

Dr. David Turner, Gospel of John, Session 11, John 9:1-41

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This is Dr. David Turner in his teaching on the Gospel of John. This is session 11, Tense Times in Jerusalem, The Blind Man and the Blind Men, John 9:1-41.

Hello, I'm David Turner.

Welcome to our video on John chapter 9. John chapter 8 has been an amazing chapter leading into John chapter 9, a chapter in which things are not going so well in Jerusalem and much difficulty is arising. And Jesus, of course, has stated that he is the light of the world and that those who follow him will not walk in darkness. However, in the chapter, there is perhaps a lot of darkness going on.

Nevertheless, this chapter prepares us in a sense for John chapter 9, where Jesus is about to heal a man who has been in darkness, as it were, all his life, a man who was born blind. So, in John chapter 9, we're going to find out that his blindness had nothing to do with any sin on his part or that of his parents. There's no punishment going on there, but it's to bring glory to God.

So, we see how God is going to be glorified by the way in which Jesus is taking care of this man and dealing with him. And the chapter is going to end on a very profound note of paradox or irony, where those who think they're able to see are really the ones who are blind. And the one who is blind is actually now the one who sees in more ways than one.

So, we start as we have been, as our habit has been, to look at the way the chapter unfolds, just in terms of the narrative flow. And we begin with that. Then we'll look at some of the thematic matters there that are of interest to us.

So as the chapter begins, obviously, Jesus encounters the blind man and also encounters a superstition, a worldview about blindness. So, the disciples ask Jesus in chapter 9, verse 2, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind. The implication that the man was born blind due to his parents' sin is an interesting view of God.

God would punish an innocent child for something the parents did. It's somewhat perplexing to me whether God would punish a person before they even came to life for a prospective sin that they might have committed. So, did he sin that he was born blind? Well, I don't know if they had some sort of a view of sin in the womb or whether they thought God would strike him blind because God knew ahead of time that he would commit sin after he was born.

Either way, it's a very, in my mind at least, strange view of God, not the God that I see described in the rest of Scripture. In any event, we still encounter this sort of worldview today because they're not lacking people who will essentially say God got them for that, for things that happen. And I think it's a sub-biblical view of God and of the world.

But nevertheless, we'll talk more about that as we move ahead into the chapter. So, we read here about how Jesus encounters the blind man and he counters a false assumption about sin. He heals the man in a manner that is a bit unusual.

We'll talk some about that later through using spittle. Somehow, I guess I can't get used to using the word spittle. I just would rather use the word spit.

So, if that's a bit insensitive, then sorry, that's just the way I was raised, I guess. So, I'm just going to call it spit. I hope that's all right.

So, he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, put it on the man's eyes, and said, go wash in the pool of Siloam. We've spoken about the pool of Siloam before in chapter seven related to the Feast of Booths and the high priest taking water from there in order to have a libation in the temple, perhaps as a background to John chapter seven, verses 37 to 39. So, the man went and washed.

The text just describes it very simply. In verse seven, he went and he washed and he came home seeing, just sort of like that. So, this was obviously a sensation in the neighborhood.

So, all of his neighbors begin to question him, verses eight through 12, and to ask what happened there. So, he reiterates the story. It's interesting that some of the people said, that can't be the same guy.

I guess they didn't want to believe it or were just skeptical. So they said, this looks like him. It's not really the same person after all.

So, he kept insisting, I am the man. So, this is an interesting part of this chapter. This formerly blind man is an interesting character because he keeps getting hassled for what happened to him.

And so, he is hassled, first of all, by his neighbors. His parents don't exactly stand up and support him. The Pharisees, of course, make fun of him and try to put him down in every way they can.

And finally, at the end of the chapter, Jesus comes to his side and leads him to a full understanding of Jesus and his mission. And we see this man's frustration begin in verse nine. Here he is.

He's been healed and people don't even believe he's the same guy. So, he says, yeah, it's me. It's me.

I'm really the same guy. And it seems a bit unusual that they had this view. So, they wanted to know how his eyes were open.

So, he has to reiterate the whole story in verse 11. So, they said, well, where's the guy who did this? And he says I don't know. By that time, Jesus has gone to do other things.

