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## The Light of the World

John 8:12—9:41

### John 8:12-59 in Brief

Jesus said that He is the light of the world and that anyone who follows Him “will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (vs. 12). Although the Pharisees disputed Jesus’ claim, Christ continued to declare that God had sent Him from heaven and that His teachings and work were the fulfillment of God’s will. Jesus never wavered in regard to the purpose and focus of His mission.

Jesus added that those who did not believe in Him would die in their sins, but those who believed would be set free. The father of all who reject Christ is Satan, who has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning. In contrast, all who receive Jesus belong to the heavenly Father. Jesus made it clear that there was no spiritual middle ground.

Jesus concluded by saying that He existed before Abraham lived. This was another “I am” statement that equated Him with God. This so infuriated His listeners that they prepared to stone Him to death. They failed, however, as He slipped from their midst.

### **a** Jesus Heals the Blind Man (9:1-12)

“Go,” [Jesus] told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

—John 9:7

The apostle John’s account of Christ giving sight to a man born blind illustrates Jesus’ declaration that He is the light of the world. This healing illustrated the way Jesus opens spiritual eyes to God’s truth.

This event occurred while Jesus was still ministering in Jerusalem. When Jesus encountered the blind man, His disciples asked whether this man was born blind because of his parents’ sins or his own. The man’s plight puzzled them. They wondered how a person could be responsible for an affliction he or she received at birth (vss. 1, 2).

One answer might be that the man had inherited his parents’ punishment. The Lord had said that He would judge upon succeeding generations up to the fourth (see Exod. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14:18).

## Medicinal Spittle

On the other hand, the prevalent rabbinical teaching of the day was that all suffering was the result of personal sin. Some went so far to say that a baby could willfully sin in the womb or that the infant's soul deliberately sinned in a preexistent state.

Perhaps because Jesus' disciples had been exposed to countless disabled beggars, their compassion for the blind man was minimal. For them he had been reduced to a theological riddle. They assumed this man's suffering was the result of someone's offense against God, but did not understand how.

Jesus emphatically told His disciples that neither the man nor his parents were responsible for the man's condition. The disciples asked about the cause, but Jesus focused on its purpose. Though God had not inflicted this man with blindness, Jesus promised to reverse this man's misfortune to demonstrate God's compassion and power (John 9:3).

**Ask Yourself** . . . *When was the last time I suffered for no apparent reason?*

Jesus followed His promise to

**D**uring Jesus' time many people believed that saliva possessed the power to cure physical ailments. The ancient world thought that the saliva of someone of particular importance was especially effective in the treatment of blindness.

Jesus also used His spit on two other recorded occasions, to give hearing to a deaf man (Mark 7:33) and sight to another blind man (8:23).

heal the blind man with statements that may have confused His disciples at the time. What did Jesus mean by "day" and "night" (vss. 4, 5)?

His statement may have become clearer to them after Jesus' arrest. "Day" referred to the bodily presence of the Lord, and "night" referred to the passing of His earthly ministry. While Jesus was still with them, He and they had to do God's work, for that was what God had sent Him to do. Those tasks included doing such things as giving sight to the blind and revealing God's truth to the lost. Jesus was the light that revealed

God's plan of redemption to a dying world.

John's account provides no indication that Jesus was asked to heal the man. Evidently He took the initiative by mixing His spit with dirt and placing the muddy substance on the man's blind eyes (vs. 6). While Jesus could have cured the man without this hands-on procedure, as He did with many other people, perhaps this outcast needed Jesus' touch. Some have suggested that since

the man's blindness was congenital, Jesus was performing an act of creation here reminiscent of God's creating Adam from the clay of the earth.

Jesus told the man to wash himself in the Pool of Siloam, which was located at the southern end of Jerusalem. This pool was part of the elaborate water system created by King Hezekiah (see II Kings 20:20). As John indicated, the word "Siloam" means "sent." Jesus sent this man to the pool, which was probably a considerable distance away. This would have called for a degree of faith from this man. Sometimes an exercise of faith involves a great deal of work. If he had overheard the disciples' conversation, he may have expected something miraculous to happen. In any case, the man may have welcomed Jesus' suggestion as the weighty clay began to dry on his eyes. When the man finally reached the pool and washed, he was able to see for the first time in his life (John 9:7).

The healing of the blind man astonished his neighbors. Some of them couldn't believe that he was the same man. After all, he had been born blind, which made his healing even more incredible. The man affirmed his identity and insisted that he was the person they had known for so long (vss. 8, 9).

The neighbors were so amazed that they asked the man how he was cured. He gave only a brief summary of what happened that showed he knew little about Jesus at this time. The neighbors apparently wanted to

speak to Jesus themselves (as did the neighbors of the Samaritan woman at the well), but the man did not know where He was (vss. 10-12).

