

Exegesis

Vs. 35-38 – As Jesus re-enters the narrative once again, the reader sees that he is in active pursuit of the once-blind-man. Undoubtedly, he knew what's occurred already, but the Lord waited until the news had reached him before looking for the blindless man (cf. 1:43; 5:14).¹ And when he finds him, Jesus asks, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Notice Jesus did not ask about what "they"—i.e., the religious leaders, the parents, etc.—believed about him; but, instead, he said to the blindless man, "Do *you* believe...." Whatever faith may be, it is essentially "a personal thing."² What's more, there was no introduction nor explanation. Much like how they first met (vs. 6), this was a rather abrupt way to begin a conversation. This is why the blindless man does not recognize Jesus and so responds with, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?"³ Interestingly, the man's belief was not in question, just the identity of the "Son of God."⁴ This interaction has close parallels with the disciple's own admittance that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. Mat. 16:13; Mar. 8:27).⁵ And so, just as he does with Peter, Jesus reveals himself to the blindless man by saying, "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." His use of the word "seen" is laden with irony. For the first time in his life, the blindless man could use his own eyes to see things for himself. And Jesus was the one responsible for the man's sight being restored. But don't miss the fact that if it wasn't for the Lord revealing himself, the once-blind-man wouldn't have recognized Jesus even if he had seen him on the street. The Word incarnate must speak before the eyes of faith can see (cf. Rom. 10:17).

Nevertheless, what a rarity to hear the Lord be so frank and forthcoming with yet another outcast of society (cf. 4:26).⁶ And what an experience this must've been for the blindless man

¹ Keener (2003), 1:794.

² Morris (1995), p. 439.

³ The Greek word translated as "Lord" is **κύριος** (*koo'-ree-os*), the same as in verse vs. 38. Some commentators (Carson (1991), p. 376; Köstenberger (2004), p. 294; Kruse (2017), p. 263) feel the need to translate the first **κύριος** as "sir" and the latter as "Lord" though why they do so is not clear. According to Morris (1995), p. 439-440, it is hard to see if a linguistic distinction is being made here. Strictly speaking, **κύριος** is a term of respect and doesn't hold much significance when divorced from its context.

⁴ Carson (1991), p. 376, explains that the earliest manuscripts support the reading "Son of man." It appears that copyists changed the text to read "Son of God" (cf. 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31) because 'the Son' is the more commonly used title in John's account concerning confessions of faith (29x's). However, while this is true, "Son of man" isn't uncommon in the Fourth Gospel (cf. 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 12:23, 34; 13:31). And considering Jesus then moves to talk about judgment, a principle closely tied to the title, it seems "Son of Man" is the better translation (cf. Jn. 5:27; 9:39-41; Lu. 12:8). Morris (1995), p. 439, also agrees with Carson.

⁵ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 159.

⁶ Morris (1995), p. 439, quoting Calvin, "So there is nothing better for us than to be far away from the enemies of the Gospel so that He may come near to us."

who not only saw the face of Jesus for the first time but then learned, in that same moment, that this was also the face of the Messiah. When the woman at the well first realized this, her feet took her into town, where she told everyone the good news (cf. 4:28-29). But when the blindless man learned of Christ's identity, John tells us he fell to his knees in reverence with the words "Lord, I believe" on his lips (cf. Dan. 7:13-14). (This is the only time in this account where anyone is said to have worshipped Jesus before the crucifixion (cf. 20:28)).⁷ Both reactions are appropriate when we come to the knowledge of who Jesus is; worship and evangelism are the hallmarks of discipleship.⁸ The blindless man first thought of Jesus as nothing more than "a man" (vs. 11), then as "a prophet" (vs. 17), then as a "worshipper of God" (vs. 31), and, finally, as the "Lord" (vs. 38). Just like this chapter, the once-blind-man's entire life had been leading to this moment. This was the very climax of his existence. If not for his blindness, one wonders how his life would've turned out.

Vs. 39-41 – Jesus uses the man's confession as an opportunity to explain the purpose of the Messiah's ministry as he says, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." This one verse frames all that's transpired in chapter nine as a parable that's been acted out in real-time rather than one that is simply taught.⁹ Thus, in the same way that Jesus employed words like "healthy" and "sick" in Luke 5:31-32 to portray the self-righteous and sinners, terms like "sight" and "blind" are used as metaphors to describe those who've been given spiritual illumination—i.e., the blindless man—and those who've been purposefully led into spiritual ignorance—i.e., the Pharisees.