So, this is the background to the story. This is the way it all gets started. The man is healed.

The neighbors are questioning him and they think this is an amazing thing. So it has to be checked out by the religious leaders. So, verse 13 and following, they take him to the Pharisees and the Pharisees begin to question the man.

And here we have verses 13 through 34, really the main part of the chapter and the part of the chapter that I think is most interesting as literature, because there's quite a bit of humor here, I think, as the Pharisees question the man, verses 13 through 17, about how all this happened. So, he reiterates one more time what had happened. He's already done this for the neighbors.

Now he has to do it for the Pharisees. So, in verse 17, they say to him, OK, how could this have happened? What do you have to say about him? How were your eyes open? So, the man says, well, things like this don't just happen every day. So, there's something unusual going on here.

So, I think he's a prophet. Verse 17. So, at this point, the man's understanding of Jesus is not unlike that of people in the crowd early on in Jerusalem who saw Jesus do the signs at the end of chapter 2 and others in the larger multitudes have seen Jesus do things like the folks in chapter 6 who were fed by Jesus in the feeding of multitudes and thought that this man must be a prophet.

He must be someone we can make a king. They thought that they could turn him into some sort of Messiah who would care for them all the time. So, the man's understanding about Jesus is similar to those types of things.

He understands something is going on with the man. Perhaps he's not unlike Nicodemus in chapter 3 who said, certainly your teacher comes from God because these types of things don't grow on trees. This doesn't happen all the time.

So of course, the Pharisees have difficulty understanding this. And guess why? For the same reason, we've seen it before going all the way back to chapter 5. According to verse 16, some of the Pharisees said that this man, namely Jesus, couldn't be from God because he doesn't keep the Sabbath. So somehow they had come to the conclusion perhaps that Jesus by spitting in the dust and making mud to put on the man's eyes had been working on the Sabbath or they thought Jesus had made him walk too far on the Sabbath, something going on there that they thought this was a violation of the Sabbath.

So, verse 18 then says that they didn't believe what the man was saying, so they sent for the man's parents. So, the parents now come onto the scene and so there is some discussion with the parents. The parents are non-committal because they're worried that they will be thrown out of the synagogue if they affirm what has happened and somehow endorse Jesus as the Messiah.

So, they say, the Pharisees say to the parents, is this your son? And they say, yep, this is the one. Was he born blind? Yep. So, they accept all that.

We know he was born blind. But in verse 21, we're not going to stick our necks out and talk about how he has now been able to see. You'll have to ask him.

He's of age. He's an adult. So, ask him.

He'll speak for himself. So, verse 22 explains editorially that the reason why the parents were so reluctant to affirm what had happened was that they were afraid of the Jewish leaders who had already decided that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. This is a theme that we have seen previously and one that we will see again in John.

So here we go again now for the third time in verse 24. First with the neighbors, now once with the Pharisees, and now the second time with the Pharisees. So, three times in all, this man is being summoned to tell his story.

So, they said, give glory to God by telling the truth. We know this man is a sinner. I'm not sure what they wanted him to say.

I guess they wanted him to say that what had happened to him had not really happened or they wanted him to attribute it directly to God and not to attribute it to Jesus. It's hard to know what they were trying to say here. It seems irrational actually.

So, here's where the story gets a bit funny. Give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner.

He replied, well, verse 25, whether he's a sinner or not, I really don't know, but I do know one thing and that is I used to be blind. Now I can see. So, they asked him again, verse 26, what did he do? How did he open your eyes? And the man says, I already told you that.

You see some of these dramas on television and they have this thing that the attorneys jump up and object and they say, asked and answered. Well, this has already been asked. It's already been answered.

So why do we have to reiterate it again? So, I've told you already and you didn't listen to me. Verse 27. Why do you want to hear it again? So, here's the great part.

Do you want to become his disciples too? So here you have the man basically sticking it to them and turning the tables. So, in verse 28, they hurl insults back at him and they say, you are this fellow's disciple. We are disciples of Moses.

