

# THE BLIND MAN AND THE PHARISEES

## John 9:13-41

Have you ever had an idea, or made a plan, that you tried to communicate to someone else? The idea or plan seemed so clear to you but no matter how much you tried to explain it, the person you were trying to talk to just could not get it? You might have tried to explain your idea in several different ways, but no matter which way you tried, the other person just could not grasp what you were saying. That is pretty frustrating, is it not? I think the blind man in John chapter 9 must have felt that way as he talked with the Pharisees.

Since, because of Palm Sunday and Easter, it has been a while since we covered the first twelve verses of John chapter nine, let us review them before we continue with the balance of the chapter.

### John 9:1-12 NAS:

*1 As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 "While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." 6 When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came back seeing. 8 Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" 9 Others were saying, "This is he," still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." 10 So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed, and I received sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."*

Now we will continue our study beginning with verse 13 of John chapter 9.

### John 9:13-17 NAS:

*13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind.  
14 Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened*

*his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet."*

Since this miracle was so unusual, the people brought the man to the Pharisees because according to their laws healing (unless life was in danger) and making or kneading clay violated the Sabbath Law. After the man told them what had happened the Pharisees believed that since Jesus "violated" the Sabbath He was a false prophet turning the people away from God (Deuteronomy 13:3-5). So they decided, "*This Man is not from God.*" Later they said Jesus was "a sinner" (John 9:24). Others concluded that the signs were so impressive that a sinner could not do them. The Pharisees then were divided (John 7:43; 10:19), just as we have seen them divided before.

The healed blind man's opinion was that Jesus was a prophet. Old Testament prophets sometimes performed miracles, which identified them as God's men.<sup>1</sup>

John 9:18-23 NAS:

*18 The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, 19 and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" 20 His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. 23 For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."*

Once again, in spite of seeing miracle after miracle, overwhelming evidence that Jesus must be from God, the Pharisees refused to accept the obvious truth. Jesus' act of deliberately healing the man on the Sabbath Day caused the Pharisees great concern. They continued to claim it was illegal to do such work on the Sabbath; and by making the clay, applying the clay, and healing the man, Jesus had performed three unlawful "works." The Pharisees should have been praising God for a miracle; instead, they sought evidence to prosecute Jesus.

When people refuse to face evidence honestly, but in fear evade the issue, then it is

<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:308.

impossible to come to a sound conclusion. The religious leaders were judging on the basis of one thing: nobody who breaks the Sabbath, they thought, could possibly be a true prophet of God.

But isn't that like many people today? They categorize others based on a few legalistic behaviors. "*Oh, he could not be a Christian because he smokes,*" or has a tattoo. Or, "*she could not be a Christian—look at how she dresses.*" They also go the other direction. "*He must be a Christian because he is so nice,*" or "*She has to be a Christian because she helps so many people.*" They do not apply God's standard to evaluate individuals, but use the standard of public opinion or "*common sense.*"

God's standard for being a Christian is that a person has acknowledged that he or she is a sinner, and believed in his/her heart that Christ died on the cross to take the punishment for that sin, and that Christ also came back to life and lives in Heaven today.

The healed blind man was not frightened by the threats of the Pharisees. When asked who he thought Jesus was, the man boldly said, "*He is a prophet!*" Some of the Old Testament prophets, such as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, did perform miracles. The Jewish people would look on their prophets as men of God who could do wonderful things by the power of God.<sup>2</sup>

But the religious leaders did not want to see Jesus given that kind of recognition. They responded, "*This man is not of God!*" Perhaps they could discredit the miracle. If so, then they could convince the people that Jesus had plotted the whole thing and was really deceiving the people. They may have thought that they could convince the people that Jesus had craftily "*switched*" men, placing a sighted man in place of the blind man so that the sighted man was not the man who had been known as the blind man.