At first glance, Jesus' words here appear to directly contradict other passages in John. For instance, he says in 3:17 that he wasn't sent "into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved," and, in 12:47, he says, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." One might be tempted to think that the Lord is inconsistent in his messaging. But Jesus says these things because the world was "condemned *already*" (cf. 3:18). What other judgment was needed? His purpose for coming was to save those who would believe. But, implied in that saving is the understanding that some will still be condemned. This he wishes to make abundantly clear when speaking to the blindless man, for he knows that others are listening (vs. 40).¹⁰ To use the metaphor of blindness, Jesus came to give sight to a world that is full of people who cannot see at all. Only some will be given eyes that can see; the rest will remain in the same state they were born into, *blind*. Jesus' arrival on earth was the

⁷ Köstenberger (2004), p. 295.

⁸ Contrast these two good examples of discipleship with the man healed of his lameness in 5:14.

⁹ Carson (1991), p. 377.

¹⁰ Contra Morris (1995), p. 441, thinks vs. 39-41 occurs later in some unknown location.

commencement of God's judicial proceedings. Anyone who believes in Jesus will avoid sentencing, but those who blindly ignore Christ's intervention on their behalf will bear the full brunt of God's judgment. Thus, while 2 Peter 3:9 is right that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," some men will still perish. God's pardon is given freely to all, but only a few will claim it.¹¹

John tells us that there were a few Pharisees eavesdropping on Jesus' conversation with the blindless man. And they rightly pick up on the fact that Jesus had really been speaking to them rather than the once-blind-man, and so they respond by saying, "Are we blind also?" The Greek syntax is better translated as "We are not blind too, are we?"¹² Meaning that the religious leaders expected the answer to be "no." But John's readers would've unanimously answered that question with, "YES!" Ironically, the only ones who were unaware of their blindness were the blind themselves.

Jesus then explains, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." Had they been "blind"—i.e., aware of their spiritual darkness—they would've seen their need for spiritual illumination through Jesus and thus would've been forgiven of their sin just like the man born blind (cf. 2 Cor. 2:15-16). However, since they insist that they can "see"—i.e., interpret the scriptures through their traditions and apart from Jesus Christ—their blindness by way of their sinful state "remains" (cf. Rom. 1:22-25).¹³ In the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:16, they are, in actuality, "blind guides." Likewise, Prov. 26:12 holds true when it says, "Seest thou a man wise in his own [eyes]? there is more hope of a fool than of him." As Kruse aptly put it, "Their presumption of knowledge kept them from seeing the truth."¹⁴

The story of a man born blind yet received sight began with a question, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" The assumption was that someone was a sinner. Why else would someone be cursed to walk through life without the ability to see? But, by the end of this chapter, the answer to the disciples' question was clear. *Everyone* was blind. The disciples and Pharisees were blind because they assumed that, because they could

¹¹ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 160, quoting Bultmann, "This is the paradox of the revelation, that in order to bring grace it must also give offense, and so can turn to judgement. In order to be grace it must uncover sin; he who resists this binds himself to his sin, and so through the revelation sin for the first time becomes definitive."

¹² Kruse (2017), p. 265.

¹³ Carson (1991), p. 378, "Pastorally speaking, John is again stressing the point that a certain poverty of spirit (cf. Mt. 5:3), an abasement of personal pride (especially over one's religious opinions), and a candid acknowledgement of spiritual blindness are indispensable characteristics of the person who receives spiritual sight, true revelation, at the hand of Jesus."

¹⁴ Kruse (2017), p. 265.

see physically, they were not sinners to the same extent that the blind man was a sinner. But, in reality, they were as blind *spiritually* as the blind man was blind *physically*. Every single human being has been born with a mind clouded by sin. This makes us unable to see right from wrong. Only when Jesus intervenes and illuminates our hearts will we truly see. Everyone is blind, but we do not have to stay that way. Anyone can see if they will but believe in Jesus Christ.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 16

Text: **John 9:35-41**

The story of a man born blind yet received sight began with a question, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" The assumption was that someone was a sinner. Why else would someone be cursed to walk through life without the ability to see? But, by the end of this chapter, the answer to the disciples' question was clear. *Everyone* was blind. The disciples and Pharisees were blind because they assumed that, because they could see physically, they were not sinners to the same extent that the blind man was a sinner. But, in reality, they were as blind *spiritually* as the blind man was blind *physically*. Every single human being has been born with a mind clouded by sin. This makes us unable to see right from wrong. Only when Jesus intervenes and illuminates our hearts will we truly see. Everyone is blind, but we do not have to stay that way. Anyone can see if they will but believe in Jesus Christ.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: