

## CALVARY BIBLE COLLEGE: SHILLONG

## Bible Study on John Chapter 9

## TOPIC: LIGHT OF THE WORLD BY GIVING SIGHT TO THE BLIND

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THE IDENTITY OF JESUS – In John 9, we see a progressive development in the revelation of Jesus' identity. Now keep in mind that this is continuing the narrative that was previously found in John chapters seven and eight, namely, the feast of tabernacles.

The festival of tabernacles related to two themes: water and light. In John chapter eight, John uses the imagery of Jesus being the light of the world and so we see this theme being picked up also in chapter nine. Look John 8:12 **“Jesus, again spoke to them saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life’.**

It is an image from John chapter one as well. Remember the light would shine in the darkness and the darkness could not comprehend it? Themes of light and darkness run all through John's Gospel, as indeed it does throughout the entire Scriptures. You can do a wonderful study, going from Genesis through Revelation, focusing on the motif of light and darkness and how it all ties together. But this claim that we have here is that He is the light of the world.

In verses 1-12 we see Jesus as a man who is called Jesus, and that is all that the blind man knows about Him. Then we see him learning more about Him. He realized that He is a prophet, beginning in verse 13 and going to verse 23. Then he acknowledged that He is a man of God in verses 24-34 and finally he comes to regard Him as the Son of God and worships Him at the end of the chapter.

There is a progressive development in the theme of the titles of Jesus. Listen to these titles that spill over each other, creating a message for the study of this Gospel. He is called a rabbi in verse two. He is called Jesus in verse three and is called the ‘Light of the world’ in verse five. He is called the ‘One who is sent from God’ in verse seven and He is ‘from God’ in verse 16.

Then He is ‘prophet’ in 17 and then He is called ‘Christ’ in verse 22 and the ‘Son of God’ in 35 and then ‘Lord’ in verse 38. So there is a developing theme. This is extremely important because John, in doing so, was really forcing us as

readers to discern where we stand with regard with this Jesus because if we go ahead to chapter 20:31 we will see John's purpose statement, where he says that, "These signs I have selected are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ."

These double meanings become particularly evident in this dramatic story because the double meaning will be the theme of light and darkness. Those who claim to have light are actually in darkness. The one who is born blind is believed to have been born blind because of something his parents had done or he was just born in sin.

We see Him healing the blind man in Jericho and then two blind men in Galilee and then a blind man without speech, possibly in Capernaum, then a blind man in Bethsaida and one more in Jerusalem following the cleansing of the temple. So, it is quite interesting that we have all of these. What we see, as well in other chapters too, is that our Lord performs miracles to meet human needs and as a proof of His Messianic claims, but also as a means of conveying spiritual truth—showing that He is the Light.

None of His signs were de-contextualized from His claims or from His life. All His signs had a purpose. They just weren't thrown in for fun. The greatest miracle in this chapter is not the opening of the blind man's eyes but the opening of his heart and enlightening his belief. In understanding this thematic development, let's take a look at the first seven verses, which is the actual account of the man who has been blind from birth and now becomes healed.

After 8:59, when they picked up stones to throw at him and Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, you recall that He made the claim that before Abraham was, 'He is'. Before that He said, "Unless you believe that 'I-am' you will die in your sins," so we have very very strong claims along these lines. The claim of 'ego-ami', and the Jewish leaders understood that because if in fact He was not who He claimed to be, then it would be blasphemous and they would have been warranted to actually stone Him.

This revelation of Jesus as the I AM of the Old Testament e.g. 6:35 and 51. are a distinctive characteristic of John. These sayings can be grouped into three categories:

- 1) Absolute use of "I am" with no predicate: John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:9.
- 2) Absolute use of "I am" but the context makes the predicate explicit. John 6:20; 18:37.
- 3) The use of "I am" with a predicate ( a noun completing the sentence):  
6:35, 51 – I am the bread of life

- 8:12; 9:5 - I am the light of the world  
 10:7,9 - I am the door  
 10:11,14 - I am the good shepherd  
 11:25 - I am the resurrection and the life  
 14:6 - I am the way, the truth, and the life  
 15:1, 5 - I am the vine.