So, here's a crucial theme in John that goes all the way back to the prologue where the prologue tells us that indeed law came by Moses who wished to see the glory of God in Deuteronomy, Exodus 33, 34, and did not get to see it fully contrasted with Jesus who brings the fullness of God's grace and truth to humanity. Not that Moses is bad, but Moses anticipates Jesus who brings the fullness of God's revelation to us. So they want to put a dichotomy between Jesus and Moses.

We know already from John that John wants us to believe that Jesus is the ultimate, the ultimate Moses, you could say, the fulfillment of Moses, the one whom Moses anticipated. This of course is a crucial matter in John chapter five when Jesus is saying that Moses bears witness of me and if you had believed him, you would believe in me. So, we are disciples of Moses.

Well, not according to Jesus because Moses was someone who was looking forward to him. We know that God spoke to Moses as for this fellow, you could almost hear the vitriol in their voice from that, this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from. So, the man is not going to be deterred by the insults, he's going to stand up for what happened as well as he understands it at this point.

So, in verse 30 he says, now this is a remarkable thing. You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, he listens to godly persons who do his will.

No one has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. This man was not of God, he couldn't do this, he could do nothing. It's somewhat of a pragmatic argument, I suppose philosophers could poke holes in it, it's not strictly logical perhaps, but the man just is saying once again, I do know just this one thing, I used to be blind, but now I can see.

To this they replied, another epithet, you were steeped in sin at birth. Going back to the misunderstanding the disciples were asking Jesus about in verse 2 of the chapter, Jesus responds that the man was born blind to bring glory to God. So Pharisees are buying into the idea that his blindness was due to sin.

You were born blind, you must have been a sinner, you were steeped in sin at birth, how dare you lecture us? Who are you? So, we're going back to the leader's skepticism about the common people's understanding of the law. The earlier text referred to the cursedness of the people of the land who didn't know the law. So they threw him out, verse 34 is the conclusion.

So, the story then comes to quite a pivotal spot where this man has been totally abandoned by the religious leaders, and even his own parents have not come to his aid, and they're still comfy and cozy in their synagogue relationship because they wouldn't, but this man who has simply told the Pharisees what happened and not accepted their explanation has been thrown out. So here's where the chapter becomes tender I think, and where we see Jesus being a shepherd of souls and anticipating what we're going to read about him in chapter 10. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, verse 35, asks him, searches him out, finds him, says, do you believe in the Son of Man? The man honestly says, well I don't even know who he is, so tell me who he is that I might believe in him.

Remember this man said Jesus was a prophet, there was something going on with Jesus that was unusual, but he didn't really understand why. Jesus then responds by saying, you have now seen him, and in fact, he's speaking to you now. In other words, it's me, and without any hesitation whatsoever, the man said, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped him.

This brings us then to the way the chapter concludes, which is I think the theological lesson of all of this. So, Jesus says, for judgment, I've come into this world so that the blind might see and that those who see will become blind. Somehow or another, as the story is being told here, Pharisees were hanging around this conversation around the edges of it, and they somehow were aware of what Jesus had said.

So, the Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, what? Are we blind too? Jesus said, if you were blind you would not be guilty of sin, but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. So, there's this ironic situation here where

those who have the oversight of Israel, the leaders of Israel, have no sight at all. They don't really get it, even though they are able to see physically.

They can see what has happened to this man who was formerly blind. They have many witnesses telling them he used to be blind and now he can see. So, they have sight and they have oversight, but they don't really have any spiritual insight about what's going on.

This man who was blind and who has been able to now physically see, and due to that happening to him has been thrown out by those who purportedly can see, now is the one who actually does see in more ways than one. So, this is the story. It's a very interesting story, one that we could just dwell on as a story, as a piece of literature.

It's very fascinating, but we need to get into some of the ways the story develops and the thematic things that need to catch our attention here. First of all, we want to go back to the end of chapter 8 and notice the transition between chapter 9 and what has gone on in chapter 8. As chapter 8 concludes, Jesus has been having a very heated conversation with Jewish people who in some sense believed in him but didn't really believe in him in the sense that he wished. So, they are ready to stone him because he has said before Abraham came to be before Abraham was born, I am.

