

Today we are in John Chapter 9. In my bible chapter 9 is titled - Jesus heals a man born blind.

As Janet Snyder pointed out a few weeks ago, Jesus has used metaphors that we as human beings could understand to help explain spiritual truths to us. Jesus talked about the human conditions of thirst and hunger and how He is the living water and the bread of life. Who has not experienced thirst and hunger. In John Chapter 9 Jesus uses the physical condition of blindness to help us understand the spiritual truth that He is the Light of the World and what it means to be spiritually blind.

Not many of us have experienced blindness. But most of us can imagine what it must be like because we have experienced being in the dark and not being able to see. For example, I usually wake up sometime in the middle of night needing to use the bathroom. I don't want to turn a light on because I am trying to not totally wake myself up. I've gotten pretty good at being able to make my way to the bathroom in the dark, but that's only because I've seen the path in the light of day. As I am walking back to my bed I can't see anything, so I'll put my hand out and reach for the corner of the footboard so that I don't bump into the bed. I do this because even though the bed is big and it's right in front of me, I can't see it. That's what blindness is like, you can't see anything, even big things that are right in front of you.

So this chapter can basically be broken into 3 sections:

Jesus' encounter with the blind man
Responses to the healing
Jesus' follow up with the blind man

There is one character who has a part in each section - and no it's not Jesus. It's the blind man. So as we look at each section, we will also look at the life of this man. How we see him grow and change as the chapter progresses. We will follow his faith journey as it unfolds.

As a reminder, the purpose of the book of John can be found in chapter 20, verses 30 and 31 “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Out of the 21 chapters in John, there are only 7 miracles recorded, 5 of which are unique to the book of John. Why did this miracle help us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

There are other recorded instances of Jesus healing blindness. In Matt 9, Jesus heals 2 blind men. In Mark 8 he heals another. In Matt 15:30 it says, “A vast crowd brought to him people who were lame, blind, crippled, those who couldn’t speak, and many others. They laid them before Jesus, and he healed them all”

The one distinction made in John Chapter 9 is that this man was born blind. He wasn’t blind as a result of an accident. He didn’t start having problems with his eyes, and eventually he lost all his vision. No, he was born blind. It can’t be said that the blindness the man experienced was just temporary and healed itself. In verse 32 of John 9 it says, “Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind”. This is a healing that has never been done before, showing the unique and miraculous healing power of Jesus. Another reason being born blind is important is because Jesus is making a parallel between physical blindness and spiritual blindness. Just like this man was born physically blind, we are all born spiritually blind.

Another thing that I think makes this particular healing unique is a question asked by the disciples about sin and suffering before the healing occurs. Lastly this story is unique in that we get to see the unique faith journey of the blind man.

Let's look at the first section of this chapter - Jesus' encounter with the blind man.

The chapter starts, "As he (Jesus) went along, he saw a man blind from birth. So here is our introduction to the blind man. Jesus saw him. We're not told his name. We're not even told where he was or what he was doing. Later in verse 8 it says, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" That's probably what he was doing when Jesus saw him. Being blind in that day meant you couldn't really work, so he was begging in order to be able to have enough money to live.

Then comes the question from the disciples in verse 3 - "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Wait what? That's the burning question on the disciples minds? Whose fault is this. And, they ask the question right in front of the man as if he's not even there. He can hear the question. Imagine how that made him feel? Is it his fault, or his parents fault? Why would they even ask this? Maybe they are thinking back to chapter 5 where Jesus healed the paralytic and later said to the man "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

Believe it or not, it was common thinking in that day that sin and suffering were intimately connected. That there was a direct cause and effect. If you saw suffering in someone's life, you could point to a specific sin in their life as the cause. It is true in a general sense that suffering is a result of sin. Adam and Eve did not experience any suffering in the Garden of Eden before the fall. Once sin entered the picture, so did suffering. It's one thing to agree in a general sense that sin caused suffering to enter the world and we all feel its consequences, but it's a different thing to believe every bit of suffering can be tied specifically to a sin in the suffers life. You think the example of Job would have dispelled this way of thinking, but obviously it had not.

Don't we still think this way too. When suffering comes into our lives, don't we sometimes think we are somehow being punished or judged by God? Those of you with children who aren't walking with the Lord, don't you sometimes struggle with feeling like your sin patterns and poor parenting in those areas caused your children to reject God. That your children are paying the price for your sin and you both are suffering as a result. We have to remember that Christ paid the penalty and took on the judgement for our sin on the cross. We may not understand the reasons for the suffering in our lives, but we can say with certainty that it's not a punishment or judgement for our sin.

If this was common thinking of that day, I imagine the man and his parents believed this too. Imagine the man thinking his blindness and his suffering was a result of his parents sin. He would probably be pretty angry at them. Or if he thought it was a result of his own sin, he would hate himself. The same may have been true of the parents too - they may have been tempted to either hate their son, or hate themselves thinking they caused the blindness and all that suffering. What an awful way to live if either of those was the case.

Jesus' response comes in the end of verse 3, "Neither this man or his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Jesus doesn't go into a lengthy discourse about sin and suffering, or rebuke the disciples for their wrong thinking. He just basically says you're looking at this all wrong.

What a gift from Jesus for this man to hear him say, it's not your fault, or your parents fault. Jesus is dispelling a lie for him that he has heard his whole life. That is a powerful and life changing thing. He may not have believed Jesus right then, but I'm pretty sure he soon would.

But this is where we also start to see God's great love for this man. Verse 3 ends, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed - in him. Jesus could have left off the "in him", but he didn't. The man mattered. He had a part. Jesus' response to the disciples question is the blind man's first introduction to who Jesus is - love, compassion, and truth. This is the beginning of his faith journey - meeting Jesus.

Jesus continues in verse 4, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Jesus is continuing and building on his teaching from chapter 8 where he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Now he is going to show us what that means.

Verse 6 and 7, “After saying this, he (Jesus) spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.”

So, little bit of an unusual way to heal the man. Jesus could have just said the words, and he would have been healed. He could have just touched his eyes, and he would have been healed. No, Jesus made mud from his spit and dirt from the ground and put it on the man’s eyes. How gross is that. Me, I would have walked away and wiped that gross mud off as soon as I could with the sleeve from my garment. But the man - he does exactly what Jesus tells him to do, “Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam” and he is healed.

Can you imagine how he felt. We’re not given any insight into this part of the story, but we all can imagine how he reacted, the different emotions he felt. And what did he think about this man who healed him? We’ll learn more about that as the chapter progresses.

Now that the man is healed let’s look at some the responses to the healing.

The man goes home and his neighbors who see him don’t even recognize him. They say “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Others say, “No, he only looks like him.” He is so changed by this miracle that people don’t recognize him.

They ask how he can see and he replies, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see”

verse 13 continues the story - "They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind." I almost missed this, but WHO brought him to the Pharisees. It was the neighbors and people who saw that he was healed. Why did they do this. Were they trying to get the man in trouble? D.A. Carson said, "they could not have know that the healed man would be subjected to interrogation and explosion from they synagogue. The extraordinary healing cried out for comment by the religious authorities. They were turning to the local religious leaders and asking them what they should make of the healing."

The Pharisees were divided. Some said Jesus is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath. Others asked how a sinner could perform such signs. How are they not remembering the passages in Isaiah - 35:5 "Then will the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. or 42:7, "to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" These men know those scriptures yet they fought believing that this miracle had occurred.

They asked the man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."

Next they had the man's parents brought in. They interrogated them about the healing. They said, "is this your son?" "Is he the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

How hard the Pharisees are and how hard they try to disprove the miraculous healing. They had the parents brought in for questioning because they wanted to show that the man wasn't blind from birth.