We are familiar with the verses in the third category. In these the predicate describes the subject. The second category is similar to, “It is I”, hence the translation “I am he”. The first category though not very frequent is very important.

The absolute use associates the “I” with divinity. The “I” stands as the substitute for divine name. In Exo. 3:14 we see the same formula, “I am that I am”. See also Isa. 43:10f. Divinity is implied in these sayings.

In sayings like “I am the light of the world” the self-revelation of Jesus comes through. The emphasis is on “I” and the predicate. The predicate defines the revelation. Also it relates the “I” to men and their needs:

“I” is the source of eternal life: vine, life, resurrection

“I” is the means of eternal life: way, door

“I” leads men to eternal life: shepherd

“I” reveals eternal life: the truth, the light

“I” nourishes eternal life: the bread.

**Vers. 1-7. The Lord confirms by a sign the declaration that he is the Light of the world, by giving eyesight as well as light:**

That which had been proclaimed as a great truth of his Being and mission, viz. that he was the Light of the world, was now to be established and confirmed to the disciples by a signal miracle.

**v.1. And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.**

This man was obviously a well-known beggar, who had often proclaimed the fact that he was blind from birth (see ver. 8). Such a condition and history rendered the cure more difficult and hopeless in the view of ordinary professors

of the healing art. Only Christ can pour light upon those who are born blind, as he is the Saviour the world needs.

**V. 2. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?**

This is a very important question and Jesus' response to this will have a great bearing on the issue of the problem of evil and suffering.

It was the current idea and popular doctrine, not only that all suffering in this life had its origin in sin. So, the calamity of congenital blindness of this man provided a very apt occasion for raising the question, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents?" It is difficult to say whether the disciples thought that one of these could have been the cause of the blindness. Some have argued that they had Scripture ground for the second of the suppositions, that the sin of the parents of the blind man was the real cause of the blindness of their son.

In Exodus 20:5 the idea is embedded in the Decalogue, and it is repeated in Exodus 34:7 and Numbers 14:18, that the iniquities of fathers are visited upon their children. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This may have led the disciples to put the question. **Did this man sin?** Is there any way or sense in which the man's own sin could be the cause of so great a calamity? The supposition of some that the disciples may have thought that the man's sins were foreknown, and that the blindness was punishment beforehand, is so abhorrent to any notion of the justice of God, that we cannot suppose that it ever entered into their inquiry.

**Ver. 3.— Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.**

There was no immediate connection between the special sin of the parents and this particular calamity. Our Lord does not assert in those words the sinlessness of those people, but severs the supposed link between their conduct and the specific affliction before them. **But** (he was born blind) **that the works of God should be made manifest in him.** The disciples will soon see in the history of this man the meaning of his lifelong blindness. In the man himself the grace of God will work mightily, both a bodily and spiritual illumination.

We are often tempted to say, 'this is because of that'. We do not know. In the economy of God it is not so simple. That is a simplistic understanding. We must understand that all physical problems in this fleeting world are consequences of the fall and of spiritual warfare and rebellion, but ultimately we look ahead and realize that He will take away every tear from your eyes, that death will no longer be, that pain and suffering will be removed and He will make all things new. The older I get, the more I treasure that hope.

**Ver. 5.— As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.** He had said in 8:12, **“I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.”** He was conscious of his power to do for the moral world. He was the Occasion of its life, the Condition of its activity, the means of its instruction, the Source of all its beauty, its joy, and its progress. The fact that he is the Light leads him to remind the disciples that he is the true Source of eyesight as well as of the conditions of vision. Light enough for all the world shines into the darkness, but the darkness comprehendeth it not. This Jewish people are surrounded by floods of light. The spiritual world stands revealed fully to Christ’s own gaze. But mankind hates the light, loves darkness on these matters rather than the light.

