

## Exegetical Notes, John 9:1-41 “Born Blind”

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### John 9:1-41

#### Verses 1-5

*As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*

*<sup>3</sup> “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.*

*<sup>5</sup> While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*

- Restoring sight is described in the Bible as a sign of the Messiah’s presence. (See Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, 47:7)
- When Jesus and his disciples came across a man who had been born blind, begging (see verse 8), the disciples wanted to know what sin had caused the man to be born blind, a sin which the man had committed or a sin which his parents had committed. The question came from a rabbinical teaching that all sickness came as the direct result of sinful behavior committed by the person suffering the illness or, in the case of an infant, his parents. While it is true that all sickness and suffering is the result of sinful behavior on humanity’s part, the root cause of the problem cannot always be traced to a direct behavior on the part of the one suffering. However, the rabbis taught that this direct causal relation did always exist, even though it might not be obvious to the human insight. So, according to the rabbinical teaching, if the man was born blind, either he or his parents must have done something to cause his blindness. According to the rabbis, the unborn child still in the womb could sin and thus be responsible for his own birth defect. Jesus disciples were familiar with this teaching and wanted to know who had caused this man to be born blind.
- Jesus refuted the rabbinical teaching by saying that this man’s illness could not be directly traced to the man or to his parents. Even though this man’s blindness was the result of humanity’s sinful ways, it was not directly related to anything the man had done or his parents had done.

- Jesus said that God would use this illness to bring healing to this man's life both physically and spiritually.
- Jesus then declared, again, that he was the Light of the World. As such he could bring the light of sight to a man who had been born blind.

### Verses 6-12

*After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. <sup>7</sup>“Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.*

*<sup>8</sup>His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?” <sup>9</sup>Some claimed that he was.*

*Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” <sup>10</sup>“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.*

*<sup>11</sup>He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” <sup>12</sup>“Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don't know,” he said.*

- Jesus then made mud from the dirt at his feet and his own spit. He put the mud on the man's eyes and told the man to go wash the mud off in the pool of Siloam. (Siloam was a pool cut in the bedrock upon which Jerusalem was built. It was dug out as part of the water supply system designed by King Hezekiah. 715-686 B.C.) When the man had done as Jesus instructed, his vision was restored. He returned home seeing.
- The man's neighbors could not believe that his vision had been restored. Some of them did not even believe it was the same man they had previously known to be blind. But the man insisted that his vision had miraculously been restored.
- The neighbors wanted all the details. They wanted to know who had performed the miracle. The man who had been blind told them how it had happened and that Jesus had done it. When the neighbors asked him where Jesus had gone, the man told them that he did not know.

### Verses 13-17

*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.*

*<sup>15</sup>Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”*

*<sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So*

*they were divided.* <sup>17</sup> *Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.”*

- A religious authority needed to establish the authenticity of the miracle. So the man was brought to the Pharisees.
- The first problem in establishing the authenticity of the miracle was the method Jesus had used to do it. Jesus had made mud with his spit and put it on the man’s eyes. Jesus had done this on the Sabbath. Making mud on the Sabbath was a clear violation of the Sabbath Law which forbade work on the Sabbath. Making mud would have been considered work.
- The Pharisees were divided over Jesus’ behavior. Some said that the miracle was invalid because Jesus was clearly a sinner, illustrated by his violation of the Sabbath Law. Others said that the miracle proved that Jesus could not be a sinner.
- So they asked the man for his opinion. He said that he now believed that Jesus was a prophet.

### **Verses 18-23**

*They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents.* <sup>19</sup> *“Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”* <sup>20</sup> *“We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind.* <sup>21</sup> *But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.”* <sup>22</sup> *His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.* <sup>23</sup> *That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”*

- The second obstacle to the miracle’s authenticity was whether a miracle had even been done at all. The Pharisees did not believe that the man who had been cured had been blind at all.
- They called the man’s parents to testify to his blindness. The man’s parents said that he was their son, and that he had been born blind. They testified that they did not know how he had been cured, and then, because they were afraid of the Pharisees, refused to say any more.

### **Verses 24-34**

<sup>24</sup> *A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”* <sup>25</sup> *He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”* <sup>26</sup> *Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did*

*he open your eyes?”<sup>27</sup> He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”<sup>28</sup> Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses!<sup>29</sup> We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”<sup>30</sup> The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.<sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.<sup>32</sup> Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.<sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”<sup>34</sup> To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.*

- The Pharisees then called the man before them again. This time they openly denounced Jesus as a sinner. He had clearly broken the Sabbath Law. By this, they intended to deny that a true miracle or a true healing had happened.
- The man countered their announcement invalidating the miracle by saying that he could not make a pronouncement about Jesus’ spiritual nature, as they had done, but he could validate that a miracle had occurred.
- When they asked the man to tell them how Jesus had performed the miracle again, intending to show him how Jesus had broken the Sabbath Law and was therefore a sinner, the man mocked them by asking if they wanted to hear the story again because they were considering becoming Jesus’ disciples.
- At that remark the meeting fell apart. They began to hurl insults at the man. They called him foolish. They told him that they were disciples of Moses, and, again, they denounced Jesus.
- The man said that their conclusion that Jesus was a sinner had to be incorrect because God does not listen to sinners. But God had listened to Jesus, for he was cured.
- The Pharisees then denounced the man more violently declaring that he had been a sinner since birth since he was born blind. They told him that he could not advise them, and they had him thrown out of the Temple, even though they had summoned him there.

### **Verses 35-39**

*Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”<sup>36</sup> “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”<sup>37</sup> Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is*

*the one speaking with you.”<sup>38</sup> Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.*

- Later, Jesus found the man. He asked the man if he believed in him.
- Because of the experience the man had endured following his physical healing, he professed faith in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and his Savior. As a result, his healing was total; physical and spiritual.

### **Verses 39-41**

*Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”<sup>40</sup> Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”<sup>41</sup> Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.*

- Jesus said that he came into the world to judge the world. He meant that he would reveal things as they truly are. Thus, the blind who cannot see will see spiritual truth as did the man born blind, but those who think they see correctly will discover that they are actually blind, spiritually speaking.
- The Pharisees, some of whom had followed the man born blind, knew that Jesus was talking about them and accusing them of a lack of spiritual sight. They confronted Jesus, asking him if he was saying that they were blind. Jesus said that if they had been blind they would not be guilty of sin, but because they judged others on the basis of their own faulty understanding of God, they were the ones guilty of sinning, not the man born blind or him.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Born Blind*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)