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John 9:1-41

## Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" **36**"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." **37**Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." **38**Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. **39**Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." **40**Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" **41**Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

***"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"(9:35).*** It is just like Jesus to come out and ask the one question that matters the most. Most people examining this passage overlook this question. They are too busy focusing on secondary matters in the text. They focus on the judgmental attitudes of the disciples towards the man born blind. Their message: do not judge. Others see the Pharisees as an example of why organized religion is bad. They say the religious leaders were a bunch of hypocrites. What's new? Religious leaders are hypocrites. But that is not the point of the passage. Others still look at these verses and say this man's blindness is cause by God so that good would occur. The only problem is the Greek does not say this. Verse 3 literally says, "It is not that this man sinned nor his parents; let the works of God be displayed in him."<sup>1</sup> Nowhere does it say that this man was born blind so that the works of God could be displayed in him. Thus, this passage is not about morality, organized religion, or the source of suffering. Rather, it is about one simple question: Do you believe in the Son of Man? This is the question being asked of the man born blind, his parents, neighbors, the Pharisees, the world, and you and me.

Before we answer the question it is important to see how the man born blind answered. Most of us would think that after being healed he would easily say Jesus is the Son of Man. He doesn't. When asked how he was healed, the man born blind said, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes" (9:11). Notice, he did not say the Lord healed me. Rather, the man Jesus healed me. At this point, Jesus is simply a man in the eyes of the man born blind.

After being questioned by the Pharisees, the man born blind said was a "prophet" (9:17). This of course did not sit well with the Pharisees and they questioned him again. This time the man said, "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 man 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" (9:30-32). I would love to have seen the Pharisees faces after that comment. Obviously they did not like it because they

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<sup>1</sup> *"Ina"* subjective in a purpose clause and thus should be translated "**let** the works of God be displayed."

kicked the man out of the synagogue (9:33). It is at this point that Jesus finds the man and asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" To which the man replies, "Lord, I believe" (9:38).

How did the man go from seeing Jesus as a mere man to confessing him as the Son of Man? His faith matured through trials, not his healing.

Martin Luther knew that trials matured faith. Luther explains, "Trials teach you not only to know and understand but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's word is. Therefore the devil himself becomes the unwitting teacher of God's word. The devil will afflict you and will make a real doctor of theology of you, and will teach you by his temptations to seek and to love God's Word. For I myself, owe my papists many thanks for so beating, pressing, and frightening me through the devil's raging that they have turned me into a fairly good theologian, driving me to a goal I should never have reach" (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 3, CPH, 1959, p. 1360).

***Over against the man born blind are his neighbors, parents, and the Pharisees who doubted Jesus.*** Like the man, they have been privy to all that has happened. However, instead of being illumined by the light, they were blinded by the truth. Instead of believing in Jesus, they rejected him. What is pathetic, are the reasons given for doubting Jesus.

- The neighbor's excuse was that the man who could see was not the same man "but one who looked liked him" (9:9). I guess he had a twin no one knew about.
- The Pharisees said Jesus had to be a sinner because "he healed on the Sabbath" (9:15-16). God forbid actual healing on the Sabbath.
- His parents feared the Jews and said, "We do not know how he was healed" (9:20-22). Yeah right!
- The Pharisees final argument, "We are disciples of Moses, but we do not know where he came from" (9:28-29). The law can never understand grace.

These are pathetic arguments. This should not surprise you. If you have ever been around people who deny Jesus, then you would know most of their theories are empty. Listen to a few of the theories used to deny the resurrection. I must warn you, educated people have come up with these theories.

1. *The swoon theory* suggests that Christ never actually died on the cross. Instead, He only passed out but was mistaken for dead. Christ then, according to this view, revived in the tomb. The problem with this view, Jesus was pierced in the side by a Roman soldier trained to kill. Even more, crucifixion was the cruelest form of execution ever imagined. People did not swoon from crucifixion.
2. Other skeptics have proposed the *wrong tomb theory*. This view holds that everyone went to the wrong tomb and thus proclaimed Christ as risen. I guess the disciples needed MapQuest.

3. A third proposal is the *hallucination theory*. This theory states that the apostles did not really see the resurrected Christ; instead, they only hallucinated and thought they saw the risen Lord. When was the last time 500 people had the same hallucination? Maybe at a political rally!
4. A final attempt to explain away the resurrection is the *hypnotic theory*. This highly speculative view suggests that the witnesses of Christ's post-resurrection appearances were all hypnotized. They did not actually see the risen Lord. Today, modern hypnotists deny this possibility. It would be nice to be able to pull off that trick. Look at my shiny watch and give me ten weeks of vacation.

These theories make you think twice about education. The point, of course, is that even the brightest people come up with pathetic theories so that they do not have to deal with God.

In his book, *The Magician's Nephew*, C.S. Lewis illustrates this point by telling how the land Narnia was created by Aslan (a lion who is meant to represent Christ). Aslan sings it into being. But there is one, Uncle Andrew, who refuses to hear it, and the consequences are staggering. Lewis writes:

When the great moment came and the Beast spoke, he missed the whole point for a rather interesting reason. When the Lion had first begun singing, long ago when it was still quite dark, he had realized that the noise was a song. And he had disliked the song very much. It made him think and feel things he did not want to think and feel.

