

John

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[0 : 00] The passage is slightly longer, but I thought it was worth hearing the whole of John 9, which is where we are up to in the gospel.! So let's hear God's word.

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth, and his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, it was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, go, wash in the pool of Siloam, which means sent. So he went and washed and came back, seeing. The neighbours and those who'd seen him before as a beggar were saying, is this not the man who used to sit and beg?

[1 : 13] Some said, it is he. Others said, no, but he is like him. He kept saying, I am the man. So they said to him, then how are your eyes opened?

He answered, the man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed and received my sight. They said to him, where is he?

He said, I do not know. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

So the Pharisees again asked him how he'd received his sight. And he said to them, he put mud on my eyes and I washed and I see. Some of the Pharisees said, this man is not from God for he doesn't keep the Sabbath.

But others said, how can a man who is a sinner do such things? And there was a division among them. So they said again to the blind man, what do you say about him since he has opened your eyes?

[2 : 16] He said, he is a prophet. The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, Is this your son who you say was born blind?

How then does he now see? His parents answered, we know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know. Nor do we know who opened his eyes.

Ask him. He is of age. He'll speak for himself. His parents said these things because they feared the Jews. For the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.

Therefore his parents said, he is of age. Ask him. So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.

He answered, whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. They said to him, what did he do to you?

[3 : 25] How did he open your eyes? He answered them, I told you already and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples? And they reviled him, saying, you are his disciples but we are disciples of Moses.

We know that God has spoken to Moses. But as for this man, we do not know where he comes from. The man answered, why, this is an amazing thing.

You do not know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. But if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, God listens to him.

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

They answered him, you were born in utter sin. And would you teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out.

[4 : 29] And having found him, he said, do you believe in the son of man? He answered, and who is he, sir, that I may believe in him? Jesus said to him, you have seen him.

And it is he who is speaking to you. He said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. Jesus said, for judgment I came into this world, but those who do not see may see.

And those who see may become blind. Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things and said to him, are we also blind? Jesus said to them, if you were blind, you would have no guilt.

But now that you say we see, your guilt remains. Let's pray. Father in heaven, help us to see this afternoon.

To see who Jesus is. And what it means to follow him. And we pray in his name. Amen. It is very warm, isn't it?

[5 : 31] So, thank you for being here. And we'll try and get through as quick as we can. The main thing that I want you to see in this passage this afternoon is that behind discouraging opposition, there is an encouraging reality.

Behind discouraging opposition, there is an encouraging reality. Now, if you're familiar with the Gospel of John, as we read out the story in chapter 9, and as we hear about this miracle that Jesus performs, you might be getting a bit of a sense of déjà vu, like we've been here before.

Because the account of this miracle of Jesus healing this blind man is a bit like another miracle that has happened in John chapter 5, four chapters earlier.

There is a similarity between two miracles. There is a supernatural work of Jesus Christ. There is a healing in both accounts.

There is a pool of water that is involved. And the healing is done on the Sabbath, both in chapter 5 and in chapter 9.

[6 : 44] The first in chapter 5 was a lame man, and this time it's a blind man. Now, often when things are repeated in the Gospels, we've got to see the significance of them by looking at the differences.

Why is John 9 here? What is different about this miracle compared with the miracle in chapter 5? And there is one crucial difference. Back in chapter 5, Jesus performs the miracle, and he faces discouraging opposition.

He is interrogated by the religious leaders. But in chapter 9, that is not the case, is it? It is not Jesus who is interrogated.

It is the man who receives the blessing and healing. It is the blind man who is in the limelight. In fact, for a long portion of John chapter 9, Jesus is not in the scene at all, is he?

He's there until verse 7, and then he sort of disappears, and then he returns near the end in verse 35. And so the narrative focuses on this man who is blind and then receives his sight.

[8 : 00] As the opposition ramps up to Jesus in the Gospel, we see that it's not just Jesus himself who faces the discouragement of the religious authorities, it is Jesus' followers, and those who are touched by him.

And that's the case today, isn't it? More often than not, in most opposition to Christian things, Jesus is targeted through his followers.

And that is the case here. This man, he is blind, and he is bullied, and he is barred from the temple. He is badgered by the Pharisees.

And it seems like, doesn't it, Jesus touches his life, and then he is taken up in this whirlwind of aggression and opposition against him. As soon as he's associated with Jesus, he is on the back foot.

And he doesn't know what's going on. He's interrogated. And it looks like he fumbles around for answers. He says, I don't know how Jesus did this.

[9 : 09] All I know was that I was blind, and now I can see. And being a Christian, being a follower of Jesus, can look like that, can't it? It can be very discouraging.

We can start to feel a little bit sorry for ourselves. So much opposition. So many questions. So many accusations. But what I think John wants us to see here, is that there is another side to this man.

And there is another side to the discouraging opposition that follows with Jesus' face. There is an encouraging reality underneath it all.

Because actually, it is very easy to get this guy all wrong. To just look at him at first glance and feel sorry for him. when really he is not who he appears to be.