So, at this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus himself slipped away from the temple grounds. He hid himself. He got out of there.

This act of Jesus is somewhat interesting. We wonder whether it may have in some ways been an echo of the departure of the Shekinah, the glory of God, from the temple in Old Testament times. So, Jesus has said, I am, alluding to God's I am he, apparently stressed repealing the book of Isaiah.

So as Jesus then departs from the temple after using the expression I am, very well may be that this is a way for John to subtly remind us of how the glory of God departed from the temple as chronicled in the book of Ezekiel in several passages as Ezekiel sees the glory of God gradually depart from the temple. Perhaps there is something also to this in the synoptic tradition in texts like Matthew 23, where after pronouncing the woes upon Israel and particularly lamenting the future of Jerusalem in verses 20, chapter 23, verses 37-39, Jesus again walks out of the temple and is asked at the beginning of Matthew 24, isn't this a beautiful place? And he explains, well, it is, but it's all going to be torn down. So there may be some echo here, some intentionality in making us think about the way in which Israel's rebellion against God in the days of the first temple is sort of rehashing over again here in the days of the second temple.

Another matter here in chapter 8 that probably should be reminded as it ties into chapter 9 is that Jesus has said in chapter 8, verse 12, sort of the keynote of that chapter, I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. So, the background in darkness and light certainly prepares us to understand what's going on here in chapter 9, verse 5 with this man who has been born blind, yet his blindness is going to bring glory to God.

Notice that Jesus explained to the disciples in chapter 9 that the man was not a sinner, but was going to bring glory to God. Jesus says in chapter 9, verse 5, while I am in the world, I am the light of the world, which is a repetition of what he had already said in chapter 8, verse 12. And this, of course, I think links the imagery of chapter 8, verse 50 to what's going on in chapter 9 as well.

In chapter 8, verse 50, Jesus says, I am not seeking glory for myself. There is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Whoever obeys my word will never see death.

So, this provides, I think, some interesting conceptual background for what's going on here in John chapter 9. Also, we have the first direct reference in John to the Pool of Siloam. We've already referred to it a bit in our discussion of the background of John 7, 37 to 39, but we see it here for the first time. So, if you have not paid attention to that lecture yet, we'll show some slides again that we've already shown there, and we'll go through it somewhat quickly.

We have a recent discovery in Jerusalem over the last several years of another large pool in the southern area of the city of David there. And so most people today think they have finally found the real location of the Pool of Siloam. So south of the Temple Mount in the Old Testament-era city of David, we have the Pool of Siloam, which in this map that we're showing at the moment, they were just guessing and placing it right here, this light area of the map.

The recent discovery would place it, of course, further south from the southern entrance to the temple down at the end of the old city of David. So, from the southern end of the temple then down to the lower part of the city. Previously, the site they had found is not that far from the one they have recently found, which is, most people think, exactly it.

So, tourists who used to visit Israel were shown this particular site. However, the site is apparently not a first-century site. And now they have found this huge installation with these stone steps leading down into a very large pool.

And the one side that has been excavated is 156 feet long. So, it is a rather major installation there. And much of the original masonry from Herodian times is still there, as you can see.

Today then many people are walking through here. If you take the Hezekiah's Tunnel Walk in Israel, you'll come out back in here and come down some steps and be able to walk through here. Here is a sewer pipe.

I think actually this is how they discovered these ruins as they were doing a modern sewer installation and trying to take care of business. And this happens all the time in Israel where they're building a highway or digging a foundation for a new apartment building or whatever and they're finding ancient remains. So, this is how it all happened.

Another picture is once they have covered up all the broken stones from ancient times with wood so people can walk through there. And there is a placard showing you the remains that are left and interpreting it for you. The placard shows you a bit about tying it back into 2 Kings chapter 20, a water installation of King Hezekiah.

This is not that, but perhaps Hezekiah's installation was the anticipatory, the background of this later pool which comes from Herodian times. Artists have attempted to think what the whole thing might have looked like. Something along these lines with steps down into the pool.

Another rendition of it from the Biblical Archaeology Review article from a few years back. And another image that I found online from a Wikipedia site. All these tend to show I think a pretty good idea of what this pool would have looked like back in the day.

So, moving then from the geographical setting and some of the physical referential parts of the text back to the text itself and its theological ideas. The whole text seems to pivot on the idea that sin is the cause of bad things happening to you. In this case, blindness.

This obviously is a perennial problem that humanity tries to understand and tries to write about. We had a book out a while back, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The opposite is also a problem.

Why do good things happen to bad people? So why do the ungodly prosper? Why are the godly suffering? So, as we try to understand this in light of scripture, we notice that occasionally, and the emphasis here is on the word occasionally. Shall I say it again? Occasionally, scripture speaks about illness, sin, and tragedy coming upon people as a result of their sin, their rebellion against God. So, there are cases of that in scripture.

We have seen one fairly recently where apparently as we read John chapter 5 about the paralyzed man whom Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda, a different pool at the other end of the temple complex, the northern side, that Jesus said to this man,

don't sin anymore. So that perhaps hints at the fact that his malady had something to do with his unethical behavior before he was paralyzed. Something was going on there.

Paul spoke to the Corinthians about some things that might have happened to them because of their misuse of the Lord's table in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. James chapter 5, when he speaks of the elders anointing and praying for someone who is sick, alludes to the possibility that the illness may have had something to do with sin and perhaps a confession of sin is warranted in those kinds of situations. So again, occasionally there is some correlation between illness or tragedy and sin.

On the other side of it, occasionally, flagrant sinners prosper. This is one of the problems that Kohelet, the preacher in Ecclesiastes is pondering. He is trying to understand why it is that sometimes people who are apparently godly build up a nice life and suddenly it is snatched from them.

On the other hand, people who are ungodly are prospering. How do we understand this? This is spoken about a couple of times in Ecclesiastes. I think there are texts in Proverbs that also raise questions about this.

Occasionally, the psalmist wants to know why it is that people who are after him, who are ungodly, are doing better than he is. In a sense, the book of Habakkuk is pondering how Israel is being treated worse than the ungodly nations around it. This is a very common issue in Scripture.

Occasionally, we can tie sin to problems. However, godly people also suffer. We need not go any further than Job.

Of course, the Lord Jesus was a godly person and was treated worse than any human being has ever been treated. The apostle Paul, himself, alludes to this sort of thing. He had some issues that he suffered from, not least in Acts 28 on the voyage to Rome.

After the shipwreck, you will recall, they have been marooned on an island for a while. They are building a fire to get warm. Paul is helping build the fire.

He reaches down and grabs a piece of wood and is a snake bit. Of course, those around say, well, there you go. He must have done something wrong for that to happen to him.

So, God got him for that. They think Paul is about ready to keel over and die at that point. Of course, nothing happens to Paul, and Paul is fine.

So, then they think there must be something divine about Paul or this couldn't have happened. So, they were wrong on both accounts. That's how they were interpreting reality.

Paul, himself, speaks of a real malady that he dealt with in 2 Corinthians 12, his mysterious thorn in the flesh, which no one is quite clear on exactly what that meant, but evidently a physical problem that Paul says God permitted to be in his life, even though he had asked him to remove it. Paul says God enabled me to deal with this in order that I would rely on him, realize that when I was weak, I was actually strong. Paul seems to be saying that had I not had this affliction, I would have become overly proud because of all the great things that God had shown me in the revelations I had received.

In any event, then, we have lots of these things going on in scripture that seem to be incoherent. How is it that godly people suffer? How is it that ungodly people prosper? We have in this world, then, the results of Adam and Eve's sin, a messed world, a broken world, where things don't always go the way they ought to go. This is what gives us reason for hope in scripture.

If everything was all right in the present world, we'd have no eschatology. We'd already have everything that we need. Obviously, we don't.

The upshot of all this data, I would think, is that sort of throws us off and makes us wonder what in the world is going on here. God has providentially permitted life in this world to be a mixed-up mess to keep people who know him trusting in him and longing for the day as we pray in the Lord's Prayer when God's heavenly kingdom comes to earth. We see it come to earth in little bits and pieces in our lives, but we haven't seen it all yet.

