

February 25: John 9

The incredible sign of healing the man born blind points to Jesus' statement in vs. 5, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Jesus is the one who opens our eyes spiritually, just as he opened the eyes physically of the man born blind. Jesus' disciples ask the theological question that any religious person of his day would have been asking, "who sinned to cause such tragic misfortune in this person's life?" Though the book of Job crushes this worldview, the writers of Deuteronomy (and all of the OT writings they touched) firmly held to the belief that "you get what you deserve" –either blessings if you're good or curses if you're bad. This was a standard belief in Jesus' day, and is still a common theological leaning in our world today. Any time we question what someone else did, or more often what we did, to deserve such misfortune, we follow in these theological footsteps. In chapter 9 of John's gospel, Jesus definitely smashes that argument, saying in no uncertain terms, "Neither this man sinned, nor his parents sinned!" The man was born blind because tragic misfortune is just a part of our broken world, but God was about to use that misfortune to reveal his glory through the power of Jesus Christ. Adversity is an opportunity for the works of God to shine. Jesus puts a paste of mud (made from his own saliva) on the man's eyes, and tells him to go wash it off in the pool of Siloam. When he returns from the pool he is able to see, and Jesus and his disciples are gone, but the neighbors debate whether or not this man was really the same blind beggar they'd seen a thousand times before. Perhaps this reveals something about how we see or don't see the most vulnerable among us.

In the next scene, the man is brought before the Pharisees who argue over whether or not Jesus was a sinner, for he healed on the Sabbath. They asked the man for his estimation, and he (who had just told his neighbors Jesus was a man) now calls him a prophet because of the incredible work he had done.

In the next scene, they call in the man's parents to solve the argument over whether or not this was really the same man who had been born blind. The parents confirmed that the man was their son who had been born blind, but since they were not present when the healing happened they couldn't offer any testimony about how he now gained his sight. Their fear of being thrown out of the synagogue for confessing Jesus' as the Messiah is likely an allusion to what was actually happening to the Christian Jews in John's contemporary community.

The religious authorities do call the man born blind back in for questioning and he's now frustrated that they're asking him the same questions over again, but also emboldened. He does not know how the healing worked, all he knows is that it worked and though he was blind, he can now see. He reminds the authorities that God does not listen to or work through sinners, so how could this man be the sinner they claim him to be. He even provokes them, asking if they want to be his disciples because of this intense line of questioning about him. This got him thrown out.

Finally, Jesus returns to the man and inquires about his faith. Jesus confesses that he is the Son of Man, the Messiah they've been waiting for, and the man born blind believes because of what he has experienced through Jesus' ministry. He believes and he worships him. The final verse indicates judgment for those who refuse to acknowledge their blindness and receive sight/light from Jesus. This is judgment for those who think they know everything (like the Pharisees who are still so hung up on Jesus' healing on the Sabbath that they can't appreciate the unprecedented miracle he performed).