



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

Learning to See (Like) Jesus

John 9.1-41

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1. Notice first that this fascinating text tells a story with a plot and/or a theme.
 - a. Survey: Jesus (and disciples) meet and he heals a man from congenital blindness; the neighbors react and some report it to the Pharisees; the Pharisees cross-examine the man, his parents, and the man again; they excommunicate him, upon which Jesus seeks him out and reveals himself as the Son of Man; the man professes his faith; the Pharisees remain blind.
 - b. Notice the blind-to-sight theme running throughout from phrases in vv. 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13-15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 30, 32, 37, 39-41 (see the attached print-out with highlighted phrases).
 - c. John 9 is part of a section that began in 7.1, focused on the Feast of Tabernacles.¹
 - 1) Among the things that occurred at the Feast (per the Mishnah):
 - a) The drawing of a flask of water from the *Pool of Siloam* was featured in a daily ritual.
 - b) At the end of the day, “candlesticks in the court of women were lit that shed light across Jerusalem (*m. Sukkah* 5:1-3).”
 - c) In Zechariah, “the festival is associated with *the hope of Yahweh one day coming as king* (Zech 14:16-21).”² (Emphasis added in all three citations.)
 - 2) More specifically, 8.12-9.41 comprise a unit revolving around the idea of Jesus’ claim to be “the light of the world” (8.12; 9.5).
 - a) 8.12-30 - discourse on the light.
 - b) 8.31-59 - defense of Jesus’ qualification to be the light.
 - c) 9.1-41 - demonstration of what it means for him to be the light (and resistance to him).
2. What is the point?
 - a. Like everything in John, John 9 must be understood in light of 20.30-31. See the reference to “signs” in v. 16.
 - b. Mainly, it’s about Jesus, specifically that he is “the light of the world.” See, in order: vv. 25, 30, 39 → 5 → 41.
 - c. The problem is that most of the characters in the story—the neighbors, parents, Pharisees, even the disciples—were blind (or in stages of blindness) to his light.

¹ See Gary Burge, *Interpreting the Gospel of John* (Baker, 1992), 77.

² G. H. Twelftree, “Feasts,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel B. Green, et. al. (IVP Academic, 2013), 274.

3. That brings us to a key secondary point.
 - a. To see it, we must appreciate John often used words or ideas that were intended to have two meanings. I suspect we see examples of that in verses 1, 37.
 - 1) “. . . he *saw* a man blind from birth” (1).
 - 2) The man gave an agnostic response to Jesus’ question, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” then, “Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you’” (vv. 35-37). In fact, the blind man was the only one in the chapter who really *saw* Jesus.
 - b. What were the others seeing when they looked at the man, and why?
 - 1) Disciples—an example of the problem of suffering.
 - 2) Neighbors—a man they had known for a long time who couldn’t possibly be seeing (because they didn’t understand “how” it was possible—v. 10).
 - a) Understandable, but it illustrates how we can be limited in the way we see people by our experiences and expectations.
 - 3) Parents—a son who was old enough to answer for himself; fearful of excommunication.
 - a) Understandable, especially since everything in Jewish community life revolved around the synagogue,³ but illustrative of how we sometimes allow our fears (which is the root of much prejudice) to keep us from moving forward.
 - 4) Pharisees—their preconceptions (and frustrations with Jesus) got in the way (notice that they also were concerned with the “how” question—vv. 15, 19).
 - a) Understandable, for the law—and Sabbath—did matter (whatever their overemphasis on applications of it), but people were more important.⁴
 - c. Have you and I mastered the ability to see *all* people the way Jesus sees them?
4. To see people properly, we need to grow our view of Jesus.
 - a. Faith development is another theme in this chapter; notice the blind man’s growth:
 - 1) Verse 7—he could see.
 - 2) Verses 11-12—he knew it was because of Jesus that he could see.
 - 3) Verse 17—he reached the conclusion that Jesus was “a prophet.”
 - 4) Verses 24-33—now I see . . . he opened my eyes (double entendre again?) . . . no one has ever opened blind eyes, he *must* be from God!
 - 5) Verses 35, 37-39—an outcast . . . Who is the Son of Man? You? Then I believe . . . “and he worshiped (προσκυνέω; *proskuneō*) him.” . . . he was one of the (now) seeing.
 - b. The Pharisees illustrate the point in reverse (vv. 13-17, 24-34), giving no indication that they would change their view of Jesus. They were truth-maintainers (defenders) [which is important], but not truth *seekers* (and note that, in John, Jesus is the truth—cf. 14.6; et. al.).
 - c. Remember: “And this is eternal life, that they *know* you, the only true God, and *Jesus Christ* whom you have sent” (John 17.3).

June 2, 2019

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³ We need to fully appreciate this to properly understand the parents’ fear of excommunication. In our world, those who are excommunicated from their church can still go to school, participate in local politics and the courts, and so on. For the ancient Jews, all of those things, not just religious activities, were centered in the synagogue, as summarized in this introductory sentence to an article on the subject: “Already by the first century A.D. synagogues were essential institutions for Jewish social, political and religious activities and important for the formation of Jewish identity” (A. Runesson, “Synagogue,” *DJG*, 903; see additional discussion, p. 904).

⁴ “And he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath’” (Mark 2.27).

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 spit 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.**

John 9:8 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."

John 9:13 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."

John 9:18 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."

John 9:24 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.

John 9:35 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.