Every time we read the newspaper and find out about some innocent person suffering, we say with even more fervor, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In the meantime, then, we have no biblical basis for assuming, certainly not for teaching, that any suffering person is being punished for sin. This is what was sort of the assumption about the blind man.

When the blind man's logic had pushed the Pharisees into the corner, they had no recourse but to use this epithet against him, who are you to tell us anything? You were born in sin, chapter 9, verse 34. We have no biblical basis for saying something like that, nor do we have any biblical basis for saying that just because a person has a lot of money, just because they're prospering, that they must be righteous, or that God is somehow rewarding them for their virtue. That's not really something that we can make global statements about.

We do have every reason to believe, based on this chapter, that God allows human suffering in order to bring glory to himself. That's what's going on here in chapter 9 with the blind man, and I think that's also what's going on in chapter 11 with Lazarus. Because when Jesus learns that Lazarus is ill and is about to die, he does not immediately go to save Mary, Martha, and Lazarus from having additional pain.

He allows the sickness to proceed to death in order to do a miracle. So, it's interesting to tie chapter 11, verse 4, into what we're talking about here in John 9. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill, he said in John 11, verse 4, this sickness will not end in death. Well, if you take that out of context, Jesus was wrong because Lazarus did die.

However, in the larger picture, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in order to teach a profound lesson about life and death and faith in him. So, this sickness will not end in death, no. It is God's glory so that God's Son might be glorified through it.

So, in that sense, I think what's going on here in John chapter 9 and early verses anticipates what goes on in John 11 in the early verses there. So we move on to another topic that helps us understand what's going on in John, and we're befuddled somewhat by this, the way in which Jesus is healing this man. So you think back to the way Jesus has healed people in John, going back to when he healed the royal official's son at Cana of Galilee.

He healed this young man at a distance. He healed him. He was living in Capernaum.

Jesus was in Cana. Jesus pronounced his healing at Cana, not because of the faith at all of the sick person, but because of his father's faith. Then we have in chapter 5, Jesus healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda.

This person is not portrayed in a sympathetic way. We have no real reason to believe that he was a person of faith. He was a person who thought angels were going to stir up the water and he would be healed if he could somehow flop his way into it before the water stopped circulating.

So, faith has an ambiguous relationship with the healing there. So, in chapter 11, when Jesus is going to heal Lazarus, we haven't got there yet. That's coming soon.

Would you say that Mary and Martha believed for sure that Jesus was going to heal Lazarus? Apparently not. Apparently, when Jesus said he'll be raised, they as good Jewish people of their day would have thought, yes, he will be raised at the resurrection on the last day for the final judgment. That was their faith.

They didn't really think that Jesus was just about to heal him at that moment. So, faith and healing are often associated today. We have folks that we call faith healers.

Perhaps we're skeptical of their performance, but faith and healing is often associated. In some of the healings of Jesus, it actually is, but not so much in the Gospel of John. So, Jesus is working with this blind man and he doesn't speak to him directly about faith.

Instead, he does something that seems very odd to us. He uses a spit. So he bends over and mixes dirt up with spit and makes a bit of clay or mud and rubs it into the man's eyes and tells him to go to the pool of Bethesda to be healed, to wash it off and to be healed.

The use of spit in healing is not unique here in John 9. It's something that Jesus did in Mark 7 and in Mark 8 as well. As I recall, Mark 7 is an instance where a person is deaf and has a hearing impairment and Jesus puts the spit on his ears. Mark 8, I believe, is another place where a person is not able to see.

If you look at the ancient texts that speak of spit, both in Greco-Roman sources and in Jewish sources, you find sort of a mixture of texts that show that there was a superstition that spit would sometimes have medicinal value, but also other texts indicate that spit didn't always have that positive connotation. Pardon me, I'll get a drink. In Jewish sources, there is the same sort of mixed review about the use of spit.

There are some texts which speak of it as having some possible medicinal value, but also texts which speak of it as being a matter of ritual impurity. Obviously, we know that to spit on someone in ancient times just like today was a way to show total contempt for them and for what they're saying. So, Jesus' use of spit here is a head-scratcher.