The best way to get that kind of evidence would be to question the parents of the beggar, so they called them in and asked them two questions: (1) "*Is this your son?*" And (2) "*If he is, how does he now see?*" If they refused to answer either question, they were in trouble; or if they answered with replies contrary to what the leaders wanted, they were in trouble. What a dilemma!<sup>3</sup>

They answered the first question honestly: he was their son and he had been born blind. They answered the second question in a manner which would not bring them under the judgment of the Pharisees because they knew they would be thrown out of the temple. They did not know how he was healed or who healed him. They then used the old-fashioned tactic called "*passing the buck*" by suggesting that the Pharisees ask the man himself. After all, he was of age.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 9:13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

John 9:24-34 NAS:

<sup>24</sup> So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "**Give glory to God**; we know that this man is a sinner."

<sup>25</sup> He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

<sup>26</sup> So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?"

<sup>27</sup> He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?"

<sup>28</sup> They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

<sup>29</sup> "**We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.**"

<sup>30</sup> The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes.

<sup>31</sup> "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him.

<sup>32</sup> "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

<sup>33</sup> "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."

<sup>34</sup> They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out.

The Pharisees called the man before the court and this time they put him under oath. "Give glory to God" is a form of Jewish "swearing in" at court (Joshua 7:19). They were trying to get the man to change his testimony so that credit for the miracle would not go to Jesus. They were pressuring this man with the fear of reprisals when they said, "we know that this man is a sinner." They had already issued a warning that anyone declaring Jesus to be the Christ would be thrown out of the synagogue.

But this man held fast to the truth. In effect, the man said, "*He may be a sinner, that I do not know. But one thing I do know is that He healed me of my blindness.*"

Actually, this was a much greater miracle than it seems on the surface, and that is pretty big. We hear it and realize this man had never in his life seen anything: not the face of his mother or father, not the blue sky, or the bright sunshine. He had not seen the temple of God. And we assume he suddenly saw all this and could immediately identify it and know what each item was. That is, in fact, what happened. But we now know that this was not one miracle but two. When **corneal transplant surgery** was first developed in the twentieth century, a factor became evident that shows how much greater this miracle was, if that seems possible. In *Catching the Light*, written by quantum physicist Arthur Zajonc we learn some extraordinary things. He writes about a number of studies that

investigated recovery from congenital blindness. Thanks to cornea transplants, people who had been blind from birth would suddenly have the functional use of their eyes. Nevertheless, success was rare.

People who have been blind since birth, and who through surgery receive corneal transplants and are given their sight, can only make sense of the images before them by using the old familiar ways of “*seeing*,” that is, by using touch, sound, and smell.

Zojanc reports that psychologists Gregory and Wallace did research on a man in his 50s who received sight via surgery. He could only “*see*” (that is, understand what it was he was seeing) after he touched things in his old way. The process of his learning to see took over two years. They concluded that “*learning to see as an adult is not easy at all.*”<sup>5</sup>

To quote Zojanc,

“In his systematic study of sixty-six case histories of the recovery of sight in those born blind, M. von Senden concluded that innumerable and extraordinary difficulties need to be overcome in learning to see. The world does not appear to the patient as filled with the gifts of intelligible light, color, and shape upon awakening from surgery. The project of learning to see inevitably leads to a psychological crisis in the life of the patient. . . . Besides an outer light and eye, sight requires an “inner light,” one whose luminance complements the familiar outer light and transforms raw sensation into meaningful perception.”<sup>6</sup>

So now we can have an even greater comprehension of how great a miracle Christ performed on this blind man. Yet, the Pharisees did not want to accept it.

They continued grilling him hoping to find a discrepancy in his story. But to no avail. As they continued interrogating him an element of sarcasm became evident in the man’s attitude when he suggested they might be considering a change of mind to become Jesus’ disciples. They were furious at his impertinence and arrogantly declared that they were Moses’ disciples, another oxymoron on the part of the Pharisees because one could not be a true disciple of Moses and not know Jesus (John 5:46).

We have already discussed this a number of times and need not do so again. Jesus brought irrefutable evidence that He was the Messiah and had been sent by God. Anyone who could not see that was simply a fool.

The blind man who had been healed then went on to teach them. He pointed out to the

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Zojanc, *Catching the Light*, ©1993 by Arthur Zojanc, pub. 1995 by Oxford University Press, pp. 4-6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Pharisees things they should have been noting. He reminded them that there had never been a report in history of anyone being healed who had been blind since birth. Therefore this miracle could only be performed supernaturally by One who had been sent by God. How then could Jesus be a sinner?

