

Exegesis

Vs. 18-23 – Even though the Jews are the ones who asked the blindless man what he thought of Jesus, they not only disbelieved the answer he gave, but they also questioned whether he had been blind at all! Like so many who are confronted with a truth that does not make sense to them, the Pharisees began doubting the virtue of the messenger rather than accepting the validity of the message. And so, John tells us that the once-blind-man's parents are called to verify that he had, in fact, once been blind. Presumably, they don't ask the neighbors again because they wanted to establish that he had been blind since birth. Though why such a fact would need to be established is not clear. Had the man been blind for only part of his life would do little to detract from the miracle's exceptional nature.

When the blindless man's parents arrived, the religious leaders asked them, "Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?" The parents respond by saying, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not...." To their credit, they do not deny that the man in question was their son, nor do they deny that he had indeed been blind since birth. Thus, in a roundabout way, they confirmed that a miracle had occurred.

However, they certainly would've known the specifics of the miracle. After all, the one who had been healed of blindness had probably lived with them his entire life. This means these parents were perhaps the first to know of their son's healing.¹ Meaning, they not only would've known the "means" by which their son received his sight (i.e., spittle, mud, the pool of Siloam, etc.), they would've also known the name of the man who had "opened" their son's eyes. Those two facts were common enough knowledge with the neighbors. How likely would it have been for the parents to not know a single detail? They were feigning ignorance because they wanted no part of this. Thus, to refrain from getting sucked in any further, they bounced the question back to their son by saying, "he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself." To be "of age" is a broad term that could refer to anyone thirteen years of age and older.² In a legal sense, this was the age at which a man's testimony was considered legitimate.³ But, less technically, the phrase likely meant that their son was old enough to answer for himself.⁴

¹ Köstenbeger (2004), p. 287.

² Carson (1991), p. 369.

³ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 157.

⁴ Morris (1995), p. 433.

Our faithful commentator explains that the parents lied because they “feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.” This is the first of three other instances where being expelled from a Jewish community is linked with confessing that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. 12:43; 16:2).⁵ But, to what extent this particular expulsion entailed is a point of great debate amongst Johannine scholars. Historically, removal from one's Jewish community could range from 10 days to 2 years. Still, there are instances where the suspension was more akin to banishment as it was a permanent, rather than a temporary, punishment.⁶

Generally speaking, there are two interpretative camps. The first sees John's use of the Greek term **ἀποσυνάγωγος** (*ah-po-soo-na-go-gahs*), "put out of the synagogue," as an anachronism. An anachronism refers to a word or phrase that does not exist in the time period that the narrative assumes.⁷ For instance, John is generally believed to have been written sometime after the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) but right before the dawn of the second century.⁸

Considering that **ἀποσυνάγωγος** does not show up in other texts outside of John's account (not even in the LXX⁹), some have assumed that this term referred to a well-known Jewish reform where Christians were excluded through the use of one of the "Eighteen Benedictions"¹⁰ of which the Twelfth read as follows: "For the apostates let there be no hope, and may the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our days. Let the Nazarenes [i.e., Christians] and the *Mînim* ['heretics'] be destroyed as in a moment and let them be blotted out of the book of life and be not inscribed with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the proud."¹¹ The date of this Jewish reform is ordinarily pegged at around A.D. 85-90.¹² Thus, while it may fit in with the timetable of John's writing, it is still some 60 years after the events in the narrative itself. Proponents of this view claim that John, or some other unknown editor, fabricated this excommunication detail to mirror issues the church faced during the second century.

The second of the two interpretative camps consider the events factual rather than fictional. John has already spoken of a division within the Jewish community at large and within the

⁵ Kruse (2017), p. 258.

⁶ Thompson (2015), p. 214-215.

⁷ Imagine reading a book you thought was written in the 1920s but then coming across words like "social media," "cellphones," and "computers." You would rightly assume the book was written no earlier than the 2000s.

⁸ Carson (1991), p. 82; Morris (1995), p. 30; Köstenberger (2004), p. 8; Thompson (2015), p. 21-22; Beasley-Murray (1999), p. lxxviii; Kruse (2017), p. 16-17; Keener (2003), 1:140; Wright (1950), p. 58.

⁹ Morris (1995), p. 434-435.

¹⁰ Köstenberger (2004), p. 288.

¹¹ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 153.

¹² Carson (1991), p. 370.

Pharisees themselves (cf. 3:2; 7:43; 12:29, 42-43). To think that the Pharisees would take some action to dissuade their fellow Jews from even considering that Jesus was the Messiah is not unthinkable. In fact, Jesus was likely referencing this very scenario when he said, in Luke 6:22, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall *separate you from their company* [emphasis added], and shall reproach you, and *cast out your name as evil*, for the Son of man's sake."¹³ This same group will go to great lengths to condemn Jesus and have him hung on a cross for all to see. That they would consider expelling a person who lends their support to Jesus' cause is only to be expected. This is especially the case for someone who they already thought of as morally compromised (vs. 34). Fear-mongering is a favored tactic of the powerful to keep the masses from questioning their leaders.¹⁴ Rumblings of dissent have already reached their ears, and the religious leaders will do whatever is necessary to squash anyone who disagrees. If they must make an example of one of their own, even though something truly remarkable has happened, so be it. Thus, as John says, "fear of the Jews" made these parents deny even knowing the name of the person who healed their son (cf. Mat. 10:35). To risk being excluded from "the community of family and friends in which one has lived, learned, and worshiped"¹⁵ was a price too high for them to pay. But, as they will soon find out, in distancing themselves from Jesus, they also distanced themselves from their own son. If some interpreters find echoes of similar scenarios throughout history, it is because the persecution of Christians began while Jesus was yet on earth and not after. Imagine how encouraging and edifying it would've been for Christians to read John 9 when they were under Roman persecution? To suffer for the cause of Christ has been a part of the Church's DNA from the very beginning (cf. Lu. 9:23).

