

### Exegesis

**Vs. 8-12** – John breaks from form and moves the focus away from Jesus and now centers our attention onto the once-blind man and what follows in the wake of this miraculous event. Jesus will not return to centerstage until verse 35.

Of note are the multiple interrogations that make up the bulk of this chapter. And the first group to interview the man healed of his blindness was his next-door neighbors. Apparently, as he's walking from the Pool of Siloam back home, unaided and aware of his surroundings, his block explodes with a chorus of commotion. And why not? After all, when the Son of God changes a life, those closest to a changed life cannot help but notice the change.

Ironically, the first few comments aren't really addressed to the once-blind-man at all but are more like exclamations. To say that the discussion was lively would be understating it.<sup>1</sup> John portrays this bit as if everyone is talking at the same time. For instance, the first of his neighbors blurts out, "Is not this he that sat and begged?" Then some nameless bystander responds with, yes, "This is he." While yet another denies it all together and says, no, "He is like him." Considering this man had begged, living hand-to-mouth, for his entire life, it is extraordinary that there was even a debate. These folk were among those who had likely helped him the most and thus would've known him the best. If anything, it is a testament to how different this man must've looked. But, not one to be talked over, the man who was once blind lays the controversy to rest by saying emphatically, "I am *he*."<sup>2</sup> Thus, reeling from the implication, the entire neighborhood turns to him and asks, "How were thine eyes opened?"

Without apparent flourish or exaggeration, the once-blind man answers simply, "A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight." To his neighbor's disappointment, nothing in his retelling answered the "how" of their question. Admittedly, the use of the clay, the anointing of the eyes, and the washing in the pool were somewhat unusual. But there was nothing truly extraordinary about them either. Anyone could repeat the actual process. In reality, the whole procedure was as workaday as washing one's face. The only peculiar aspect of his tale was the "man" who set these mundane events into motion. The once-blind man said that "a man that is called Jesus" told him to do these things. This modest admittance perhaps implies that he had little to no knowledge of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> But part of the charm of this chapter is

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<sup>1</sup> Köstenberger (2004), p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> Morris (1995), p. 429.

<sup>3</sup> Morris (1995), p. 429.

watching as his awareness of Jesus' identity grows with each passing interrogation. Thus, ceasing on the only notable detail of his story, his friends ask him about Jesus' whereabouts, but, sadly, the blindless man replies, "I know not."

**Vs. 13-14** – Not really knowing what to do next, John tells us that the people "brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind." It is unlikely that their actions were sinister.<sup>4</sup> It might be nothing more than a group of people wanting an explanation of a spiritual event. Given that the miracle-worker in question was nowhere to be found, who better to ask about spiritual matters than their religious representatives?

Interestingly, this next scene moves between three separate interviews beginning with the man's testimony, moving to the witness of his parents, and then back again to the once-blind man. As the drama unfolds, the atmosphere gets more and more emotionally charged. There's division amongst the religious leaders. The parents of the healed man, who should've been the best people to call to the stands, are all but useless. And the entire affair finally ends when the only man to have ever been cured of blindness is excommunicated from his own community.

Ironically, from his perspective, the once blind man was thrown out for allowing himself to be healed of his blindness. Just as he did not cause his blindness, he did not ask to be healed. Jesus took the initiative. Thus, the blindless man was not to blame for this controversy. Jesus bears that responsibility. Like a stone pitched into still waters, Jesus was the one who launched this man into the Jewish community, disrupting their legalistic equilibrium.<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite being the recipient of undeserved rage, the man healed of his blindness will still choose to throw his lot in with Jesus. He might at first be guilty by association, but he will be guilty by choice by the end.

Heightening the tension further is the fact that "it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes." This was the same day that the lame man of John 5 was healed. Understandably, comparisons between the two passages are natural and are doubtless intended by the writer. But while there are many parallels, the most striking difference is how the man healed of his lameness appears to distance himself from Jesus little by little, whereas the man of John 9 gradually associates himself with the Lord more and more.<sup>6</sup>

In healing the blind man on the sabbath, Jesus broke the oral tradition (not the written law) in two possible ways. First, while actions meant to save a life were permitted, the healing of blindness was not life-saving. Thus, even though Jesus' actions were an astonishingly good

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<sup>4</sup> Köstenberger (2004), p. 285; Carson (1991), p. 366; Beasley-Murray (1999), p.156; contra. Keener (2003), 1:784.

