

Comments on John 9

The setting of the Feast of Tabernacles continues from the preceding chapters, and continues into the next chapter. The events of this chapter fall on the last day of Sukkot (cf. 7:37).

Jesus' healing a blind man is similar to the Old Testament prophets who act out their prophetic messages with public symbolic actions to dramatize and emphasize their message. Isaiah walked barefoot and stripped to the waist around Jerusalem in Isa. 20, Ezekiel used etched tiles and iron pans, and lay on each of his sides for 40 days to warn of the impending invasion of Babylon in Ezek. 4. Here, Jesus heals a physically blind man who can see spiritually, while the Pharisees who can see with their physical eyes are spiritually blind. Jesus shows he is the light of the world (v. 4) by reversing a man's physical blindness. However, it is up to us to overcome our own spiritual blindness and see Christ for what He is.

Being the light of the world ties into the Feast of Tabernacles theme. See the general comments on ch. 7-10 for additional discussion of the symbols of this feast.

A number of rhetorical patterns are found within the text. A repetition of three is used twice, once for the blind man and once for the Pharisees. The blind man humbly confesses ignorance three times (v. 12, 25, 36) while the Pharisees arrogantly and confidently make inaccurate statements three times (v. 16, 24, 29).

Another more dramatic pattern is that of the increasing faith of the blind man contrasted with the increasing hardness of the Pharisees as the dialogue goes on:

Blind man

A man that is called
Jesus (v. 11)

He is a prophet (v. 17)

Whether he is a sinner I
know not (v. 25)

Pharisees

Some say "This man is not of God"
others say "How can a sinner...
do such miracles?", division (v.
16)

We know that this man is a sinner
(v. 24)

We know not from whence he is (v. 29)

If this man were not of God he could do nothing (v. 33) Thou wast altogether born in sin (v. 34)

Lord, I believe (v. 38) Are we blind also? (v. 40)

Note the adversity of the Pharisee's question steels the blind man's faith rather than cutting it down. He reasons through their arguments and exposes them as fraudulent. They respond with personal attacks and finally cast him out.

Also contrast the blind man in this chapter to the paralytic healed in ch. 5. Where the healed paralytic capitulates with the Pharisees when threatened, the blind man stands up to them and confounds them.

1 AND as [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man which was blind from [his] birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? 3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. 4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

6 when he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, 7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

v1-7 Jesus sees a blind man begging, apparently outside the Temple gate, (v. 1) and his disciples ask him whether the blindness was a result of sin or not (v. 2). Jesus indicates his blindness is not a result of sin, but that God's work should be manifest in him (v. 3). Jesus says he must do the works of his Father while he is in the world (v. 4) because he is the light of the world (v. 5). After explaining the spiritual significance of the miracle he is about to perform, he makes mud from his own saliva and dirt and places it on the eyes of the blind man and tells him to wash his eyes in the pool Siloam (v. 6). The blind man does so, and his sight is restored (v. 7).

v1-2 Jesus must have stopped or in some overt way drawn attention to the blind man in v. 1 in order for the disciples to have taken advantage of the situation to question him on this

point of doctrine in v. 2. We are left to wonder if Jesus somehow perceived the blind man's spiritual condition and deliberately stopped in order to instigate the subsequent events, or whether it was a chain of events that occurred auspiciously and therefore was included in the text.

These two verses are the best proof-text for the pre-mortal existence of spirits in the Bible. Where many other passages the LDS use to support the doctrine can be argued with differing views of predestination and foreordination, this passage cannot. The disciples plainly believe that spirits pre-existed the birth as how else could the man sin before he was born such that he was born blind?

v2 The doctrine that people were born handicapped as a result of either their sin or their parent's was apparently a widely held belief, and passages such as 2 Sam. 12:14 and 1 Ki. 14:12 seem to suggest such a thing. The disciples are asking him whether or not the doctrine was true.

v3-4 Jesus indicates that his blindness was not a result of sin on anyone's part, but rather that the works of God may be made know (v. 3). Jesus then comments on his works (v. 4). These works are later discussed in v. 39-41.

