

John 8: 12—9: 41  
The Gospel of John

After dismissing the woman caught in adultery by telling her to “go and sin no more,” Jesus enters into a long discussion with the scribes and Pharisees who had been her accusers. Clearly, the scribes, who were professionally trained interpreters of the law, had an acute interest in how Jesus could justify violating the law as they understood it. Likewise the Pharisees, who were members of a holiness movement based on strict obedience to the law of Moses, were perhaps more than troubled by Jesus’ seemingly cavalier attitude with regard to a law stating she should be stoned. Jesus, of course, speaks with the authority of God, so the law says what he wants it to say. And this ultimately points to where he wants the discussion to go, namely, to him as the embodiment of God in their midst.

Therefore, he begins the discussion, which is really more of a proclamation about him, by using another of his “I am” statements. The reference in this to God’s name, “I am who I am” would not have been lost on his audience. “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (vs. 8:12)

Jesus, in trying to describe the consequences of coming to faith in him for the individual believer, uses a series of symbols appropriate to the topic he is addressing. Light enables a person to see what is in his field of vision. A blind person cannot see what is around him, and so he walks through the world in darkness. For John, faith is an organ of “sight.” It enables us to see what is real about ourselves and God.

Contrary to the common misconception that “faith” refers to an intellectual belief in doctrines or ideas about God—doctrines which, by definition are not subject to any kind of verification logically or otherwise—faith in the gospel of John refers to a God-given gift to be able to apprehend the presence and nature of God in Jesus Christ. For a person of faith, Jesus is “light” because faith “sees,” with the heart and mind, the presence of God shining through this particular human being. Moreover, because “seeing” God is the result of having received the being of God (Holy Spirit) through an open heart, the person of faith also has the life of God. This is why Jesus connects “light” to “life.” The Pharisees respond by saying that since Jesus’ testimony is about himself, it is invalid. For a statement to be valid, according to the Pharisees, it would have to be based on the law. Moses received the law from God. For this reason, the law, and anything based on the law, is valid and authoritative by definition. Thus, for them, Jesus’ statements about himself are invalid and without authority.

Jesus’ response is predictable. They say it is invalid because they have no ability to see the truth of what Jesus said. They have no faith and therefore no “sight.” They

can see neither God nor God's presence in him. He knows that what he says is true because he came from God. He has his being in God. Since they are unable to see that, neither are they able to validate what he says.

Jesus then changes the subject. "I am going away...where I am going, you cannot come." (vs. 21) Predictably, they misunderstand. He is speaking of spiritual matters. They are dumbfounded because their thoughts are limited to a literal understanding of what it means to go somewhere--what Jesus calls being from "below." So they wonder if he plans on committing suicide. Jesus then tells them they will die in their sin if they do not believe that he is the Messiah. Their response? "Who are you?" After indicating that he came from the one who sent him, and that he came to do his will, he predicts that they will recognize who he is when he is "lifted up." John then observes that some folks believed in him.

Taking advantage of this, Jesus addresses the believers. He affirms that if they "continue in his word" (remain faithful to his promises over time), they will be made free. They object, [saying] that they have never been slaves. Again he speaks of spiritual matters while they are stuck on the earthly. He then clarifies that the freedom he speaks of is freedom from sin. They are "slaves to sin." Moreover, slaves have no permanent place in the "household"—the Kingdom of God. Jesus' point here is that, insofar as a person lives and acts in separation from God, sin is inevitable. Apart from faith in God, the human heart is turned in on itself. That is, it seeks love, security, meaning and purpose from those things in the world to which it is attracted. It puts its trust in things that are not God because it has no ability to "see" God. Apart from faith, God is not real. A person can have an idea of God, but not take hold of God with the heart. But the human heart needs to find happiness, security, and meaning in something. If God is not "seen," neither is God an option as an object of faith. Therefore, sin, or acting in a way that reflects one's disregard for God, is inevitable. Only God, making himself known to us in Christ, can set us free.

Jesus' hearers had also mentioned the fact that they were Descendents of Abraham. "Yes," Jesus says. "Yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place for you for my word." Because they have no faith, and because they cannot see God in Jesus, they respond to him in a negative way. They want to eliminate him because they feel judged by his message. Jesus also points out that if they acted as Abraham had, they would not try to kill him. Abraham believed God's promises. They do not. Claiming God as their father, Jesus responds by saying their father is the Devil, for they are acting out the Devil's lies and murderous intent. Their response is to try and come up with the ultimate insult: Jesus has a demon and, on top of that, he is a Samaritan. It doesn't get any worse than this. They have been bested and so they resort to insults.