<sup>5</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 156.

<sup>6</sup> Carson (1991), p. 366.

thing to do, they still broke from convention.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, even when one puts aside the miraculous aspect of what's occurred, the Lord made the clay salve in much the same way that one would knead bread. And the making of bread on the sabbath was expressly forbidden by Jewish tradition.<sup>8</sup> Thus, even from this rudimentary perspective, it would've been a small leap to condemn Jesus for what he did with dirt since they had prohibited others from doing the same action with dough.

**Vs. 15-17** – The Pharisees inquire about “how” the once-blind-man “had received his sight.” Interestingly, his reply is less than ten words in Greek, thus making his answer here far more reserved than before when he was amongst friends and neighbors (24 words).<sup>9</sup> He states the matter as succinctly as possible when he says, “He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.”<sup>10</sup> Notice that he did not mention the fact that Jesus “made clay,” as he did before (vs. 11). And though he told him that he washed himself, he left out that he had been commanded to do so by Jesus. Clearly, our blindless friend is trying his best not to implicate the man who gave him his sight. He doesn't even say “Jesus” when he responds. Though, admittedly, neither do the Pharisees name the Lord. Yet everyone knew who was really on trial. Jesus was the proverbial elephant in the room.

To our surprise, rather than show a united front, John tells us that “there was a division” amongst the religious leaders (cf. 3:2; 7:43; 12:29, 42-43).<sup>11</sup> Think about that for a moment. The Pharisees—a group known for their collective hatred of Jesus—begin debating the merits of this event. This miracle must've been remarkable to make even the most entrenched and inflexible legalists question their own assumptions! On the one side of the debate, you have those who said, “This man is not of God, because he keeps not the sabbath day.” Drawing from Deut. 13:1-5, this conclusion isn't as farfetched as it may appear. Moses warned of prophets who should be executed if they pull people away from God even though their predictions might come true.<sup>12</sup> But predicting the future isn't nearly as extraordinary as performing a miracle that's never been done before. This is why, on the other side of the debate, you had some who stated the obvious: “How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?” The same argument quietly murmured by the crowds during the Feast of Tabernacles has found purchase in the minds of a few religious elites (cf. 7:31). Prophets have been known to draw people away from

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<sup>7</sup> Carson (1991), p. 367.

<sup>8</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 256.

<sup>10</sup> Morris (1995), p. 431.

<sup>11</sup> Morris (1995), p. 431, notes this is nothing more than “a division within a group, not a splitting off from the group.”

<sup>12</sup> Carson (1991), p. 367.

God (cf. Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18-19; 1 Ki. 22; Neh. 6:10-15; Jer. 14:14; Lam. 2:14; 2 Pet. 2:1-3), but the nature of this particular miracle and in light of the countless others (note the plural “miracles”)<sup>13</sup> that Jesus had done made these Pharisees question whether he was indeed a sinner.

Not seeing a way to resolve the dispute amongst themselves, the Pharisees turn back to the man who was blind and ask him, “What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?” And, rather than repeat that he was “a man,” as he said to his neighbors, the once-blind-man confesses that he believed Jesus to be “a prophet.” This is precisely the same response of the Samaritan Woman in 4:19 (cf. 6:14).<sup>14</sup> And while this confession falls woefully short of who Jesus actually was, it was, at least, contrary to those in the room who stated flatly that “this man is not of God” at all. Whoever Jesus was, this man knew that he must be sent from God at the bare minimum. Did not prophets like Elijah and Elisha perform similar miracles? And who could forget Moses, who was not only a prophet but the greatest miracle worker in all of the OT! The similarities between them and Jesus were so evident that even a blind man could see the connection. Or, as Carson explains, “This man's eyes are opening wider: he is beginning to see still more clearly, while the eyes of his judges are becoming clouded over with blinding, theological mist.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Morris (1995), p. 431.

<sup>14</sup> Keener (2003), 1:787.

<sup>15</sup> Carson (1991), p. 368.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 13

Text: John 9:8-17

The world is filled with stories of innocent people who've been condemned simply because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. And, in a way, today's passage is no different, except that nothing "wrong" happened. Instead, we have a blind man healed of his blindness. If anything, he was in the right place at the right time. So, why do we find a group of religious elites interrogating him like he's some criminal?

Pastor's manuscript can be found [here](#):