v3 Jesus' response on the doctrine is ambiguous. He replies that in this case the blindness was not a result of sin. However, Jesus does not completely contradict the doctrine. The position he forwards is that this case was not a result of sin, however that leaves room for there being times is may be a result of sin. We can all think of cases where the baby suffers physically as a result of a parent's sin: fetal alcohol syndrome and the like, physical abuse, malnutrition, venereal disease passed on from mother to baby [e.g. blindness in the baby as a result of the mother having syphilis], and so on. However, there are obviously cases where the physical condition has no relation whatsoever to the relative righteousness of the parents.

v4-5 Jesus explains the spiritual meaning of the physical miracle he is about to perform. Jesus is the light of the world, in that he is the source of spiritual truth to mankind, cf. D&C 93:26-37. He can heal the physically blind, but he can also spiritually blind the wicked.

v4 "while it is day: the night cometh", Jesus is speaking of the day of his mortal life and the night of post-mortality. This is made clear in the IV/JST:

KJV

I must work the works
of him that sent me,
while it is day:
the night cometh,
when no man can work.

IV

I must work the works
of him that sent me,
while I am with you;
the time cometh
when I shall have finished my work,
then I go unto the Father.

v5 On the light imagery, cp. 8:12, 11:9-10.

v6-7 contain the miracle and it receives remarkably little attention in the text. This is because the matter of real importance is the ensuing interrogation.

v6 "clay", the symbolism of Jesus' actions here is that he is the Creator. The Lord fashioned man from the dust in Genesis, so He may exercise His will over His creations. Jesus is that Lord, and so he may repair with the dust of the earth as easily as he formerly created man from the dust of the earth.

v7 "Siloam...Sent", the pool of Siloam is the same as that water of Shiloah which is used in the Feast of Tabernacles to be poured out on the altar. The use of this pool in particular has messianic implications because of its connection to the Feast, but also because of the use of the name in Gen. 49:10 and Isa. 8:6.

8 The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? **9** Some said, This is he: others [said], He is like him: [but] he said, I am [he]. **10** Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? **11** He answered and said, 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. **12** Then said they unto him, where is he? He said, I know not.

v8-12 The healed blind man is recognized by his neighbors and those who saw him begging and are rather surprised that he has his sight (v. 8), so much so that they question if it is the same man and he indicates it is (v. 9). They ask him how it

happened (v. 10) and he relates the rather simple story to them (v. 11). They ask where Jesus is, and he says he doesn't know (v. 12).

The people, his neighbors, have got to understand the gravity of the situation. Everyone knew who Jesus was per 7:12, and they knew the Pharisees were out to get him per 7:25, so they want nothing to do with it and pass the matter off to the Pharisees.

13 They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. 14 And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. 15 Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. 16 Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. 17 They say unto the blind man again, what sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.

18 But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. 19 And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? 20 His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: 21 But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. 22 These [words] spake his parents, 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. 23 Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. 24 Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.

25 He answered and said, whether he be a sinner [or no], I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. 26 Then said they to him again, what did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? 27 He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear [it] again? will ye also be his disciples? 28 Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. 29 we know that God spake unto Moses: [as for] this [fellow], we know not from whence he is. 30 The man answered and said unto them, why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and [yet] he hath opened mine eyes. 31 Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. 32 Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. 33 If this man were not of God, he could do

nothing. 34 They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.

v13-34 The people from v. 8-12 bring him to the Pharisees (v. 13). It was a Sabbath upon which Jesus did these things (v. 14), so we know the Pharisees will grasp hold of this to fault Jesus. The Pharisees ask him how it happened, he relates the story (v. 15). The Pharisees then debate and are divided among themselves concerning Jesus, whether he is a sinner or not for violating the Sabbath (v. 16). They then ask the healed man what he thinks of Jesus, and he says he is a prophet (v. 17).

The Pharisees still don't believe the blind man really was blind so they call his parents (v. 18) and ask them concerning their son (v. 19), and do so out of the presence of their son. The parents respond that he is their son, that he was born blind (v. 20), but how he now sees they have no idea and since he is an adult they should be asking him and not his parents (v. 21). John informs us the parents act in this manner out of fear of the Pharisees because it was well known among the people that they would throw anyone who said that Jesus was messiah out of the synagogue (v. 22-23).

