

The Sign of Unbelief – John 9 (*Part 1: The Healing of the Man Born Blind*)

Introduction – We come to the sixth of seven signs in the Book of Signs, the first 11 Chapters of the Gospel of John. Christ has made wine of water, healed a son by His word, caused a lame man to walk, fed five thousand men and their families, and walked on the water. These signs, we are told, are selected so that the reader would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God, and that in believing would have life in His name (20:31). In this chapter, a man born blind receives his sight. Yet, for all these signs, the Pharisees see a man from Galilee, rumored to be born of fornication, lawless in his refusal to obey the authorities' Sabbath regulations, claiming deity for Himself when in fact they wonder if he is demon-possessed. In their willful unbelief in the face of these works, Jesus declares, *"For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind"* (v39).

Recall this event comes right on the heels of Jesus declaring Himself to be the "I AM" (8:58), whereby they took up stones to throw at Him. Jesus caused them to not be able to see Him, going through the midst of them and leaving the temple (8:59). They can't see Him, and then in 9:1 Jesus sees someone. The one He sees can't see and can't see Him. In healing this man, this one who could not see is able to see and the rest of the chapter is about the ones who can see Him but cannot see. This is the sign of unbelief, the story of spiritual blindness. But it is also the sign of the One Who gives sight to the blind, where we will begin now.

Afflictions and the Glory of God (vv1-4) – The story of the man being healed is simple and straightforward – and dripping with symbolism and teaching. It begins with the disciples' rabbinic question. You see their worldview – sickness (and poverty, afflictions, deformities, etc.) are a result of someone's past sin. They are like Job's accusers and so we must respond. First, we live in a world fraught with the results of the fall and we are by nature fallen humanity. Second, there are often consequences of sin in this life. But third, there is such a thing as innocent suffering (as in Job's case). Jesus turns the question on its head, connecting the hardship to the future rather than the past, to what God is going to do with the affliction (vv3-4).

We tend to think that everything going on in our life is about us – that we are the center of the story. But what if we learned to encounter our trials with our eyes centered on the more glorious story of which we are a part? What then is the purpose of your affliction? John Piper addresses this in his book by the title, *"Don't Waste Your Cancer."* We would have the opinion of Paul that *"when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Cor 12:7-10). We might better comprehend the glory of election instead of simply complaining before God, *"Why have you made me like this?"* (Rom 9:20-24) and join Paul in his great doxology following this long argument, *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God...for of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."* (Rom 11:33-36).

Healing and the Revealing of the Glory of God (vv5-7) – Jesus is the light of the world and this light particularly gives sight to those bound in darkness. This passage (chapter 9) is a clear revealing of the blindness of those in chapter 8 who first brought the woman *"caught in adultery"* (8:3, 12), and to the Pharisees who charged Jesus with bearing false witness (8:13ff).

A Weird Method? – We might think it gross that Jesus spits on the ground and makes clay to put on the blind man's eyes. But even today we acknowledge the medicinal value of a dog licking a wound. In the ancient world spittle was considered medicinal and there were rabbinical teachings on such treatment. In addition, as early as the second century, Irenaeus noted the parallel to Genesis when God fashioned man with dirt and His breath (Gen 2:7) saying what the Word *"had omitted to form in the womb he supplied in public, that the words of God might be manifested in him."* All of this was to show that Christ was the world's creator and that He had come to make the new humanity. The washing in Siloam (waters from the "Sent One") then was the *"laver of regeneration,"* the new birth represented by Christian baptism (Against Heresies, Irenaeus).

God is Revealing His Glory in You and in Us – It is humbling but true: you are not a self-made man and you do not control your destiny. You are clay in the hand of the Potter (Isaiah 64:8). He was the One who made you just the way you are in your mother's womb (Ps 139:13-15). This includes your physical attributes, your personality, your gifts, your weaknesses, and how they would all play out in each and every day of your life (Ps 139:16, Eph 2:11). The hairs of your head are numbered (Luke 12:7) so that you should not fear. When one grasps this by faith, it is overwhelming blessing (Ps 139:1-6, 17-18).

This is true of generations and peoples as well as individuals. The house of Israel can be made and remade (Jer 18:3-7). Jesus warns His generation (Matt 12:29) and Peter calls on individuals to be saved from a perverse generation (Acts 2:40).

Throughout the Old Testament, entire nations are warned, and in Revelation, whole churches (or all the churches in a city) are warned.

Night is Coming (v4) – This dour warning was given to the disciples but pointed at the unbelieving Jews that Jesus will deal with next in this chapter. This healing was a wonderful sign of what the Messiah could and would do. He would remain with that generation just a short time and then a great night would fall upon the Jews. It is possible that the blind could see, but they must come to the One who was revealing Himself in these signs. The same applies to individuals, generations, and nations in all times.

The Light of the World – I have said repeatedly that the book of John is an unpacking of the themes of the first 18 verses of the first chapter. Jesus is that Light (1:4, 9) and all men and nations must deal with it (3:19-20, 12:46).

The Light Has Come – This sign is also a wonderful sign of what the Messiah has and will do. Through His church, the light of the gospel remains (John 12:36) and so the church is the light of the world (Matt 5:14-16). The apostle Paul saw that light in the midst of persecuting the light and became blind, only to hear the Good News of the Light and receive His sight (Acts 9:1-18). He would later testify, while in chains, of what had happened to Him and why it happened, “...to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:12-18).

The Light will Go Forth – The command to the church is clear and it is based on the authority of the Risen Christ (Matt 28:18-20). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are and will be the triumphing church over history, bringing spiritual sight to the blind. Christ will have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Psalm 72:8), bringing deliverance to all in their afflictions (Psalm 72:12-14).

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