

RUF Bible Study – John  
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John 9 – Sight to the Blind

Have you ever lost something that was actually right in front of you? I remember the worst time I lost my keys. I must have been a sophomore or junior in high school, and after basketball practice, I went out to my green Honda Accord hatchback – and the keys disappeared. I looked everywhere. I went back into the school and looked. I asked my friends to look. Finally, I had to call my parents, which I hadn't wanted to do because I had a tendency to lose other things and this only confirmed that reputation.

My dad came and, as per usual, he found the keys almost instantly. They were dangling in the hatchback keyhole.

They were right there! Yet I couldn't see them. Our passage in chapter 9 deals with seeing things right in front of our faces. Yet so often we miss them.

Let's use the questions asked in the text to guide us through the passage. One thing we need to keep in mind as we go through is that Jesus' miracles are signs to us. They point to something else greater. So as we talk about this man receiving sight, we must remember that it's a sign to something else, to some other sight.

***Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?***

This is the question that gets us going. To state the obvious, this story in chapter nine is immediately succeeding chapter eight. John writes a connection for us: "As he passed by...." We're coming out of the story of the Feast of Tabernacles, where Jesus claimed to be the living water, the light of the world and the great I am. Jesus had been saying he is the light of the world, and whoever follows him will not walk in darkness.

He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples ask him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" They want to know why this has happened, and they have only a few possibilities. Obviously, they think, someone did something wrong. His parents' sins are being accredited to their son, or this man sinned before he was born – how is that possible?

This was the way most people thought, but it's really almost a tenant of reincarnation and karma. The world goes around, and the bad things keep going and getting to you so you have to live a good life in order to shake it. This blindness was bad. This man had no hope for being healed. People didn't recover from being blind. And remember that there aren't any contacts or glasses, so if you had poor vision you'd be in trouble too. I have 20/400 vision, which means I can see at twenty feet what a normal person can see at 400 feet. That means I can't read unless I have a book six inches from my face. I'd most likely be considered blind, and even though I wouldn't live in total darkness, I would only have a very few jobs I might be able to do. Blind people didn't get married. They sat on the street and begged.

Why did this happen to the man? Jesus contradicts the construction of the question the disciples have asked. He says neither his sin or his parents' sin is the cause of this man's blindness. It doesn't work that way. The people back then put too much stock in a direct connection. They forgot that sin – man's broken relationship with God – brings sickness and death into the world. Yes, sin also brings consequences to an individual, and we must remember that. Sin brings suffering and guilt to us. But we must be careful about generalizing sicknesses and infirmities to be causal from sin in particular people. As D.A. Carson writes, "But once theologians move from generalizing statements about the origin of the human race's maladies to tight connections between the sins and the sufferings of an individual, they go beyond the biblical evidence."<sup>2</sup>

I would say that the world of the Bible thought the connection between sin and sickness and death was too tight. They were looking for particular reasons for anything that happened. But we in our world think of the connection too lightly. Although it wasn't any particular sin that caused this man to be blind, we brush over the question, dismissing it altogether as absolutely stupid. There may be more causes than we know to our sicknesses, and we should think about them more deeply instead of merely medicating them until we feel better. The truth is probably somewhere inbetween.

Jesus doesn't go into all that. He says it's because God is to be glorified. All of creation brings God glory, even in the broken parts of it. God is at work in bringing light to the darkness, in healing people and restoring them, and we should care about this work of his.

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**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2008, website: [www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org). For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson, Hughes, Wright, Calvin and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, 361

So you may feel “blind” in some part of your life. Like you got a bad start. You may wonder about that and why it happened. If so, you’re down there deep, questioning God’s goodness.

It can start pretty shallow though. Like: Why don’t I have the perfect skin tone or complexion? I feel cursed with acne. Why can’t I jump higher? Why am I not more flexible? Life would be better for me if I were more flexible – I could be a tremendous dancer, but God has cursed me – why has this happened? It wasn’t my fault I got my ACT or SAT score – it’s God’s fault for giving me this amount of intelligence and diligence. Why was I born in this dinky town? Tahlequah, Oklahoma? I could have really been something if I had been born somewhere else to better parents.

We think this way. We aren’t thankful for how God has made us and who God has made us as his image bearers, his special creations. We wish we were different.

This isn’t even mentioning people who have real problems. Genitive birth defects. Born with real deformities. Born *really* blind. We surely think of Hellen Keller, and the life she was leading. What would we tell her if we’re feeling shafted because of our relatively minor complaints? We probably can’t say much to people like that until we become their friends and enter into their worlds. Once we do that, we might kindly and compassionately tell them that their condition wasn’t outside of God’s control, and that he will make everything right someday.

