



INTERPRETING THE SIGNS

READING JOHN'S GOSPEL

**SESSION 18:
THE HUMBLE SHAMES THE ARROGANT**

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THE HUMBLE SHAMES THE ARROGANT

SESSION 18

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What are some of the characteristics of spiritual blindness?
2. Where have you/continue to show the most spiritual blindness?
3. How can we overcome spiritual blindness? What does this and other passages in John that we've looked at so far say about this?
4. As a church, how can we prevent getting stuck in spiritual blindness?

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

People respond differently to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we should expect that. Peoples' responses indicate where their hearts and minds are at in regards to belief in Jesus Christ. These responses then prove helpful as we pray and talk with people about the gospel. Rather than seeing these various responses negatively, we should thoughtfully consider the response, recognize that the gospel of Jesus has always elicited a wide range of responses, and continue to live and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully while helping ourselves and others see blind spots.

Additionally, our own responses to life circumstances help us to properly evaluate our own belief in the gospel and should cause us to question whether or not we are seeing everything through the lens of Jesus and the gospel. The theme of seeing dominates this passage, giving us helpful ways to understand our own or our neighbors' sight , or lack of it.

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Passage:

John 9:1-41

Think Through the Questions:

1. How often does the theme of seeing appear in this passage?
List the times by verses.
2. How does Jesus see the presence of evil in the world?
3. Describe the various responses to Jesus' miracle of giving sight to the blind man.
4. What is the primary lesson for the reader in this passage?

Respond to the Questions Below:

COMMENTARY

The Beloved Disciple has left the scene of the Feast of Booths. He doesn't give many details about the setting, but few are necessary. The imagery of the miracle and the words of Jesus draw the reader into John's purposes without them. The miracle is straightforward. As with the lame man, Jesus initiates grace towards a blind man he sees along his way. The disciples' question regarding the reason for the man's blindness gives Jesus an opportunity to give them (and us) a different perspective on the cause of evil in the world. Rather than seeing evil as a product of God's judgment for sins committed, Jesus draws us to understand evil and suffering as an opportunity for the grace and power of God to be made known. He follows this explanation with a call to his disciples to join in the work of God while it is still light, for darkness is coming, which is the foreshadowing of a future time where darkness will dominate, in contrast to the domination of the light of Jesus over the darkness of evil (John 1:5). Without further clarification from the text, or even the rest of the book of John, Jesus is probably referring to a future time where darkness will dominate for a short period of time on earth, which is the subject of another one of John's books, Revelation. The man responds to Jesus kindness by obeying him and washing his face in the pool and returns to Jesus with sight.

At this point, John draws our attention to the responses of those around this man. The responses are confusion from his neighbors and those familiar with him, division among the Jewish leaders, fear and cowardice in the man's parents, arrogance on the part of the Jewish leaders, belief and boldness on the part of the man born blind, and duplicity from some Jewish leaders. Let's look at each one of these responses more closely. As we will see in the end, the responses all have to do with how well they could see what was truly going on around them.

Confusion

John identifies the first group of people as the neighbors and regular observers of the man born blind. Other than his family, these would be the people most likely familiar with him. They had seen him regularly for years. The people in this initial group could not agree on whether or not this was the man, despite his repeated insistence that he was and their familiarity with him. It appears that they were stumped in regards to how this man's blindness had been healed and could not make sense of it. Even after the man told them how he had

been healed, which was through the power of Jesus, they were still not resolved and took him to the Pharisees—the Jewish leaders of the day.

Division

Once the Pharisees heard how the man had received sight, they immediately launched into their old routine of accusing Jesus of violating the Sabbath. Again, Jesus intentionally initiated this miracle on the Sabbath in order to draw attention to the villainy, abuses, and contradictions of the Jewish leaders. As Jesus pointed out earlier, the people must evaluate his Sabbath miracles with reason and right judgment (7:24). If the Jewish leaders circumcised infants on the Sabbath in order to keep the Law of Moses, would not his miracles to heal and give life be reasonable works, even if it was on the Sabbath? The point of the Sabbath was to cease from one's regular work and to trust God for provision. Jesus' efforts in no way violated the Sabbath law. This time however, there were those present with the group of Pharisees that actually defended Jesus as being from God and believed him to be from God. At a stalemate, they asked the man again for his take on Jesus, to which he answered, "He is a prophet."

Fear and Cowardice

Now with the neighbors, passersby, and Jewish leaders confused and divided in regards to the person of Jesus, they then call the parents of the man born blind to attest to the identity of the man. Surely the family could clarify the situation! The parents affirm that this was their son and that he had been born blind. But in regards to Jesus, they say they know nothing, which the text strongly indicates was a lie. The reason for not telling the truth is explained as the parents trying to protect themselves from being thrown out of the synagogue, the punishment for anyone affirming Jesus. They were afraid of the consequences of testifying to Jesus. The text alludes that they knew Jesus healed their son. They were simply afraid to say so and instead deflected the question back to their son. This response also demonstrated cowardice, for they were willing to let their son suffer the interrogations of the Jewish leaders alone. They were also willing to let their son, who had suffered all his life, continue to suffer alone with his probable expulsion from the synagogue, which was the center of Jewish community life.