Having been made to look foolish in the eyes of the people, the infuriated Pharisees could do little more than insult this man again and throw him out of the synagogue. There are religious people like this all over the world. Instead of being willing to evaluate the facts, their minds are already made up and not even the soundest evidence will change such minds. The healed blind man, however, was open to the truth and because of that we will see later in this chapter that he is saved, in spite of the fact that the religious leaders had excommunicated him from the local synagogue. Membership in a church or synagogue is neither a guarantee nor a requirement for salvation.

John 9:35-41 NAS:

<sup>35</sup> *Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*

<sup>36</sup> *He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"*

<sup>37</sup> *Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you."*

<sup>38</sup> *And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.*

<sup>39</sup> *And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."*

<sup>40</sup> *Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?"*

<sup>41</sup> *Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."*

This concluding section of John 9 describes the man's discussion with Jesus and reaches its climax with his declaration of faith. Jesus wastes no time in seeking the man out and then issuing a call to faith. Jesus always comes to the person who wants to believe in Him.

The blind man was given both physical and spiritual sight because of his faith. The Pharisees had their natural sight and thought they also had spiritual sight, but their response to Jesus showed they were really blind. It was in this manner that His coming had brought judgment. John then goes on to highlight the complete lack of understanding among the Pharisees in verses 40–41.

The question "We are not blind too, are we?" highlighted their unwillingness to accept what was true. They were blind to the truth of who Jesus is. They were blind to the truth of God's Word. Jesus' reply, "If you were blind," can be understood in two ways. It could mean, 'If they were really conscious of their blindness in a spiritual sense they would desire illumination' which they clearly did not.

Jesus had already called them “*blind leaders of the blind*” (Matthew 15:14), so they had their answer. They were blinded by their pride, their self-righteousness, their tradition, and their false interpretation of the Word of God.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus replied, “*If you were blind, you would be better off. But you claim to see. Therefore, you are guilty!*” Blindness would at least be an excuse for not knowing what was going on. But they did know what was going on. Jesus had performed many miracles and the religious leaders ignored the evidence.

**Jesus is the Light of the world** (John 8:12; 9:5). The only people who cannot see the light are blind people and those who refuse to look, those who make themselves blind. The beggar was physically blind and spiritually blind, yet both his eyes and his heart were opened. Why? Because he listened to the Word, believed it, obeyed, and experienced the grace of God. The Pharisees had good physical vision, but they were blind spiritually. If they had listened to the Word and sincerely considered the evidence, they too would have believed on Jesus Christ and been born again.<sup>8</sup>

In what sense did the Pharisees “*see*”? They saw the change in the blind beggar and could not deny that he had been healed. They saw the mighty works that Jesus performed. Even Nicodemus, one of their number, was impressed with Jesus’ miracles (John 3:2). If they had examined the evidence with honesty, they would have seen the truth clearly. “*If any man wills to do His [God’s] will, he shall know of the doctrine*” (John 7:17, literal translation). “*And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life*” (John 5:40).

We never meet this healed man again in the gospels, but surely the man followed Jesus closely and was among those who witnessed for Him. We hope that he was able to win his fearful parents to the Lord. While being excommunicated from the synagogue was certainly a painful experience for him, he undoubtedly found in his fellowship with Jesus Christ much more spiritual help and encouragement than he could ever have found in the Jewish traditions.

Even today, there are people who must choose between Christ and family, or Christ and their traditional religion.<sup>9</sup> This blind beggar made the right choice, even though the cost was great.<sup>10</sup>

How about you? Do you clearly see the truth of who Jesus is? That He was God come to earth in the form of a Man. Do you see Him as the only One who can save you from the penalty you deserve for your sins? Do you see Him as the One who loves you more dearly than anyone else in the world loves you? Do you see Him as your Guide, Counselor, and Friend?

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<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 9:35.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Jesus wants to be all those things and more to you. But you, like the blind man, have to make a choice to put Jesus Christ first in your life.