Jesus healed the man. He really wasn’t that interested in the debate about whose fault it was. He was saying, “There is a blind man here in front of us, and I’m the light of the world.” So he healed him. Here we have Jesus spitting on people again (as my friend Clint Rule likes to point out). He makes a mud pack, puts it on the man’s eyes and tells him to go wash himself in the Siloam pool, the same one the priests would draw the water out from for the Feast of Tabernacles water ritual. Siloam means sent, and Jesus sends the man to be healed. *So he went and washed and came back seeing.*

### ***Is this the same man?***

Let’s move along in our narrative and ask the next question. The man returns – AND HE CAN SEE – people cannot believe it.

The neighbors seem fairly open to it. They wonder if it’s the same man, but aren’t sure. They ask around. Some of them ask him. “I am the man,” he says. That is a cool thing to be able to say and not be a stuck-up braggart. Most of us say, “I am the man” when we make a score in ultimate, or win at Puerto Rico, or score 100 on a test, or stick a trumpet solo or get the part.

The formerly blind man was saying “I am the man” in a good way. He’s saying, “I’m the one who grace happened to.” He gives testimony to the change in his life. He recounts the story of how it happened, and the people are interested to hear about it because this sort of thing just doesn’t happen. It’s not like his foot fungus rash cleared up or he got a cool, hip hair cut. He was blind, and now he can see.

The parents aren’t quite as excited. They get interrogated starting in verse 18. Obviously, they were excited about their son being able to see, but this was world-changing for them. Many parents’ identities get formed around their normal children. This is all the more so when their child has some special, great or long-term need. Of course this is natural, but it can turn out extremely harmful if it’s not talked about and dealt with. How will they relate to their son now that he can see? How will this change their lives?

These parents are also scared. They feel intimidated by the Pharisees, and don’t want to say too much. John lets us in on their feelings in the parenthetical comment (9:22): *His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.* If the parents said too much, they would be expelled from their whole community. Not only would their identity as parents change, their identity in the community would be ruined forever. So they kept silent, pushing things off on their son, who was old enough to talk for himself anyway. They’re giving “No comment” answers, not testimonies of God’s glory.

What about the Pharisees? They have an extreme position, as stated by John in the comment regarding the parents. They had decided to kick out of the synagogue anyone who confessed Jesus to be the long looked-for Messiah, the one who was to come for his people and save them. This tension has been growing. We’ve seen several scenes in John, starting in chapter two, where the Jewish leaders and Jesus have squared off. The tension has been growing, and Jesus has walked straight into it with his extravagant claims to be God. He hasn’t brushed things off, but keeps on pressing the issue. It’s almost like he wants them to kill him (which he does in a way), and he goes toward a binary paradigm – crown me or crucify me.<sup>3</sup>

Here the Pharisees are concerned about the fact that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath, which they’re claiming is work, which then is a violation of the laws of Moses on the Sabbath. They’re very upset about this and are looking for anything possible to discredit Jesus.

To us, this probably seems silly. You might be tempted to dismiss the Pharisees here as being incredibly petty and foolish. But it’s important to see how important his was to them. It was *everything* to them. They *had to* hold on the law. It was what they knew to be right. It made them who they were, so they took it very seriously.

Because of that worldview, they weren’t able to see and appreciate what Jesus had done to heal this man. How he had worked righteousness, goodness and grace on the Sabbath, which are things God does.

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<sup>3</sup> turn of the phrase from Keller

Let me ask you – what is your issue that you hold onto so tightly that you can't see the work of God, that you can't see Jesus? Let me give just a few examples.

I have plenty of conversations with people who occasionally drink alcohol in moderation and are petrified to tell their parents. They often hide whatever alcohol they have in the house when their parents come over, and then finally they think that is ridiculous and lying, and they finally tell them. And their parents freak out, saying, "This is not how we've raised you! Your husband or your wife will be an alcoholic and you'll be on the streets!"

That seems reactionary and crazy, but not if this way of thinking is Your Life. Then it is earth-shattering for it to change, and for you to encounter something different, a Christian use of alcohol in moderation.

I'll tell one on myself. I *love* RUF. I cannot believe how much it has meant to me in my life, and I whole-heartedly believe God is at work here on our campus at the University of Oklahoma. I pray for it to touch many, many lives as we reach students for Christ and equip them to serve Christ and his church. I pray for conversions. I pray people will be set free from the bondage and darkness of sin and rejoice that that happens.

But. But. But. But I can love RUF so much that I don't see Jesus. I can love RUF so much that I just die if I hear of someone choosing another ministry or another church over mine. I can hate to look on facebook and see reports of people going different places, and I can feel jealous about that. It can make me crawl into a hole and not come out. Or it can make me proud and arrogant if someone does choose RUF over another ministry.

This is wrong. This is sin. This is focusing on something else – something that is good – so that I do not see and rejoice in Jesus when he is at work.