Arrogance

The Jewish leaders then call the man who had been blind back to the interrogation. They ask him to renounce Jesus and give glory to God, even though it is Jesus that has brought him sight. After asking the man again to tell them how Jesus brought him sight, the man born blind got somewhat exasperated at their stubbornness and actually begins to teach them, to which they take great offense because they see that his previous blindness and their well-being were consequence of their moral and spiritual states. He was blind because he was a sinner. They were well-off (physically and materially) because of their holiness, virtue, and knowledge. This was the lens through which they viewed the world. They could not see the man who had been blind or themselves in any other way. In this way, they were blind, because their lens was out of focus. They could not truly see because what they saw was not real. They could not see their own arrogance and sin.

Boldness and Belief

The man born blind emerges from this story as the only one who truly sees Jesus as He really is—the Son of God. Jesus gives him physical sight, as well as spiritual sight. In the humility of his state, the blind man was willing to trust and obey Jesus in order to be healed. In contrast to the lame man who was healed, the blind man returned to Jesus and learned his name. Additionally, the lame man essentially went back and betrayed Jesus to the Jewish leaders while the man who was blind defended Jesus in their presence and even had the audacity to point to their ignorance and blindness (contrast 5:1-17 with this story). With Jesus bringing sight to this man, Jesus not only gave him victory over the enslaving darkness of physical blindness, he also brought the light of faith, which gave him the ability to perceive the Jewish leaders as they truly were and the boldness to stand against them and defend Jesus. For this, the Jewish leaders cast the man born blind out of the synagogue, which was where he had essentially been his whole life anyway—an outcast of society, but loved by God.

Duplicity

Jesus immediately finds the healed man and the man responds warmly to Jesus and worships Jesus because of his gift to him. Jesus' statement in v.39 is the point of the whole story. Jesus came into the world to judge. Jesus brought sight to those who did not claim to already see. To those who did not see that they needed the sight Jesus

gave, their stubbornness and disbelief in Jesus made them increasingly blind to him—even hostile. As we saw earlier in the passage, there were some in the group of Pharisees that believed that Jesus was from God (v.16). Evidently, there remained some Pharisees not totally darkened by the arrogance of the majority. Upon overhearing Jesus’ remarks to the man born blind, asked Jesus, “Are we also blind?” This question appears to be humble and sincere, but it betrays how they see things. They asked Jesus if they were blind. To Jesus, they began blind, just as the man born blind had always been blind before meeting Jesus. Instead of partially considering Jesus’ statements, they should have realized that they were truly blind without the sight that Jesus gives. These men seemed to warm up to Jesus, but they stopped short of true belief, which comes with the recognition of one’s inability to see without the light of Jesus Christ.

THINK THROUGH THE ISSUES

We are all victims of spiritual blindness. In coming to faith in Jesus, we experience blindness, and after we come to faith, we experience blindness. It’s one of the most significant obstacles to faith and growth in Jesus. Essentially, spiritual blindness is failure to see how we need Jesus in all of our lives. Seeing signs of spiritual blindness and knowing how to correct it is one of the most important skills the people of God can develop. Let’s use this passage to grow in those skills.

Issue: Spiritual Blindness

1. How can the responses from these various people show causes of spiritual blindness?
2. What are causes of spiritual blindness?
3. From your life experiences, can you identify sources of spiritual blindness?
4. How does belief in Jesus overcome spiritual blindness?

Respond to the Questions Below:

DINNER TABLE DISCUSSION GUIDE

MEAL #1: A BLIND MAN

Read John 9:1-7

1. Who do you blame for bad things you see in life?
2. Why do you think Jesus used clay and saliva to heal the blind man?
3. Why do you think John included this miracle about healing blindness? Is there something else to learn about Jesus other than his power to heal blindness?

MEAL #2: THE TREATMENT OF THOSE LESS-FORTUNATE

Read John 9:8-12, 18-23

1. Do you know any blind people as a family?
2. Do you regularly see blind people? How much do you notice them? Would you be able to readily identify them?
3. Describe how the blind man's neighbors and parents treated the blind man.
4. Would you want to be treated that way?
5. How would Jesus want us to see blind people, and other less fortunate people?

MEAL #3: RULES AND PRINCIPLES

Read John 9:13-17

1. Why were some of the Jewish leaders mad at Jesus?
2. What do you think is more important? To follow the rule of the leaders to not do anything on the Sabbath or healing a blind man?

MEAL #4: SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

Read John 9:24-41

1. What does Jesus mean by "blindness" in vv.39-41?
2. Why were the Jewish leaders "blind?"
3. How can we "see?"

FAMILY PRAYERS

SERMON NOTES



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