**Ver. 6. When he had said these things, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and with the clay thereof anointed his eyes.** The meaning and motive of the process here described has been a source of great perplexity to the commentators. We see that, on other occasions, our Lord used his own saliva as a means of cure (Mark 7:33; 8:23). On some occasions Jesus touched the diseased or deficient organ, put his hand on the leper, and his fingers in the ears of the deaf mute. On other occasions, again, he healed with his word only, and even from a distance, those who in the freeness and royalty of his love, he elected to relieve from their sufferings. He was moved, doubtless, in every case by the ‘special condition and temperament of the objects of his compassion. The use of these means was probably intended to evoke faith of the sufferer and onlookers

**Ver. 7. And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.** The only other place in the Old Testament where the pool of Siloam is referred to is Nehemiah 3:15. There the word sheep-skins; is used that is, the pool that was used to wash sheep before shearing them. We see here God’s choice of simple things.

“Siloam,” means “Sent,” You see the idea? He sends him to the place called Sent. There is a play on words going on here. A blind man is told to wash in a place called Sent by the One who was sent by God. The point is that Jesus is the source of his healing, not the pool. This pool of Siloam, by the way, was the only internal spring of water that they had in the city of Jerusalem and it was made possible after Hezekiah redirected the spring, which was outside the city wall at that time.

**He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.** The blind man needed no guide to Siloam, and if he had there would have been a score of helpers or curious on-lookers anxious to test the meaning of the Lord's command. **And came seeing.** What a wonderful change it would be! It would be strange and there would be a wonderful excitement for the man who, had never seen a thing, was moving indeed in a new world. Now remember that this man hasn't even seen Jesus yet. He went away, washed and came back seeing.

The miracle, ofcourse, provokes the critical school either into denying the supernaturalelement, or doubting the historical fact.

### **Vers. 8-34. The proof of the reality of the miracle, the bitterness of the Pharisees.**

Then the second part of the narrative is found in verses 8-34. This is the interrogation and here we see four basic moves. In verses 8-12 their neighbours are involved. Then in 13-17 it is the Pharisees and then the parents are called in, in verses 18-23. Then, after his parents, we go to the man himself and he is interrogated before the Pharisees. Again, each of these things makes the case stronger and stronger.

The natural question would be, 'Is this the same guy that was born blind?' Secondly, was he really blind to begin with? His parents authenticate this. Who is this Jesus? After all, He healed on the Sabbath. If He were of God, why would He heal on the Sabbath? Actually, as we have seen, that was not a violation of Torah. It was a violation of human tradition. But they were so wrapped up in their human traditions that they virtually elevated that above grace and were more concerned that He violated their particular tradition than the fact that a man was healed.

Let's take a look at the neighbours, by going back to verses 8-12. "Therefore the neighbours, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, 'Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?'" It is a question of identity. Is this the right guy? We have seen him all his life. "Others were saying, 'This is he', still others were saying, 'No, but he is like him'. He kept saying, 'I am the one'." You can just see the doubt; is this a setup here? The poor guy kept saying, "I am the one," but they are completely ignoring him. "So they were saying to him, 'How then were your eyes opened'? If you are the one, how could your eyes have been opened? You were born blind, how could it be that your eyes were opened?" "He answered, 'The man who is called Jesus made clay'." At this point

that is all he knows about him. Remember that he has not seen Jesus yet. All he knows is the name. “He 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.”

It would be great to see a man who was born blind and suddenly could see? We have heard about people who have lost their sight and regained it, but here is a man who has never seen at all.

**“They said to him, ‘Where is He’? He said, ‘I don’t know’.”** He has no clue as to where Jesus is. The first thing that we see here is that they are asking the wrong question. Instead of ‘how’, it should have been ‘who’. Who is this One? They were focusing more on the manner of the healing and missing the message of the healing. You know, Jesus did it in different ways. He healed two blind men by touching their eyes and on by putting spittle on his eyes. Though the healing power is the same, He can vary His message and methods. God has a way of doing things in unique ways.