The whole discussion, or rather argument, ends when Jesus asserts his eternal preexistence. "Before Abraham was, I am." This is the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. They decide to stone him but Jesus "hid" himself and leaves the temple area.

## Chapter 9

Chapter 9 is the story of how Jesus gives sight to a man born blind. The whole story is meant to illustrate how a person comes to faith—that is, the ability to see God.

As Jesus and his disciples walk by this blind man, the disciples ask who is to blame for the blindness—he or his parents. The question assumes that the blindness was a punishment for sin. Because many believed that the guilt for sin was passed on to the next generations, it could be that it was the parents' fault for his blindness.

Jesus responds by telling them that no one sinned. Suffering is not the result of being punished for sin. God does not respond to sin in this way. Rather, he seeks to redeem us from it. Therefore, Jesus says, his blindness presents an opportunity to display what God truly does, namely, restore and heal. He then gives the man his sight.

Shortly thereafter, the neighbors began to wonder how it was that this man could see. Some deny that he was the man who had been blind. Obviously, they couldn't believe such a thing could happen. Wherever Jesus goes, he produces "singularities"—inexplicable events that baffle the crowds. The man, however, tells them, "I am the man."

This is something for the authorities to deal with—at least, that's what the crowd thinks. They are like a group of people who see a UFO and decide to call the police and the military. Moreover, complicating this whole affair, Jesus had performed this sign on the Sabbath—a potentially criminal offense.

The Pharisees are then brought into this developing farce. They ask how he received his sight. After being told, they decide Jesus could not be from God because he did this on the Sabbath. He therefore must be a non-observant Jew. Some other folks wonder how a sinner could perform such a sign. Unable to agree, they ask the formerly blind man what he thinks. "He is a prophet." (vs. 17) This man, unlike the paralytic, is taking steps toward coming to faith. This is what the story is really about. It's about Jesus opening the eyes of faith so that he can eventually "see" Jesus as the Messiah.

The Pharisees still can't believe this sign took place at all. So in order to verify it, they question the man's parents. They admit this is their son but they won't explain how he got his sight. Had they identified Jesus as the miracle worker, they would have been thrown out of their synagogue. So, they tell the Pharisees to ask their son. He can speak for himself.

For a second time they question the man born blind who now can see. But they set him up to be condemned first by saying Jesus is a sinner. The man responds by telling them what he knows about Jesus. He gave him his sight. "How did he do that?" the Pharisees respond. "I already told you." Then he insults them. "Do you

want to become his disciples?" They respond predictably. They believe in Moses because they know Moses came from God. But this man? Where does he come from?

The blind man now has them cornered. God does not listen to sinners. Obviously, God listened to Jesus. Therefore, Jesus comes from God. Enraged, the Pharisees declare that the man born blind was therefore also born in "sins." Again, when a person can't deal with the argument, he resorts to insults. They are simply restating their belief in the idea that his blindness was a punishment for sin. The man was then thrown out of the synagogue.

Jesus returns to the man because he knows the man was rejected due to his witness. Asking if he believes in the Son of Man (the term used for a heavenly Messiah from Daniel), the man eventually says, "Yes," and he worships Jesus. Not only were his physical eyes opened. His spiritual sight was also restored, or rather, given to him for the first time.

The story concludes by Jesus saying he came into the world for "judgment." He came so the blind might see, and so that those who do see would become blind. The Pharisees, like a dog with his tail between his legs, ask, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" (vs. 40) Jesus responds with the observation that, because they think they see and yet reject him, "Your sin remains."

John's gospel is the only one of the four that includes such detailed stories of how signs bring people to faith. John wants his readers to know that:

- 1) Faith is a way of seeing that which is hidden from physical view. Faith is the gift of spiritual sight. It is not something for the mind only, nor do we give it to ourselves. It is a gift from God. Spiritual sight is the ability to apprehend the presence of God and therefore, by definition, only God can give it to us. Faith is born in our hearts as God gives us the gift of the Spirit. Through the gift of the Spirit, we can see that God is embodied in Jesus Christ.
- 2) And 2) Faith develops over time. The man born blind starts out confused, eventually confesses that Jesus is a prophet, and then, as it soaks in that he received his eyesight from Jesus in a miraculous way, he sees that Jesus is the Christ.

*Thus endeth Chapter 9.*