They summon the healed man again and tell him to give God the praise, meaning they want him to attribute the miracle to God and not Jesus, because they know that Jesus is a sinner (v. 24). The healed man replies that if Jesus is a sinner he doesn't know, what he does know is he was blind and now he isn't (v. 25). They then ask him again how it was that Jesus opened his eyes (v. 26). The healed man recognizes their skepticism and that they are pressuring him to change his story to conform to the one they suggested. He says he has already told them what happened and they refused to listen, so why do they want to hear it again? Would they change and accept Jesus and become his disciples? (v. 27). The Pharisees are angered that he is standing up to them, and revile him, accusing him of collaborating with Jesus (v. 28). They say they are Moses' disciples because they know God spoke to Moses, as for Jesus they don't know where he came from (v. 29). The healed man reasons with them and says "How is it you don't know where he is from when he has opened my eyes? (v. 30) We know God doesn't hear sinners, but only those who worship Him (v. 31). And since the beginning none have performed such a miracle except they had God with them (v. 32), so if he were not of God he could do nothing" (v. 33). The Pharisees cannot escape from his logic, and so they must resort to personal attacks and unrighteous

dominion in order to silence him, so they throw him out calling him a sinner (v. 34).

v14 "the sabbath day", is was a Sabbath because it was Simchat Torah, the last day of the Feast per 7:37. The Festivals were Sabbaths as well as Saturdays according to the Law.

v16 "this man is not of God", the accusation here is more serious than what is superficially conveyed. The accusation is that Jesus is a false prophet and therefore must be disposed of, cf. Deut. 13:1-5.

"How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?", the underlying issue is that sinners can in fact do miracles, cf. Exod. 7:11, Matt. 7:22-23, and Matt. 24:24. But, they are saying that how can a sinner "do such miracles", or in other words "there is no way a sinner could do these miracles".

v22 "they feared the Jews", cp. 7:13.

v24 This verse is ironic on two counts. First, Jesus is the God of the OT, and so when they say he should give God the praise they know not that Jesus is God. Second, here the Pharisees acknowledge the miracle is genuine and tell the man to attribute it to God, but when the man fails to comply they turn on him and accuse him of colluding with Jesus as his disciple.

v29 This verse is again ironic playing on the Pharisee's ignorance. John repeatedly draws parallels between Moses and Jesus, the "prophet like Moses" (cf. Deut. 18:15), cf. 1:17, 5:45-47, 7:19-23, 9:29.

v30-39 presents similar rhetoric as that found in Jesus' interview with Nicodemus, cf. 3:5-12. This parallel portrays the Pharisees as willfully ignorant (cf. 3:10), and the blind man as one who perceives spiritual things and speaks of that which he knows yet his testimony is not received (cf. 3:11-12).

v32 The IV/JST appends "except he be of God" to the end of the verse.

v34 The Pharisees are trapped in the man's logic so they resort to ad hominem arguments to excuse themselves from him. Also note they directly contradict Jesus in v. 3 in this judgment upon him.

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? 36 He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? 37 And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. 38 And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

39 And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. 40 And [some] of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? 41 Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

v35-41 Jesus hears about what has happened between the Pharisees and the healed man, so he goes and finds him and asks him if he believes on the Son of God (v. 35). The healed man, not having seen Jesus previously, asks him who it is (v. 36). Jesus says it is himself (v. 37), and the healed man accepts Jesus and says he believes (v. 38). Jesus then reiterates the spiritual significance of the healing of the blind in that his mission is to heal the blind and to blind the seeing (v. 39). The Pharisees who are present hear Jesus' comments and catch what he is alluding to, so they taunt him and ask "Are we blind also?" (v. 40). To which Jesus replies, "Yes". Had they truly been blind they would be without sin, but because their pride motivates them to say "We see" their sin remains (v. 41).

v35 Where the Pharisees cast him away, Jesus searches out and accepts him.

v38-39 "And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him. And Jesus said", the Anchor Bible (AB) indicates this portion of text is missing from many of the most ancient manuscripts.

v39 Compare 3:19-21, 12:40, Isa. 6:9-10, Matt. 23:16.

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