Let’s continue on to the next part and look at what the Pharisees say. “They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind.” Now John raises this point, “Now it was a Sabbath on the day Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.” That is their focal concern, the violation of their particular law. “Then the Pharisees were also asking him again how he received his sight.

The **“Pharisees”** is not a conclusive definition of the Sanhedrin itself, which is generally denoted by the addition of the phrase, “the chief priests”. They were a highly organized society, and some well-known gathering of them may have been easily accessible. They were the generally accredited religious guides of the people.

And he said to them, ‘He applied clay to my eyes, I washed, and I see’.” He is giving the same answer over and over again. “Therefore, some of the Pharisees were saying, ‘This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath’.” So, we see that there is going to be a division here. “But others were saying, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs’? And there was a division among them?”

In other words, if this man were a sinner, God could not do such an amazing thing. The question now becomes, is this the right guy? Was he certifiably blind and if so, how can we authenticate that? Now, “They said to the blind man again, ‘What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes’? That is an interesting thought isn’t it? People were divided among themselves so they asked him what do you conclude? So, “He said, ‘He is a prophet’.” First He was a man called Jesus.

Now he concludes he is a prophet. In other words, there is no way that a man who is a sinner could have done what He did. Now, they didn't go for that either, but the point is that it was an upsetting and challenging concept to the religious leaders but they were blinded by their bias and they sought to discredit the miracle, assuming that somehow Jesus had switched beggars.

The Jews 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 received his sight. Now they want to prove that this is not the real man and they questioned them saying, 'Is this your son who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?' His parents were smart enough to know that they were being put into a box because they are afraid of being thrown out of the synagogue if they say something that is displeasing to the leaders. "His parents answered them and said, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind.'" You notice how cautious they are? These are irrefutable statements. "But how he now sees, we do not know. Ask him, he is of age, he will speak for himself." So, they put it right back on their son, because his parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.

You see the problem we have in the Scriptures again and again is the problem of fearing other people. Go back to 7:13, it says, "**Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews.**" Then read 12:42 and you will see this same motif: "**Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue.**" So, there was a tremendous power that they wielded over people, the power or the authority to more or less excommunicate them and bar them from fellowship in the religious community.

Here is the thing; when you commit yourself to Christ there will be consequences of persecution and so forth. Jesus makes this clear in His teachings. So, there is always going to be, in your life and in mine, a period of testing to see if we will confess Him before other people. That is part of the idea. He stands firm and will not deny what he knows to be true.

The point is that the Pharisees can no longer write this off; now they can't just say the guy was a sinner and couldn't have been a prophet. Let's continue in our story. In verse 24, "A second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him," and this establishes the fact that they have the right guy and that he was blind, but here is what they do. They put words in his mouth: "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." In other words, agree with us. This is what you must confess. In other words, if you don't say this, you are out of here. You see the point? They were effectively asking him to deny this man.

I love his response. “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” That’s great because what can they say? He knows this for sure. They can’t write it off because he is standing there telling them. But, they were not satisfied with that answer. “So they said to him, ‘What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes’?”

They already asked him this before. Now he says, “I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again?” He doesn’t exactly endear himself to them with that. But, he goes on, “You don’t want to become His disciples too, do you?” That is a great line. How come you keep asking me this question? “They reviled him and said, ‘You are His disciple but we are disciples of Moses’.”

As if that would mean, therefore, that if you were a disciple of Jesus, you couldn’t be a disciple of Moses. That is a big mistake. The reality is that Jesus came to fulfil the Law of Moses. The point is this, if you confess Jesus, you are no longer a Jew. That is always the cutting edge, what we do with Jesus.

At the point in which we say He is just a good man, a prophet, that sort of thing, that is one thing. But, as soon as we acknowledge something more about Him, that He is the Messiah and the Son of the Living God, we have another story entirely and that will be something that will divide people. He knew that He would come and that people would be divided over Him.

