

John 9.35-41: Choosing Sight or Blindness

❖ Act 5: Sight Complete; Blindness Confirmed

▶ Main characters:

▶ Jesus the Lord

▶ The fully seeing man

▶ The truly blind Pharisees

▶ Theme: Sight that leads to life and blindness that brings judgment

An unhesitating willingness to believe

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

- ❖ Jesus saw this man when he was blind and now seeks him out so that grace and faith can complete its work of bringing him into an eternal relationship. This is the mission of the “Sent One” and the mission for which Jesus has sent us.
- ❖ *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*
 - ▶ Here is the heart of John’s gospel and the central reason for which Jesus did his miraculous signs: “that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20.31).
- ❖ *“Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.”*
 - ▶ The blind man-healed has never seen Jesus; the first and only time that Jesus spoke to him was when he was still blind—so logically he asks, “Who is he?” But note that he asks for the identity of the Son of Man “so that I may believe in him.”

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

- ❖ The “Son of Man” is a profound Christological title that is used almost exclusively by Jesus—of himself—in the Gospels (69 times in the Synoptics and 13 times in John). The exception is when the Jews question the pronouncements of Jesus and skeptically ask, “Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”
- ❖ “Son of Man” is used by Jesus to convey identity, revelation, and display “messianic self-consciousness” (cf. Matthew 16.13; John 8.28; 9.35). Using the designation, Jesus presents himself as: having authority corresponding to God (cf. Mark 2.28; Luke 6.5), the one who identifies with sinners (cf. Matthew 11.19), the servant who is the ransom for the sins of the world (cf. Matthew 20.28; Mark 1.45), the One who is coming in eschatological glory for judgment and reward (cf. Matthew 25.31; Luke 9.26), and the one who exclusively represents the Father and is the sole source of eternal life (John 5.27; 6.27, 53). It is an extraordinary title, one that reveals Jesus as the Fullness of Deity in bodily form (cf. Colossians 2.9).

Revelation and worship

Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

- ❖ What a moment of revelation! He has heard, as a blind man, the voice of the one speaking to him and when he did, he responded with unhesitating faith. Now he sees the One who spoke healing to him and he responds with belief in who this One is—the Son of Man, the Lord—the response of one who is truly spiritually alive. In him was fulfilled the words spoken by Jesus to a scandalous woman to whom he had revealed himself as “the one speaking with you”—

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

—John 4.23

- ❖ Revelation received—not just heard, but received into one’s spirit—always results in worship offered. If we hear the Word of God and it does not result in worship, we are afflicted with a Pharisee-like blindness—a deadly malady.

The Judgment Work of Jesus

Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

—John 3.17-18

- ❖ “This is the paradox of the revelation, that in order to bring grace it must also give offense, and so can turn to judgment. In order to be grace, it must uncover sin; he who resists this binds himself to his sin . . . ” (Bultmann)

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

—John 5.21-23

A Blindness that Brings Guilt

Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

- ❖ Jesus has already, again and again, testified that he is the “Sent One” who has come from the Father and who is doing the works of the Father. Once again, in response to a miraculous sign, the Pharisees have refused to believe—therefore their guilt remains. Those who are willfully blind are held responsible for their blindness.
- ❖ Martin Luther to his one-time monastic companion said these words that reflect the truth of Jesus’ “justification parable”—

“Therefore, my dear brother, learn Christ and learn Him crucified, learn to pray to Him, despairing of yourself, saying: ‘Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness, but I am Thy sin; Thou hast taken on Thyself what Thou wast not, and hast given to me what I was not.’ Beware of ever aspiring to such purity that you do not want to seem to yourself, or to be, a sinner. For Christ dwells only in sinners.”

What we have learned about blindness . . .

- ❖ The **blind judgment** of the disciples: their erroneous theology compelled them to find guilt and assign blame instead of seeing need and extending grace. This is a blindness that often characterizes those who claim to be followers of Christ and renders them unusable for the work of God.
- ❖ The **structural blindness** of the community is a “caste” blindness that every one of us needs to acknowledge; *a lack of perception that renders me unaware and therefore unconcerned about another’s experiences or plight*. If we don’t see the need, we don’t truly see the person as Jesus sees them.
- ❖ The **legacy blindness** of the Pharisees: perpetuating rules, traditions (*“That’s how we’ve always done it.”*), cultural norms or preferences which do not reflect grace and the life-giving work of the Spirit, have little or no basis in Scripture, and are simply a reflection of “our way.”

- ❖ The **institutional blindness** of the parents teaches us that going to church or having membership in a church does not fulfill the purposes of God in one's life and yet it often replaces the hard work of obedience, sacrifice, and taking the mission of Christ to a lost and hostile world. Institutional loyalty is never an acceptable substitute for Christlikeness, faithful discipleship, or Spirit-led living.
- ❖ The grave nature of **unteachable blindness**: you would never find a Pharisee at the altar after a sermon, weeping and praying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner. I am failing as a follower of Christ." A Pharisee doesn't come to be taught, corrected, or rebuked (cf. 2 Timothy 3.16). He is too acceptable and satisfied in his own evaluation of himself for the Word to ever have that effect on his heart, or perhaps too unmindful to be changed by the Word (cf. James 1.22-25).
- ❖ "Born blind" is the story of every human being and only Jesus can open blind eyes. Tragically, many Christians who claim to see are, in fact, sight impaired—blind to our continuing need of grace, blind to the glories of the Son of Man, and blind to the needs of others, especially those who are marginalized and outside of our social circle. Only as we receive his touch can we fulfill our calling to be his "sent-ones"—doing the work of the Father while there is still time.