There is more to be encouraged about with this man than there is discouragement. And that goes for the same in the Christian life. Now, three things about him.

[10:16] First of all, he is the blind man who sees. He is the blind man who sees. And of course, that's the great irony of the story, isn't it?

Of the passage. He is the only man, in this whole account, whose eyes do not work properly. And at the same time, he is the only man in the story who can see.

He can and has seen things that the sighted people in the passage cannot. That is why Jesus says about him in verse 39, if you look there, I'd come for people like this, people who do not see, that they may see.

Do you know, in those days, to be blind, like this man, to be blind from birth, would have been a massive disadvantage to you in life. Maybe this man was sat outside the temple, as often was the case, waiting for handouts.

And to be disabled in your eyes was as good as really an early death sentence. And to all intents and purposes, this guy is a lost cause, isn't he?

[11:31] He is the man with the worst prospects in the world. He's got every reason to be discouraged. He cannot see. But the work of Jesus means that this man is not what he seems.

He is surrounded by the fully sighted, fully trained students of theology. He looks like the loser, doesn't he? But we're told, actually, it's the opposite.

Notice what Jesus says to him at the end in verse 37. And these are really huge words. He talks about the Son of Man.

That is a code for God's chosen king sent into the world. And he says to this man, in verse 37, you have seen him.

And it is he who is speaking to you. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. Do you see, the physical healing of his eyes is a demonstration of a deeper sight that Jesus has given to this man.

[12:40] To see who Jesus is. And to believe in him. And to worship him. There is much to discourage this man.

But the encouraging reality is that Jesus has given him vision of something better than everyone else is capable of seeing. Going around on the tube, I don't know if you've seen or heard the guy who whistles on the underground.

Maybe you've heard about him before. He's not an official busker. He doesn't have one of those designated busker patches. But he's a really good whistler. He's got a great tone.

And his thing is hymn tunes. He whistles hymn tunes about the Lord Jesus. So you're in the stream of people in the underground corridors.

And whistling over the kind of noise is this music from this guy. But as you get closer, there is something else unique about him.

[13:42] He is totally and utterly blind. This guy can't see a thing. And he sort of rhythmically rocks backwards and forwards.

And he whistles hymns to Jesus. And you know, he couldn't care less. And you realise that this blind man, he can see something that nobody else in the corridor can.

There is much to discourage him, isn't there? He is disadvantaged. He's at the bottom of the pile.

Well, this man is out of place in the world. And you pity him and you feel sorry for him. But the blind man is not who he seems.

Last tune I heard him whistling was, crown him with many crowns. The lamb upon his throne. The blind man sees. And followers of Jesus are ridiculed and pitied and resented.

They're discouraged, aren't they? But they are not what they seem. They are people who used to be blind, but they've come to something more valuable.

[14:47] They've come to see something that nobody else can see. They've come to see Jesus. Because he has met with them and opened their eyes to him.

So you're a follower of Jesus. You get up in the morning, you switch the radio on, you listen to their conversation, you go to work, you walk through healing, you go shopping, you wash your car, talk to the neighbours.

And all of the while, there is this sense, isn't there, that you can see more than meets the eye in the world. That this world is ruled by King Jesus, the Son of Man.

And I can see now that there is a God who sent him to bring me to himself and to give me sight. And underneath the discouragement and opposition, there is a vision and a sight that transports believers out of the difficulty, in a sense, to see the Lord Jesus in his glory.

He is the blind man who sees. Secondly, though, he is the bullied man who is strong. He is the bullied man who is strong. Now, the other way you can get this guy wrong is that he just seems overwhelmed by the pressure, doesn't he?

[16:13] He seems overwhelmed by the discouragement. And the middle section of John 9 has a series of increasingly aggressive interrogations.

So, in verse 8 to 12, it starts off with the neighbours. They get called in, don't they? After he's given sight. And they ask him, how were your eyes opened?

And then the theological professionals jump in, the Pharisees, and the questions get more and more aggressive. And then the parents get brought in and they're interrogated as well.

And the vigour of the opposition gets more and more intense. And by the end of it, the Pharisees, all they've got is insults.

In verse 34, you were born in utter sin, they say to him. You can scan through some of the accusations that they throw at one of Jesus' followers. Verse 16, they say Jesus is not from God.

[17:14] Verse 19, they say that the miracle is not possible. Verse 24, Jesus is a sinner. He's morally questionable. Verse 26, they ask him for more details to try and tie him up in a contradiction.

Verse 29, they again ask about Jesus' origins, where he's come from. They throw heresy after heresy after accusation after accusation at him.

They attack Jesus' follower to try and discredit Jesus. But what is interesting is that parallel to the increasing venom of the opposition is the increasing clarity of the man's answers.

When the opposition was light, he's more vague, I think. But as it hots up, he is more clear and more emphatic in his answers.

Now when the neighbours ask him, he just tells them the facts, doesn't he? He says, look, this is what happened, he healed me. And they ask him, where's he gone now?

[18:24] And he says, well, I don't know. Slightly vague. But as the opposition mounts, the blind man is given, he gives concise, clear, confident answers.

The Pharisees ask him later, what do you say about him? And he says in verse 19, he is a prophet. And by the end, he is giving actually quite sophisticated, confident answers.

His defensiveness and his fumbling has turned actually into an attack on the Pharisees. Did you hear the tone in verse 27? He says to them, do you want to be his disciples as well?

He's got them pegged, hasn't he? He's being sarcastic there. Verse 31, it's an amazing thing that you don't know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes. He has an awareness and a vision of what is going on and who they are.

As the opposition increases, his insights into the situation improves and clarifies. The bullied man is strangely strengthened, isn't he, in his convictions.

[19:42] It's as if Jesus' enemies carry on the sort of eye-opening work in his absence, in opening his eyes to the truth.

And by attacking him they actually encourage and help him. You've got to feel sorry for the Pharisees, haven't you? They just can't win. Perhaps they think, you know, Jesus isn't here, this guy is an easy target now, isn't he?

And, you know, we can pick off Jesus' followers like fish in a barrel. And all through church history it's kind of been the same, hasn't it? people have hurled heresy after heresy after false accusation after false accusation at the followers of Jesus.

But I think this passage teaches us, and I hope you know what I mean when I say this, it teaches us to say thank you Lord for heretics. Since many of the clear and glorious things that we understand about God and about the Lord Jesus and his work, and the Bible, the things that we've formulated over the centuries in the creeds and confessions, the great statements and doctrines of faith have been forged and hammered out over centuries in response to what?

Heresy and opposition. As opposition mounts, clarity and confidence and strength comes to the church strangely.

[21 : 17] And so behind the discouragement is the underpinning reality of God's sharpening and blessing Jesus' followers with clearer understanding of his word and his work.

The blind, discouraged man who sees, the bullied, discouraged man who is strengthened. And lastly and thirdly, he is the barred man who belongs.

He is the barred man who belongs. One of the other differences between this miracle and the similar miracle in chapter 5 is that the guy who is healed there, you'll notice, he returns to the temple and he praises God.

He receives strength in his legs and he's able to go back and worship. He can go back into the structures of the organised religion.

But this time that doesn't happen at all, does it? Look at verse 34. They say to him, you were born in utter sin and would you teach us?

[22 : 26] And they cast him out. Now it shows again how brave he's become, doesn't it? He suffers the fate his parents wanted to avoid by not getting involved.

They knew that that could happen, that they might be thrown out of the synagogue, John tells us quite clearly. And so John is brilliant in his irony here, isn't he?

The man is excommunicated from the church for believing in Jesus. He is out. And that was a really, really big thing.

To be thrown out of the synagogue, it was to lose your standing in society, it was to lose the opportunity of corporate worship, it was to be outwardly cut off from God's blessing.

But the guy makes a choice here. It is a choice between the truth of who Jesus is and the structures of the church.

[23 : 28] church. Now normally those two things should be in harmony, shouldn't they? But sometimes they are not. And he's got to make a decision here.

Will he belong to the synagogue or will he belong to Jesus? Will he keep his membership in a church that no longer worships Jesus or will he leave?

And I think he makes a clear decision here. And he could have been a bit more strategic, couldn't he? he could have toned down his responses to the Pharisees, maybe been a little bit less sarcastic, a little bit less offensive.

He could have stayed in the synagogue and maybe changed it from the inside. But this was his gut reaction, wasn't it? And he pushes the Pharisees to the point where they bar him.

And it must have been very discouraging to be thrown out of the place that he loved with the people that he loved and wanted to be part of.

[24 : 32] But what happens is actually a very encouraging reality underneath it all. Because in the moment of his rejection and wrongful excommunication, Jesus communicates with him.

And we get this lovely dialogue between the man and Jesus in the last section, don't we? Jesus hears that he's been thrown out and he seeks him out and he finds him and he confirms him in belief and he consolidates him in his faith.

When he gets barred, Jesus says, you belong. Jesus tells him who he is and the man believes and worships. And that is so often the case when there are painful decisions that need to be made.

When it's a choice maybe between a church that is not true to the gospel that we love being part of and we want to be in that community and choosing Jesus might mean that we are barred or we bar ourselves from that church or from that religious structure.

And we've got to part ways. Just as we close up, I don't think they mind me telling you this, but my wife's mum and dad, they were in a really similar situation. They were members of a church for many, many years and they served there and worshipped there dutifully and humbly.

[26 : 05] But it just became increasingly clear that this church no longer taught the gospel.

Ceremony and outward religion had taken over and it was a very, very hard decision for them to make.

They would be leaving friends and they would be leaving their place in the community. That was nothing compared with what this blind man faced. But in the end they made their decision to move to a good gospel preaching church.

And at first it was tremendously discouraging. They'd effectively barred themselves from the familiar things of the old church that they loved. church. But let me tell you that the difference for them spiritually has been night and day.