Now the man is teaching them. Now, he was a man called Jesus, then He was a prophet, and now what is He? He has come from God. You see the development in his illumination and his own reflection and insight. Now he knows He has come from God. If He did not come from God He could do nothing. What was their response? “‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us’? So they put him out.” Now we don’t know how permanent that ‘putting out’ was, it may have been for a short period or it may have actually been permanent.

Now we are at the next level. He was a man called Jesus, He was a prophet, He has come forth from God, and now He is the Son of God. At this moment, the man has never seen Jesus. He hears that voice, though. The voice sounds familiar, but he has never seen the face of Jesus until now. Notice that Jesus sought him out, just as in chapter five He sought out the paralytic. He sought him out and wanted to bring closure because the physical healing is not the point. That is not so important compared to the spiritual healing and that is John’s theme.

It is one thing to heal a man physically, it is another matter entirely for there to be a healing of the heart. That is the much higher miracle. Continuing, then, “He answered, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him’? Jesus said to him,

‘You have both seen Him and He is the One talking with you’.” Using that phrase, ‘seen Him’, to a man who was born blind is very meaningful. He has both seen Him and now He is the one who talking with him. In other words, you have already seen Him in a spiritual sense, but now you are looking at Him. His response, and He doesn’t waste a second, “‘Lord, I believe’, and he worshiped Him.”

Just a few thoughts about this. The Good Shepherd cares for His sheep and Jesus sought him out after they put him out of the synagogue. He knew His voice but had not seen His face. Now he can see Him. But it is not enough that he believe He is a man called Jesus, or a prophet, or even that He is a man of God, he professes the truth that Jesus is the Christ, Son of the Living God. For it is this purpose, as it says in John20, that this Gospel was written.

So, the beggar admitted his need, and his eyes and heart were both opened. In another point, “he worshiped Him,” which, of course, is evidence of His Deity. Turn to Acts 10:25-26. Where Cornelius tried to worship Peter. But Peter raised him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am just a man’.” In other words, don’t worship me, I am just a man. And also Acts 14:11-15, Paul and Barnabas were to be great gods come down in human form. But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, knew of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and so, again they cannot accept worship.

Then we turn to Revelation 19 and see a similar picture, this time with an angel. In verse nine, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said, ‘These are the true words of God’. Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’.” Worship only God; no angel will accept worship, unless it is the angel of the Living God. We are reminded of Thomas who worshipped him and said to worship “My Lord and my God.” Jesus didn’t say don’t do that. In fact, He said, “The Son of Man has come.”

Go back to chapter five for a moment and look at verse 23. Jesus says, “So that all will honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the father who sent Him.” That word, ‘honour’, speaks, really, of the kind of honour that one would give to the Living God, and He is saying the same honour is to be given to Me as well. These are powerful claims, and so Jesus did receive that worship. He said, in these words, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, those who see may become blind.” There is a remarkable irony there.

That is to say, those that admit their need are those who will see, those who refuse to see will then remain blind. It is this idea, then, of seeing, and a person can see and still not 'see', and fail recognize their need.

So, the man was put out of the synagogue and then Jesus has his discourse with him. He found him and he worships Him, "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'. Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, 'We are not blind too, are we?'" Then follows one of Jesus' great statements. "If you were blind you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see', your sin remains." That is a pretty strong and powerful refutation. I don't know how they responded to that, but I am sure they were not happy. The fact is that if you acknowledge your spiritual blindness, then your sin problem will be done away with. But, because they said, 'we see', and refused to see the light they had been given, their sin now remains.

There is a price to be paid. So, this is written by a disciple of Jesus, who now comes to a full understanding of Him and now he responds as he should in the illustration of a man whose physical blindness is now overcome and now he is also capable of seeing in his heart. Those who should have seen the truth blinded themselves to it. All this occurred on the last day of tabernacles, the festival of light.

So, there is a double meaning in that. 'What do we do with this Jesus'? Do we align ourselves with Him? Are we willing, for example, to confess Him before people who are skeptics and who would deny Him? That is the issue we have to raise.

Sources:

1. Matthew Henry's Commentary
2. Pulpit Commentary