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## **b** The Pharisees Interrogate the Healed Man (9:13-23)

**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 do such signs?" So they were divided. —John 9:16**

Although John did not identify those who took the healed man to the Pharisees, it seems likely that they were neighbors of his who marveled at his cure. Apparently they thought that the Pharisees could explain this miracle, or perhaps they had misgivings because the healing had occurred on a Sabbath (vss. 13, 14). The Pharisees taught that no work of any kind, including healing, could be performed on the Sabbath.

When the Pharisees questioned the man about the circumstances surrounding his healing, he gave an even shorter account than he had previously. He just reported the facts (vs. 15).

The man's account confirmed, in the minds of some of the Pharisees, that Jesus was not doing God's work, since He broke their Sabbath rules. Other Pharisees, however,

were not ready to judge Jesus so harshly. Indeed, the question “How can a sinner do such signs?” (vs. 16) seems to echo Nicodemus’s earlier greeting to Jesus (3:2). Nevertheless, the Pharisees favorable to Jesus seem to have represented a small faction. Those who follow Jesus today also often find themselves in the minority, especially when something valuable is at stake.

Since the Pharisees were divided in their view of Jesus, they asked for the healed man’s opinion. This time he did not refer to Jesus as simply “the man” (9:11), but called Jesus “a prophet” (vs. 17). This was probably the highest title he could think of. The man’s understanding of Jesus

was obviously increasing.

**Ask Yourself . . .** *How has my understanding of Christ changed in the past year?*

The Pharisees, on the other hand, refused to believe that Jesus had God’s approval or was empowered by Him. They were perplexed, however, as to how to discredit the miracle and brand Jesus as a charlatan. So they continued their investigation by summoning the man’s parents for questioning (vss. 18, 19).

The parents affirmed that the man was their son and that he was born blind. Their fear of the Jewish authorities, however, compelled them to plead ignorance as to how

## The Pharisees and the **Sabbath**

**T**he fourth of the Ten Commandments reads, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God” (Exod. 20:8-10a). Fifteen centuries after Moses delivered God’s commandments to the Israelites, the Pharisees had constructed an elaborate interpretation of this Mosaic law.

Jesus’ healing of the blind man would have offended the Pharisees in three ways: First, Jesus mixed His spit with mud. Though this was a simple act, they still would have considered it work. Second, Jesus healed. According to the Pharisees, only if a person’s life was at stake could medical attention be given on the Sabbath. And third, one of their obscure laws specifically forbid putting spit on a person’s eyelids on God’s holy day.

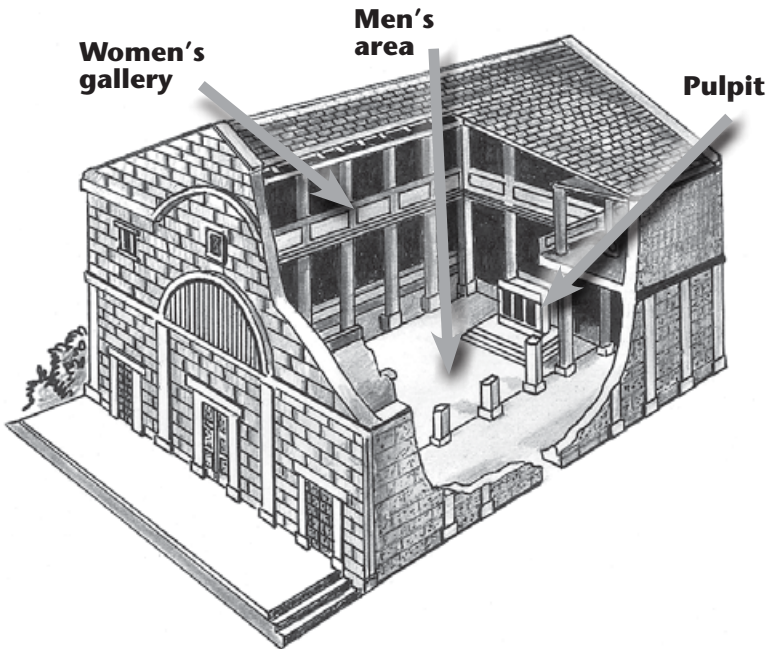
their son was cured. Instead, they told the Pharisees to question their son, who could speak for himself as an adult. They were particularly afraid of being barred from the synagogue, since the religious rulers had warned that anyone who professed a belief in Jesus would be excommunicated from the synagogue (vss. 20-23). To be put out in this manner had profound social and economic implications for the person who suffered such a punishment. Sometimes Christians today are excluded from certain circles because of their faith.

## **C** The Healed Man Confronts the Pharisees (9:24-34)

**“Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”** —John 9:32, 33

Since Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the Pharisees concluded that Jesus was a sinner. So they sent for the man Jesus had cured and ordered him to glorify God for what had happened to him (vs. 24).

*An illustration of a synagogue. Anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah was cast out of the synagogue and thus from Jewish society.*



They wanted him to admit that the miracle was due to God's merciful involvement and not to anything Jesus had done.

