

“I was blind, but now I see.”

(John 9)

John is a great storyteller because he is able to make a simple miracle into a plot with tension, emotions, and controversy: Jesus performs a miracle, and so far so good. Jesus tells the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam, and so far so good. Only in verse 14(!) does he tell you: “It was a Sabbath when Jesus performed this miracle...”

Like any good storyteller, John gives us this delayed revelation, introducing an important detail only after the miracle has already happened. And suddenly, what seemed like a simple miracle becomes a controversial issue. A miracle that everyone should have celebrated and given glory to God now becomes the center of a conflict.

Should miracles be controversial? Absolutely not. Should miracles cause division? Absolutely not. So why is there a plot, and why is there tension in this story? Surely not because of Jesus, but because people respond to the miracle in radically different ways. And the Pharisees are not simply “troublemakers”; the conflict reveals something much deeper about what happens when people are confronted with what God is doing.

Theme: John 9's main question is not “Can you see?” but “Do you want to see Jesus?”

John divided this story into three major scenes: (1) Miracle — eyes can see (vv. 1–7); (2) Skepticism — eyes can't see (vv. 8–34); (3) The greatest miracle — salvation (vv. 35–41).

(1) The miracle — eyes can see (vv. 1–7)

Verse one is foundational because it shows 2 different approaches to the same issue: Jesus sees the man, while his disciples speculate about the man.

“Who sinned, the parents or the kid?” Without Jesus in the picture, such a question becomes completely speculative; because no one has “spiritual x-ray” vision, no one can actually know the hypothetical answer.

In some areas of the evangelical world, people truly believe in hereditary curses: “You are an alcoholic because your parents were alcoholics...” I believe in the opposite,

hereditary blessing! “I am saved because of Jesus’ cross.” “I am blessed because of Jesus’ cross...”

Moreover, their premises were wrong, just like Job’s friends’ premises were wrong: “All illness or disfortune that may happen in life is a punishment from God.” Job’s friends accused him, saying that for sure he had hidden his sins or committed an unknown sin; that’s why God was punishing him. But the clear conclusion of the book was: Job’s story was meant for God’s glory.

That’s the exact same reasoning Jesus approaches this situation with: It doesn’t matter where his blindness came from; what matters is that it glorifies God after all! He sees the misery of the man; he doesn’t give the responsibility to the state, to a social charity, or to the hospital; he owns the responsibility and intervenes with compassion.

The miracle displays three crucial pieces of information:

- (1) He works some mud on the ground. Why? Because according to the Mishnah, that wasn’t allowed on the Sabbath.
- (2) Jesus requires obedience and faith for the miracle to happen. Jesus could have healed him on the spot, yet he chose to require faith and obedience from this man.
- (3) He sent him to the Siloam pool. Why? Because it was a Sabbath day; therefore, there were a bunch of priests drawing water from the pool.

That’s why the miracle got so much attention at once!

(2) Skepticism — eyes can’t see (vv. 8–34)

A. The neighbours

The story was supposed to end here, with the neighbours glorifying the miracle and rejoicing for the blind man, but that’s not what happened; they transformed the miracle into a case study — they brought the man to the Pharisees.

For now, I want you to keep in mind this piece of information: “The story was supposed to end here,” and the blind man healed called Jesus “the man.”

B. The informal hearing

“The inquiry begins as an investigation of the miracle but becomes a prosecution of the miracle-worker.”

V. 16 is key: “There was division because of him (Jesus).” Forget about the miracle, the witnesses, or even about the blind man himself! The focus shifted to Jesus.

Hence, that's why they became skeptical about the healing altogether; they called the parents as witnesses.

Keep in mind this important piece of information: "He is a prophet," the blind man deduced.

C. The parents' witness

There are two different feelings happening here:

(1) The parents were afraid of the Pharisees. This is obvious because John himself clarifies that in v. 22. To be excluded from the synagogue was a bit harsher than we tend to think; this wasn't a simple "Oh well, this synagogue doesn't accept me; I will go to the synagogue in the other neighbourhood." It involved potential persecution, the loss of possessions, work, and society's honour.

