’s next state of enlightenment, he now identifies Jesus as a prophet. This may be a first stage in recognizing Jesus for the author’s group, since it also happens in 4:19; 6:14; 7:40.”<sup>11</sup>

Vv 32-33 “As the man - a former beggar - learns, he develops as a character, his earlier innocent directness growing in courage, in discernment, in argumentative skill, and, above all, in understanding Jesus. *This is a transformative discipleship course in a tough school.*”<sup>12</sup>

“While the blind man receives both physical sight and intellectual insight, in the end the opponents of Jesus will be overcome with darkness and become blind. The two will then have switched positions.”<sup>13</sup>

John tells us stories of witnesses who can testify to the power, authority, and true identity of Jesus. Up to now, witnesses have included the disciples, a Samaritan woman, a Roman official, and an adulterous woman. Many others witnessed miracles at a wedding with thirsty people, on a hillside with hungry people, and by a poolside with desperate people. Jesus even walked on water. Is there anything this man cannot do? Now, a man blind from birth becomes a witness.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ford, 190.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, 210f.

<sup>10</sup> Ford, 192. Author’s italics.

<sup>11</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, 170.

<sup>12</sup> Ford, 194. Author’s italics.

<sup>13</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, 169.

“One of the primary duties of a client was to praise the patron in public. Public and proper credit was to be given whenever it was due. In asking the healed man to honor God, and then adding that Jesus is a ‘sinner,’ the opponents are asking him to recognize God as his patron but to reject Jesus as broker.”<sup>14</sup>

- In how much of this story is Jesus not present? (He exits at verse 7 and returns at verse 35.)
- Why do you think Jesus is absent for over half of this story? How does Jesus’ absence inform our life of faith?

“Jesus is strangely absent. Even though his actions have generated the controversy that dominates the narrative, Jesus does not take center stage. Rather, the main conversations occur between the man and his neighbors, between the man and the Pharisees, and between the man’s parents and the Pharisees. Jesus returns only after the Pharisees drive the man out (9:34). The man’s testimony is cast into sharp relief in Jesus’ absence. *Indeed, bearing witness to Jesus in his absence is what Jesus’ disciples must do.*”<sup>15</sup>

“The man healed by Jesus demonstrates exactly the kind of exemplary courage and faith in confessing Jesus that others, including the man’s parents, lack (cf. 12:42-43). Since the man’s parents are willing to make him an orphan, he will need a family and a place to belong. Jesus’ subsequent act of seeking and finding the man embodies his promise to his followers that he will not leave them as orphans (14:18). In his ministry, Jesus gathers together those who have been cast out or scattered by others and makes of them one flock (see 9:34-35; 10:11; 11:52).”<sup>16</sup>

### **Transformational Exercise**

Let’s listen to this hymn as we reflect on this passage. Invite the Spirit to use these words, printed on the fourth page of your handout, to speak to your spirit.

- Play the 3:51 minute hymn, “The Light of the World is Jesus” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8J98AoG57I>

---

<sup>14</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, 172.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, 208f. My italics.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, 215.

## A Reading in Six Voices — John 9:1-41 (NRSV)

Voice One: Narrator

Voice Two: Jesus

Voice Three: Man born blind

Voice Four: Pharisees

Voice Five: Parents of the man born blind

Voice Six: All other speakers

### I. 9:1-5: Jesus and the Disciples

As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

### II. 9:6-7: Jesus and the Man Born Blind

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him: "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

### III. 9:8-12: The Man Born Blind and His Neighbors

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask: "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying: "It is he." Others were saying: "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying: "I am the man." But they kept asking him: "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered: "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me: 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him: "Where is he?" He said: "I do not know."

#### **IV. 9:13-17: The Man Born Blind and the Pharisees**

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them: "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said: "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said: "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man: "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said: "He is a prophet."

#### **V. 9:18-23: The Pharisees and the Parents of the Man Born Blind**

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them: "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered: "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said: "He is of age; ask him."

## **VI. 9:24-34: The Pharisees and the Man Born Blind**

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him: "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered: "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him: "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them: "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying: "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered: "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him: "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

## **VII. 9:35-38: Jesus and the Man Born Blind**

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered: "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him: "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said: "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

## **VIII. 9:39-41: Jesus and the Pharisees**

Jesus said: "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him: "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them: "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say: 'We see,' your sin remains."

## The Light of the World is Jesus!

The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin,  
The Light of the world is Jesus!  
Like sunshine at noonday, His glory shone in;  
The Light of the world is Jesus!

[Refrain]

Come to the light, 'tis shining for thee;  
Sweetly the light has dawned upon me;  
Once I was blind, but now I can see:  
The Light of the world is Jesus!

No darkness have we who in Jesus abide;  
The Light of the world is Jesus!  
We walk in the light when we follow our Guide!  
The Light of the world is Jesus! [refrain]

Ye dwellers in darkness with sin-blinded eyes,  
The Light of the world is Jesus!  
Go, wash at His bidding, and light will arise;  
The Light of the world is Jesus! [refrain]

No need of the sunlight in Heaven we're told;  
The Light of the world is Jesus!  
The Lamb is the Light in the city of gold,  
The Light of the world is Jesus!

Words and Music: Philip P. Bliss

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8J98AoG57I>