It is also possible that they suspected that this man had faked his blindness in order to assist Jesus in duping the people into thinking that He was a miracle worker. The phrase "Give glory to God"—often used in religious cross-examinations—might have meant "Speak the truth in the presence and the name of God."

In either case, the Pharisees impressed upon the man that they, as the established religious leaders, were convinced that Jesus was a charlatan and a fraud.

The man responded with a statement the Pharisees could not disprove—that the man could now see, though before he was blind (vs. 25). As to their assertion that Jesus was a sinner, the man would not comment. He spoke only what was obvious to him. His answer, however, showed these religious leaders that he was not intimidated by their power as his parents were.

**Ask Yourself** . . . *Do I know any spiritual bullies? How would I respond if they attempted to intimidate me?*

Despite the man's refusal to implicate Jesus in any wrongdoing, the interrogation continued. The Pharisees asked the same questions again, hoping this time the man would somehow incriminate Jesus. Instead, the man brusquely reminded them that he had already answered their questions. He sarcastically asked

whether they also desired to be disciples of Jesus. The "too" in his question may indicate that he now considered himself a devoted follower of Jesus (vss. 26, 27).

The Pharisees resorted to insults and veiled threats in an attempt to put this man in his "proper" place as their religious inferior. With contempt for the man and Jesus, they noted the cultural difference between being a disciple of Moses and being a disciple of Jesus. Moses' authority was unquestioned among the Jews, yet Jesus' origin was unknown to them (vss. 28, 29). They certainly did not believe Jesus' claims of His heavenly origin.

The Pharisees' accusation that he was a follower of Jesus did not silence the man, for he wondered aloud at their ignorance of Jesus' origin. Indeed, it was amazing that such learned scholars of Scripture could not figure out that God had to have sent Jesus. God listens only to the righteous and not to rebellious, fraudulent sinners (vss. 30, 31).

The man reasoned that his healing could not have been accomplished unless Jesus were from God. Who had ever heard of someone receiving his or her sight after being born blind? The answer was obvious—nobody! According to the healed man, Jesus could not have done anything so remarkable acting apart from God (vss. 32, 33).

The Pharisees had enough of the man's impudence. Not only was he born blind, but according to them he was born permeated with sin. They may have been implying that God

had punished him with blindness because of his godless character, which was evident to them by his contempt for those God had put in charge over him (vs. 34a).

The Pharisees terminated the interrogation by having him forcibly removed from their presence. John may have been indicating that he was only physically cast out, but it is likely that they banished him from the synagogue and branded him an outcast among his people (vs. 34b).

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## **d** Jesus Seeks Out the Healed Man (9:35-41)

**Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” —John 9:39**

The actions of the Pharisees and Jesus stand in stark contrast. The Pharisees had the man physically, and perhaps socially, cast out; Jesus sought the man out after He heard what had happened.

After Jesus found the man, He asked him whether he believed in “the Son of Man” (vs. 35). The Greek text makes it clear that Jesus stressed the “you” in His question. Jesus knew what was in the man’s heart, but He wanted the man to make a personal commitment. Little by little Jesus revealed Himself to the man so that his spiritual eyes could now be opened. People often come to Christ

in this manner. Little by little they learn more about Him until one day they understand their need for Jesus as Savior.

The man spoke to Jesus with a respect he certainly had not shown to the Pharisees. The man could not have recognized Jesus by sight since the healing occurred after he had left Jesus’ presence. He might have remembered Jesus’ voice or was told that this questioner was his healer. In any case, the man readily indicated that he would place his faith in the Son of Man if Jesus would be kind enough to identify Him (vs. 36).

Jesus told him that the one he was looking at and listening to was the Son of Man (vs. 37). Instantly the man proclaimed his belief and honored Jesus by addressing Him as “Lord” (vs. 38). John added that the man worshiped Jesus, and the Lord did not hinder him.

Jesus declared that His coming affected people in one of two ways. There are those like the blind man who could not see but received their sight when they acknowledged Jesus as their Lord. Then there were those like the Pharisees who claimed to know God but remained in spiritual darkness (vs. 39).

**Ask Yourself . . .** *Do I tend to be spiritually nearsighted? farsighted?*

The Pharisees who heard Jesus make this statement were shocked that Jesus would suggest that they were as spiritually blind as other people. Since they were confident that Jesus was referring to them,





*These steps led down into the Pool of Siloam, where Jesus instructed the blind man to wash the mud from his eyes.*

they demanded that He speak plainly. Was He accusing them of spiritual blindness (vs. 40)?

Despite the indignation of these self-exalted religious leaders, Jesus did not mince words with them. If they had admitted their inability to understand their own spiritual state, they would have recognized their need for healing. But because the Pharisees were convinced that they could see no such need, they remained in their sin. Their spiritual blindness prevented them from seeking reconciliation with God (vs. 41).

Jesus is the light that reveals our true spiritual condition and God's enduring forgiveness. When we believe in Him and worship Him, the light of Jesus draws us into God's grace.