Why were they so afraid? Because, apparently, the burden of proof was on them. In Canada, the law says "innocent unless proven guilty." In that hostile (informal!) scenario, things sounded quite different: "Give me evidence that he was blind." "Give me evidence that he was born blind." "Give me birth paperwork." "Are you falsely making up a story for profit?" That's why they are afraid and under pressure.

But that scenario shows you the opposite side of the coin as well: They were not the only ones afraid in that synagogue; the Pharisees were too!

(2) The Pharisees were afraid of the truth. If they really wanted to be serious about their inquiries, they would indeed investigate the matter further! But they don't, because they know that when they investigate, they will find the truth.

They prefer to keep it just in the realm of the "verbal testimony" because it's easier to discredit that one rather than the facts.

D. A second informal hearing — under oath

They put the man under oath, and what is interesting is that they give the verdict before the man even responds. "We know that this man is a sinner." Against the evidence, against the witnesses, and even before the main witness opens his mouth, the biased jury had already made up their mind.

The witness now lectures the jury:

(1) "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know; I know that I was blind, but now I see." This powerful statement makes as much sense in our days as it did in his days. We live in a culture where they charge Christians with the question: "Proof that God exists?" "Give me evidence that your faith is real?" And, honestly, our best response is just as

this man did — I was blind, but now I see. I can't believe for you, my brother; I know whom I believe, and I am persuaded that he is the true Saviour who gives me sight!"

(2) "We know that God doesn't listen to sinners but to those who fear him..." We should not read this as if God doesn't respond to non-believers' prayers, because he surely does; as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: "God makes the sun shine and rain to fall on both righteous and unrighteous ones." What it does mean is the sign of authentication that his servants carry on them when performing miracles. It was like this with Moses, the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and with the apostles. God's sign confirmed their ministry.

Especially due to the kind of miracle that Jesus performed! There's no record, both in the Bible or extra-biblically, in any religion or in any place in the world, of a man who healed a man who was born blind! Why would this particular miracle be different from healing a person who became blind by accident? Because of the background beliefs in ancient Judaism: A man born blind was believed to be under God's curse (remember the opening verses of this story?!); if someone comes and "reverses" that curse, that man is surely sent from God!

The lecture was so good that the Pharisees insulted the man and excommunicated him from the synagogue. You know the old saying: "When argument fails, people adhere to insults and aggression."

3) The greatest miracle — salvation (vv. 35–41)

Though he was expelled from the synagogue by man, the Lord of the Temple accepted him in heaven!

Jesus heard the news that he had been excommunicated and purposefully found him, and straightaway asked him: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" That title makes allusion to the vision of the prophet Daniel, where he sees the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great glory; that was Jesus' favourite title to refer to himself. The man asked, "Who's he?" Jesus said, "You have seen him before, and he is now talking to you" — a clear reference to his prior encounter with Jesus when his eyes were opened.

He remembered the tone of his voice, he saw his face, he believed and worshipped Jesus. This is the greatest miracle: the salvation of his soul!

John concludes the story with Jesus' paradoxical statement: "Those who were supposed to see can't see; and those who can't see are the ones who are actually seeing it!" The doctors of the Law, priests and Levites at the Temple, full-time ministers and teachers, look at Jesus and refuse to see that he is who he claims to be! Their eyes may be physically okay, but their spiritual vision is total darkness, a complete blindness.

If the salvation of the blind man was the greatest miracle, on the other hand, the blindness of the Pharisees and religious leaders was the greatest sin.

Conclusion —

Remember I asked you to keep note of the important piece of information John was giving on the way? We can see the progression in the man's revelation about Jesus:

v. 11: "The man called Jesus..."

v. 17: "He is a prophet."

v. 33: "If this man were not from God..."

v. 38: "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped.

Jesus said in the beginning that he was blind not because of a curse or a sin, but for the glory of God to be revealed in him. Similarly, the Pharisees' hostility, trying to discredit the miracle and his witness, also worked out for the glory of God. The Pharisees' consistent charge against him and his experience made his faith in Jesus all the stronger! Developing from a personal experience into a life commitment before the Lord. God doesn't waste any circumstance in the life of his people; in "all things God works for the good of those who love him..." (Rom. 8).