What is that thing for you? Is it school or the way you look or having a boyfriend or getting married, or being agreed with all the time, or your successful career?

How are we distracted from the work of Jesus in our midst? How are we open to it like the neighbors, pushing it off like the parents, or ignoring it like the Pharisees?

### ***Do you also want to become his disciples?***

Let's look briefly but more purposely at the Pharisees. In their discussion with the man, he explains to them again how it happened, and he asks them, "Do you also want to become his disciple?" They rage back at him, NO!

The Pharisees have a few arguments with the man. They say Jesus cannot be sent from God. He is not God's messenger. Jesus is a sinner (he broke the Sabbath), and the man is a sinner, born in utter sin (so they answer the question the disciples asked in the beginning, not caring about the healing of the man).

They say they will not follow Jesus, because they follow Moses. I want to point out here that John, and I think Jesus too, is saying that following Moses is of no value. Moses pointed to Jesus. Exodus is about Jesus. Just as Genesis was about Jesus – creation, light, life – so to Exodus is about Jesus – redemption, restoration, worship. So if you are going to follow Moses and you really love and understand Moses, you must understand and love Jesus, for that is what Moses was about. We've had this theme all along in John. Jesus is fulfilling the Old Testament ideas, stories and images. He is the manna in the wilderness, the rock that was struck, the living water, the fire and the flame, the light of the world, the Great I Am, the new temple. These things have been fulfilled in Jesus.

That doesn't mean those things aren't important any more. The other thing we've learned along the way is how the whole Old Testament shows us about Jesus. We are the poorer if we don't read it and understand it, for Jesus certainly was thinking about it when he spoke and acted like he did. So we should know what he's doing and talking about. Let's not say, Well, because Jesus fulfilled the stories and images of the Old Testament, I don't need to worry about them at all. No, let's learn about them and thus have a richer view of who Jesus is. But let's not follow Moses.

The man asks the Pharisees if they want to be Jesus' disciple. They give a resounding no.

What about you? Do you want to be? What are you making of Jesus through all of this? Are you seeing him as a good teacher still – he doesn't want you to think he's only that. Are you seeing him as something deeper and more, yet strange and mysterious? Are you sensing that if he is who he says he is – very God of very God – that he might demand all of you if you follow him? That's probably a good thing to think, for it is true.

### ***Do you believe?***

Our last question shows us how the formerly blind man answers the previous question. It's been interesting to see the progression of this man's understanding of who Jesus is. At first he just knows him as the man who did this awesome thing to him. He doesn't know where Jesus is or who he is, he only knows a man came up to him, a discussion ensued, a man put mud on his eyes, told him to go to the pool and wash (which he needed to do anyway), and voila it worked.

During the discussion with the Pharisees, the man goes a little further. The man who did all that is a prophet. He's a holy man who has the words of God. Many people agree with the man here. The Mormons, the Buddhists, the Muslims – practically everyone would say Jesus was a good teacher, a moral man, a prophet from God (whoever God is). Not many would be willing to say Jesus is a bad, bad man. So we have the standard Jesus as Prophet or Teacher way of thinking here.

The man says a few other general things about Jesus. He was sent from God. He does things from God. You would think with all the hubbub about it, he would know Jesus' name by that point. So he knows whom it is that has done this, who has gotten him in so much trouble, who is the center of attention and controversy.

Ah, but he doesn't know Jesus. He met him, but he was blind then. Even then, he didn't know him. James Montgomery Boice's commentary is helpful in thinking about what that might mean.

Just think, the man had already been obedient to Jesus. He had done what Jesus had asked of him. But he didn't know him yet. Have you done the things Jesus has asked of you? Maybe you're still a virgin. Maybe you've stopped cursing. Maybe you've been in church quite a few times. Maybe you're polite, and a good person. You've grown up in a good home, gone to a good school and treated people well. But do you know Jesus?

This man had experienced things from the very hand of Jesus. He had had something amazing happen, something he says has never ever happened before. But he still didn't know Jesus. Perhaps you've witnessed amazing things – speaking in tongues, healings, powerful outpourings of the Spirit, deep times of prayer and conviction. But do you know Jesus?

This man had even given testimony about Jesus. He had been in the witness stand and said things that took courage to say. But he didn't know Jesus. Might that be true of you? Isn't it possible that you could have stood up in church and talked about Jesus and even about your walk with Jesus, and yet you didn't know him?

There are stories about ministers who were converted during their own sermons. Spurgeon tells one, and the pastor was preaching and preaching, and something was changing, and the people said, "The minister is being converted!" The pastor paused when he heard that, and said he thought they were right. He had just been converted and believed in Jesus. The people broke out into the doxology – Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.

John Wesley was a missionary to America, and he wasn't a converted Christian. Couldn't that be true about you? Have you ever thought about that?

This man also suffered for Jesus before he knew him. He went through a lot of trials. Have you suffered for Jesus and not yet known him? Have you been persecuted for being labeled a Christian or being grouped with them or because you were dropped off at youth group, or you just have always identified with Christians – and yet you don't know Jesus?

The Pharisees had seen all these things, but they rejected Jesus. The demons know these things, and they hate Jesus.

But Jesus comes to this man particularly. And he asks him, "*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*" The Son of Man is a term Jesus uses that comes especially from the book of Daniel. It is God's son, come to judge the people, the one who holds the world in his hand, the Messiah, the Christ.

The man answers with a very good question: *And who is he sir, that I may believe in him?* The man wants to believe. He asks "Who is the Son of Man?"

Jesus tells him, "*You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.*" Jesus is the Son of Man! He is God. He is the savior of the world. He is the Lamb of God. He is the light of the world. He is the bread of life. He is living water. He is I am who I am. The man is talking to him.

At that moment his heart blindness falls away, and he receives spiritual sight. "*Lord, I believe.*" Now he knows Jesus. He doesn't just know about Jesus, but he knows Jesus and that makes all the difference. The text says then he worshiped Jesus, and Jesus doesn't stop him.

This is all a true story. It really happened. And it's a sign. Jesus is all the time talking about darkness and light. John is writing this in a masterful way to call into question for the reader: What do you think? Are you seeing Jesus? Are you in darkness or do you see the light?

Jesus is right there. Don't be so blind as to miss him like the keys in my car. He was right in front of the Pharisees, and they wouldn't have him. They wouldn't be his disciples. They wouldn't follow his teaching. They couldn't believe he was the one to take away the sins of the world. "Jesus did not come to a world of sinners aware of their need, and eager to be rid of sin."<sup>4</sup>

How are you rejecting him? How are you pushing him away?

Those who are spiritually blind have no sense of need; consider the teaching of Jesus as foolish; and are guilty for their sin in rejecting Jesus. It's like they were inoculated from Jesus. They knew enough about him that they should have known better, and that made it all the worse, not all the better. Are you blind?

The man had experienced Jesus but didn't know him yet. Is that true of you? I fear it is true of so many in our culture, but it is blindness of the worst kind. Let God open your eyes to see him. The worst type of blindness is the person who denies it and thus can't get help. The worst kind of drunk is the one who says he isn't. Admit it. You need help. You need your need. That is the way to find Jesus, and to let him find you. This man spent much of his life blind, but because of that he found the light of the world – wasn't that worth it?

Those who come see their need, and they need God's miracles; they have found Jesus' teachings comforting and reasonable; they have obeyed Jesus; they are growing in knowledge about him and worshipping him; and they're doing all this solely by the grace of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Carson, 378

I have a friend from high school named Tracey Groh. I really, really wanted to date her. I never got to, but we did fool around a few times. We grew up in Ozark, Missouri, from good families. I went away to Mizzou, and she went to Southwest Missouri State, and while she was there she became a Christian through a group called Icthus.

A few years later, I became really good friends with her husband, and we were all on staff with The Navigators together. I had become a Christian in college too. It was so strange to be a different person sitting there with Tracey now McElmurry and she was a different person. But she was the same person. But different. How did that work?

God had changed us both. It reminds me of Augustine, who lived a crazy, sexual lifestyle in his younger days. After he was converted he later ran into his former lover. He was polite, but wouldn't give into her advances or play along with her flirting and sexuality. They were about to leave each other, and she thought to herself, "Maybe he doesn't realize who I am?" So she turned back to him and said, "Augustine, it is I." He looked at her and said, "Yes, but it is not I."

He was different. He had been blind, but now he could see. He was changed. He now knew Jesus, and that made all the difference.

I told you I was blind. I wore glasses starting in second grade. I was thrilled to get contacts when I was in eighth grade. But those were merely corrective. It wasn't until I had laser eye surgery when I was in my late twenties that I wept with joy at being able to see. I highly recommend it.

One last story, and I don't remember where I read this one originally. There was a man in Africa who had always been blind. A group of doctors went to Africa on a medical mission to help people. Some of those doctors were ophthalmologists, eye surgeons. They did several surgeries, and gave the blind man sight. He left amazed, thankful and happy, and they continued their work.

A week later, they saw a strange sight. They saw that man, the one who had been blind, coming toward them with a whole bunch of other blind people, all who were holding a rope. The man had been walking around the villages, telling people about the doctors who had healed him, who had given him sight, who had changed his life. Do you want to go see him?, he asked. I will take you there. Follow me. So he brought them to the ones who had given him his sight.

So it is with Jesus. Can you see him? In Ephesians 1:18, Paul prays that God would open the eyes of our hearts. May he take away our spiritual blindness so we can truly see and follow him.