The parents confirm the man is their son and that he was born blind. But they deny any knowledge of how he was healed. They were afraid. They were afraid of being kicked out of the synagogue. How sad that their fear kept them from testifying about the one who had performed a miracle in the life of their son.

Next the Pharisees called the man back and basically called him a liar and asked him to tell the truth about what happened. They asked him again how he received his sight.

He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see" "Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. "

In the end the Pharisees are furious. They say "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out."

Now we see a little more why the question about who sinned at the beginning of the chapter. God knew how the Pharisees were going to react to this healing and to this man. God cared so much for this man that he prepared him ahead of time so he wouldn't be hurt by their words. He had heard directly from Jesus that it was a lie that his sin had caused his blindness. Satan knows our weaknesses and where to attack us. God knows too and he protects and shields us.

From this discourse with the Pharisees, we learn more about the man. He is bold and not afraid of the Pharisees. It must have been pretty intimidating to be brought before these religious leaders and questioned. It says, they hurled insults at him. Still he stands up to them and doesn't back down from telling the truth even though he could see it was making them mad. He knows, as his parents knew, that he was risking getting thrown out of the synagogue. In fact he does get thrown out. None of this stops him from telling them what Jesus had done for him. We see his faith growing as a result of his encounter with Jesus.

Now we will look at the final section - Jesus' follow up with the blind man.

“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 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. “

Here again we see Jesus' love for this man. He heard that the blind man was thrown out of the synagogues and he sought him out. Jesus knew this would have been a hard thing for the man to face so he came along side him and revealed himself to him. And look at Jesus' play on words - “you have now seen him” he is no longer physically or spiritually blind. The man's reaction is to believe and worship.

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

The Pharisees because of their intellectual knowledge of the scriptures thought they understood and could see, but they might as well have been blind because just like I couldn't see my bed in dark, they couldn't see Jesus for who he was even though he was right in front of them.

So in summary what do we see in this chapter. First we see a miraculous physical healing that further shows us who Jesus is - the light of the world, and whoever follows him will not walk in darkness. We see two faith journeys. First, the blind man who comes to faith in Christ. He goes from being blind and in darkness, both physically and spiritually, to being able to see, again both physically and spiritually. This transformation starts with a physical healing, but I think it is solidified by Jesus's love and care for the man. One commentator put it this way - note the growth in the healed man's perception. From the man they call Jesus(11), he moves on to He is a prophet(17), he opened my eyes (30) he is from god (33), and finally to, Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him (38).” Everything about the man is changed. He can no longer be referred to as the man blind from birth.

On the other hand the second faith journey we see is that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees continue to witness Jesus's miracles and hear his teaching, and continue to reject Him. They continue to walk as blind men in spiritual darkness.

Where is your faith journey? As you encounter Jesus through these chapters and this bible study, like the man born blind, do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Through the book of John, do you see God's love for you? Or like the Pharisees, are you still questioning who Jesus is and rejecting him ?

Or maybe you're like me - someone who put there faith in Christ a long time ago (we won't say exactly how many years). What does this chapter mean for us? Is it just one of the miracles Jesus performed that we've heard so many times we've sort of stopped listening?

As I studied this chapter I was really struck by Christ's love for this blind man. He saw him in his suffering and difficult life and stepped in. He not only healed him, alleviating the cause of much of his suffering, but he revealed himself as the Son of the God to him. He brought him out of darkness both physically and spiritually. Christ has done the same for us. Sometimes we just need to meditate on that and let it move from our brains down into our hearts.

The other thing that stood out to me about this chapter was how the blind man boldly proclaimed what Christ had done in his life. He wasn't a learned theologian, he simply said what he knew to be true for himself - I was blind but now I see. When interrogated by the Pharisees, he said three words that are so hard for us to say - I don't know. He didn't get intimidated or shrink back because he didn't have all the answers. How many times do we struggle with sharing our faith because we're not sure what to say, or think we might get asked a question we can't answer. It doesn't have to be that complicated. We can simply proclaim what we know to be true about what Christ has done in our life. I was blind but now I see.