Then, when the sun rose and he saw that the singer was a lion ("only a lion," as he said to himself) he tried his hardest to make himself believe that it wasn't singing and never had been singing—only roaring as any lion might in a zoo in our own world. "Of course it can't really have been singing," he thought, "I must have imagined it. I've been letting my nerves get out of order. Who ever heard of a lion singing?" And the longer and more beautifully the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring.

Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did. He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song. Soon he couldn't have heard anything else even if he had wanted to. And when at last the Lion spoke and said, "Narnia awake," he didn't hear any words: he heard only a snarl (C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, Collier Books, pp 125-26).

Do you believe in the Son of Man? The man's parents, neighbors, and the Pharisees did not. That is why Jesus says in 9:39, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

**This brings the question to you.** Do you believe Jesus is the Son of Man? Do you believe that Jesus is the link between heaven and earth? Do you believe that Jesus came down from heaven to reveal the Father to us? If you do, give glory to God because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but the Holy Spirit.

If you do not believe, then I must ask, why not? What excuse do you have? Maybe it is because you are too much of a sinner and do not believe God can forgive you. You are wrong. God loves sinners and has forgiven you (Romans 5:8). Maybe you have been hurt by others. The man born blind knew what this

was like. He was kicked out of the synagogue. But the Bible says, "Jesus found him" (9:35). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, found him. Jesus was looking for him. Jesus is looking for you. Call out to him, he will find you.

Maybe, you do not believe because you have experienced pain and wonder why God has allowed it to happen. I wish I could tell you why you have experienced pain, but I cannot. However, I can tell you that God loves you and is with you in the midst of your suffering. In addition, I can tell you about the day when you will be with God and there will be no more suffering.

But maybe, you still cannot believe. Maybe your heart is still too hard. At that I simply bid you to stand at the foot of the cross and see Jesus lifted up from earth, suspended between heaven and earth, dying to link us with the Father. "But when I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32).

Jesus is the Son of Man!

**In Jesus Name,  
Amen**

## Exegesis

### Pericope

- Scene 1: Sinner or Sent by God (9:1-7)
- Scene 2: The how is revealed but not the why (9:8-12)
- Scene 3: Jesus is a prophet (9:13-17)
- Scene 4: Parents testify to healing but not Jesus (9:18-23)
- Scene 5: Jesus is the Messiah (9:24-34)
- Scene 6: Jesus is the Son of Man (9:35-42)

### Scene 1: Sinner or Sent by God (Siloam)

#### Man born blind trusts Jesus Others (Disciples) questioned who sinned?

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 was born blind?" **3**Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4**We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. **5**As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." **6**Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud **7**and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

- A. Jesus was sent (9:4)
  - B. Jesus is the light of the world (9:5)
    - X. Jesus spat on ground and commanded man to wash (9:6-7)
- A' Man washed at pool of Siloam, which means sent (9:7a)
  - B' Man came back seeing (9:7)

[The disciples observed the man's physical blindness and inferred that the blindness must have been the result of sin. Jesus abruptly shifted the plane of discussion from questions about the cause of the blindness to what God could do with the blindness. Jesus accepted the blindness as a given and indicated that whatever the cause, the blindness would become a means of revelation (Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 100).]

**Scene 2: The how of the healing is revealed but not the why**

**Man born blind says Jesus healed me  
Others (the neighbors) questioned if this was the same man**

**8**The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" **9**Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." **10**So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" **11**He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." **12**They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

**Scene 3: Jesus is a prophet**

**Man born blind says Jesus is a prophet  
Others (Pharisees) are divided: He is a sinner who broke the Sabbath  
He is sent from God**

**13**They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. **14** Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. **15** So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." **16**Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. **17**So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

**Scene 4: Parents testify to the healing but not to Jesus**

**Not sure where the man born blind was  
Others (Parents) say son was healed but not how (they feared the Pharisees)**

**18** The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight **19**and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" **20**His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. **21**But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." **22**(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) **23**Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

## **Scene 5          Jesus is the Messiah**

### **Man born blind says Jesus is from God Others (Pharisees) call Jesus a sinner and cast man out of the synagogue**

**24**So for the 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." **25**He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." **26**They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" **27**He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" **28**And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. **29**We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." **30**The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. **31**We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. **32**Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. **33** If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." **34**They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

[The Old Testament contains no accounts of someone being healed of congenital blindness. Yet the Scriptures did say that the "servant" of God – whom many took to be the Messiah – would be "a light to the nations" and "open the eyes that are blind" (Isaiah 42:6-7).]

## **Scene 6          Jesus is the Son of Man**

### **Man born blind believes Jesus and worships him Others (Pharisees) ask if they are blind (little do they know they are blind)**

**35**Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" **36**He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" **37**Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." **38**He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. **39**Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." **40**Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" **41**Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

["Son of Man" was the human being in whom God was revealed]

[The beggar did not infer Jesus' divinity from the sign; he recognized it only when Jesus made it known to him. Yet the beggar's reaction suggests that at least in retrospect the sign does point to the divine aspect of Jesus].

**Major Theological Themes**

Jesus is Prophet – Messiah – Son of Man

Jesus is the light of the world (reveals light to the blind and blinds those who see)

Jesus is the Son of Man sent to reveal the Father

**Minor Theological Themes**

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who searches for the “cast out” sheep

Jesus is greater than Israel’s traditions

The problem of physical blindness

**Recapitulation**

Prophet = Elisha told Naaman to wash in the river Jordan (2 Kings 5:10)