As an aside, I cannot help but point out the measures some interpreters will go just to deny or, at least, cast doubt on the validity of the Scriptures. While etymologies bring depth to our understanding of many passages, they are not, in and of themselves, definitive. Word studies have their limitations. Ironically, those who wish to read into John's account elements of fiction are akin to the Pharisees in this very passage. Though presented with a blind man who had miraculously received his sight—a fact confirmed by the man himself, his neighbors, and his parents—they refused to see the obvious truth. Likewise, when a passage is in complete agreement with the specifics of the rest of the N.T., interpreters must go to great lengths to discredit it.

¹³ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 154.

¹⁴ Keener (2003), 1:789.

¹⁵ Thompson (2015), p. 215.

This is not to say we should refrain from questioning the Scriptures. Questions are the means by which our faith is enriched and expanded. Throughout all four gospels, the disciples are constantly being portrayed as incessant detectives investigating something that Jesus said or did. However, when we leave behind good-faith arguments, we have ceased making an honest academic pursuit and have, instead, begun insulating ourselves from the facts at hand. Look hard enough, and a person is bound to find an excuse for why they should not believe in Jesus Christ. But that does not mean their conclusion is correct. Confirmation bias is the characteristic of those who are willfully ignorant and nothing more. Often, what a person like this needs is not more facts but more faith. And God is the only one who can awaken a sleeping mind such as that.

Vs. 24-25 – Seeing that the blindless man's parents have unintentionally hurt their cause, the Pharisees questioned the once-blind-man *again*. They say, "Give God the praise..." which isn't an exhortation that the man worship God but more akin to how we might say, "tell the truth" (cf. Josh. 7:19).¹⁶ They thought he must indeed be hiding something. And posturing themselves as his intellectual superiors, they then say, "we know that this man is a sinner." In essence, they had heard what this man *believed* about Jesus, and they now what to inform him of what they *know* Jesus to be: a sinner. After all, Jesus transgressed the Sabbath when he healed this man's eyes. Only a sinner would do such an awful thing.

What's more, since they could not discredit the man (he had, in fact, been blind), nor could they disprove the data (a miracle had, in fact, been performed), they had to switch tactics. If they couldn't refute the facts, they would simply change the facts. And they would start by coercing the man healed of his blindness into changing his testimony. Is it possible that they sensed the parent's trepidation and so assumed if they pressured the man, they could force him into altering his opinion of Jesus? After all, "discrediting Jesus is the only concern."¹⁷

The blindless man responds by saying, "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." The absurdity of the mental gymnastics performed by the Pharisees is brought into stark contrast by how the blindless man stated the facts of the event simply without adornment or exaggeration. As far as he's concerned, Jesus' virtue is of secondary importance compared to the miracle itself. And the latter of those two issues ought to provide sufficient proof that Jesus was not who they thought him to be. The Pharisees might twist things in such a way that Jesus becomes the very embodiment of Satan himself. But one thing they could not do was make this man forget his own experience. For years he had walked

¹⁶ Carson (1991), p. 372.

¹⁷ Köstenberger (2004), p. 289.

in utter darkness. If he wanted to go anywhere, he had to be led by the hand to avoid bumping into someone. How many times had he heard people talking of something beautiful but never being able to see it for himself? But things were different. Where once he groped his way through a perpetual night, he now strides in the light of the noonday sun. The religious leaders might think they know that Jesus is a sinner, but he knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that though he was blind, now he can see. "He does not go into the theoretical question of whether Jesus was a sinner or not. He sticks to the facts of which he has certain knowledge, and thus produces an answer that is a classic. No fine-spun web of airy theory can budge a person who can say with conviction "one thing I do know." The man had sight. Nothing could alter that."¹⁸

¹⁸ Morris (1995), p. 436-437.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 14

Text: John 9:18-25

Some in this world refuse to believe the truth even though they are presented with undeniable proof that something is true. And it is common for such an individual to weasel their way out of admitting that they're wrong by denying any evidence that may contradict their conclusions and defaming the person who brought the data in the first place. Such is the case as the Pharisees continue to grill the man healed of his blindness. Rather than accept the message, they shoot the messenger.

When we leave behind good-faith arguments, we have ceased making an honest academic pursuit and have, instead, begun insulating ourselves from the facts at hand. Look hard enough, and a person is bound to find an excuse for why they should not believe in Jesus Christ. But that does not mean their conclusion is correct. Confirmation bias is the characteristic of those who are willfully ignorant and nothing more. Often, what a person like this needs is not more facts but more faith. And God is the only one who can awaken a sleeping mind such as that.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: