

John 9:1-41  
March 19, 2023

Sight

The Gospel of John is different from the other three gospels in several respects:

1 - It has a different timeline; it is from John that we get the idea that the earthly career of Jesus lasted three years . . . there are three Passovers.

2 - It has no parables. There is no Good Samaritan or Prodigal Son or Mustard Seed, or Talents or Sower or Lost Sheep. Instead, there are long conversations, like the one with Nicodemus in the third chapter or in the fourth with the Woman and the Well.

3 - It has *different* miracles. There is no Healing of the Paralytic at Capernaum or Raising of the Widow's Son at Nain; or of Jairus' Daughter or the Woman with an issue of blood. And in John, they are not called miracles, but signs, because they point beyond themselves to something else, something greater.

There are seven signs in all: Changing Water to Wine; the Healing of the Royal official's Son, who was near death and Jesus healed him from a distance by saying the word; the Healing of the Lame Man at the Pool of Bethesda; the Feeding of the 5,000, Walking on the Water, the story for today, the healing of a man born blind is the sixth sign, and the Raising of Lazarus.

The signs point beyond themselves from physical health; hunger and sight and life, to spiritual health,

understanding and fulfillment and eternal life; all wrapped up under the banner of faith.

All of this in the first half of John before there is a transition to the stories of the Passion, the washing of the disciples feet on the night of the arrest, denial, betrayal, crucifixion, Easter.

Our long reading this morning tells the story of a person blind from birth who received his sight one Sabbath, and the resulting furor which led to his being, "thrown out," presumably of the Temple. There was a question about sin, "whose sin was it, that he was born this way? His or his parent's?"

It turns out that there is an alternative explanation. Jesus offered them the idea that human weakness, serves as an avenue for the demonstration of God's power. It sounds very much like Paul in Corinthians, "My power is made perfect in weakness."

It is very striking that it caused an uproar. It would be like firing the doctors and nurses that work in a hospital, and sending the patients into exile, just because they were healed.

The "Kingdom of Heaven," though it offers a new explanation of things, new set of possibilities for all of us, is always seen by some as a threat, honestly, sometimes by us. There is a resistance to it, not because the person got healed, but because it gives evidence of a power over which the people in power

have no control. In this case it was beyond their competence, and their jurisdiction.

At least part of the intensity surrounding the healing of this blind man is related to the sense in which his sight points beyond itself. First, sight equals understanding. When we say that we can see, we often mean, and it is the case here, that we know. It means the dark clouds of confusion have gone away.

In this story, sight means *spiritual* understanding. The ones who are blind are the religious authorities who cannot comprehend and see the life of the Spirit. A person can have 20/20 physical sight and still be spiritually blind, and vice versa, a person can be physically blind and possess great spiritual sight.

“He replied, ‘I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’”

And in this story, lurking underneath the surface is an insult. The ones who are supposed to know about these things are actually clueless about them. The one who understands is the one born blind, who sees the truth about himself and what has happened to him, what he can and can not understand; and about Jesus, about God, about life. The others only reckon that they know, and they perceive, correctly, that they have been insulted.

“Some . . . who were with him heard him and asked, ‘What? Are we blind too?’”

They did the usual things that those in power do when their authority is undermined or their incompetence is exposed. They bullied him, insulted him, accusing Jesus of wrongdoing because he healed on the Sabbath, which is a way of changing the topic.

They claimed Jesus was a sinner. There was even a denial that the man had ever been blind. They did not, however, have control over the situation and could do nothing to alter the principle facts; the man *had* been blind, now he could see.

What they couldn’t see is that they lived not only a material, this world life, but also an eternal, heavenly one as well. Even if they claimed to believe in the eternity, they did not believe in it practically, for they gave it no room to breath, no space to operate in the everyday world. This failure gives evidence of a crucial lack of spiritual understanding. They *were* blind.

Yet, as authority figures they had real power, not only could they, “throw the man out,” and seek to destroy Jesus, but they bullied the people who were afraid of them. They had a large enough measure of this world’s power to exert themselves. And they did, in the end it led to the execution of Jesus. But they were still powerless in the things of God, no matter what they said about Moses. For the execution of Jesus became the principle means of redemption.

We are all powerless in the things of God. It is best to admit it. God often does not do what we want nor operate on our schedule. We want the world to

become goodness and light, and now, not later. God has another agenda, another schedule.

Yet we can know that in Jesus, eternity and time meet, our blindness and God's vision meet, the world of the earth, historical and sometimes vulgar, and the world of heaven, majestic, transcendent, meet. The world of unspeakable brutality and injustice collides with the world of justice conquered by infinite mercy. And because we are aware of the meeting, we participate in it, beginning with our confession that we are powerless before it.

We still live in the same circumstances, but they are new. By faith we know that our most important possessions are spiritual not material. The most important things to know regard love and friendship, mercy and compassion; not the world of science and philosophy, this world's knowledge.

We know it is the supremacy of Grace, and not the familiarity with the biological details of our existence, which has the power to make life new and which represents true spiritual sight. To be able to see and understand the gospel is sight indeed, and the crowning knowledge of our lives.

We see it in Jesus, and never more powerfully presented than at Passiontide when he is on the Cross, when in the world's terms his failure was complete. What a wonderful failure it is; to God be the glory, now and forever, amen.

[Back](#)[Home](#)