It's something that is not easy to understand in ancient times or today. The best thing I have to help us understand it is perhaps what Jesus is doing here is in a sense reenacting the creation of Adam and Eve. God made humanity, according to Genesis 2, out of the dust of the ground, out of the mud.

From dust you came to dust you'll return, you'll recall the Bible says. Perhaps Jesus is in a sense a creator. We know from John 1 that he is indeed the original creator.

Perhaps he is recreating this man's sight by this symbolic act. That perhaps isn't a persuasive or fully satisfactory answer to the question, but it's the best I have at the moment and I'm still trying to think about this and understand it. So perhaps Jesus is revisiting Genesis 2 here.

Perhaps Jesus is simply testing the man's faith because he's doing something that in some ways is a very odd thing and I don't know, not a pleasant thing to have applied to your eyes. Dirt and spit mixed together. Go wash in the pool of Siloam.

So, the man must have thought to himself something. I don't know who this man is or why he's doing this. Maybe he just thought pragmatically what do I have to lose? Maybe he thought there was something really going on here and he had begun to have faith in Jesus.

Who knows? But he permitted Jesus to apply the mud to his eyes and he made his way down as a blind man. It must have been difficult to the pool of Siloam and he washed and as the text says he began to see. Another thing that's interesting about the text is this idea of washing in the pool of Siloam.

The Hebrew word behind that is a word that has to do with sending. So perhaps Jesus sent him to the pool. He was sent.

He was on a mission from Jesus to take care of his issue and so it was sort of a pun, an appropriate place for him to go. We're told about this in John chapter 9 verse 7. Wash in the pool of Siloam. Editorial comment.

This word means sent. So, Jesus sent him to the pool where people go and this is how he was healed. As we consider this story about this man, it's interesting to compare and contrast him with the paralyzed man in John chapter 5 who was healed at a different pool, the pool of Bethesda.

To tie these two texts together is somewhat interesting, both similarities and differences. So, when we compare these two Sabbath healings, the man in John 5 had been paralyzed, the text tells us, for 38 years. I don't think there's anything symbolic about the number 38 there.

I think it just means he was paralyzed for a long time to underline the severity of his affliction. It wasn't just something that happened to him that might immediately go away, a passing problem. This is a chronic situation the man had been dealing with for a huge part of his life.

So, this was a severe problem that the man had, being paralyzed for 38 years, but not nearly as severe as someone who had never had sight at all, a congenital blindness. In both of these cases, Jesus takes the initiative. In neither of the cases is the person healed someone who comes to Jesus and asks to be healed.

Jesus comes to them, and he takes the initiative, unlike other healings where someone comes and asks for healing or asks Jesus to heal their son as in the case of the official in chapter 4. In both cases, the Father's works are being shown by Jesus according to chapter 5. In chapter 9, Jesus said that I must do the works of the one who sent me. So similar comments about what's going on here. The one who sent me is working in chapter 9, the father is working in chapter 5. In chapter 5, although

the man was looking for water, he thought that if he jumped into the somehow, when the water was stirred up, he thought by an angel that he would be healed.

However, Jesus healed him without using any water. This man in John 9 had no idea at all about the pool of Siloam being able to help him. He wasn't looking for water, he had no idea about the value of the pool of Siloam.

Nevertheless, Jesus had him go wash in the pool of Siloam. So, we have sort of the opposite situation with the water in the two accounts. In both accounts, we have the Pharisees having found out about it, criticizing Jesus, and it has to do with the Sabbath.

So, in both cases, a huge debate erupts. In chapter 5 as well as in chapter 9, this whole event is a matter of teaching and helps Jesus explain the nature of his mission. In chapter 5, the person healed seems to be someone who is sympathetic to the Pharisees, because when he finds out that it was Jesus who healed him, he goes and tells the Pharisees.

So, he, in a sense, becomes the person who, shall we say, sicks the Pharisees on Jesus. He is sort of aligned with them as the story is told. On the other hand, in chapter 9, the blind man is not at all connected to the Pharisees.

In fact, he ridicules them for their continually asking him the same question over and over again. And of course, they try to call him names and they throw him out of the synagogue. So, opposite relationship to the Pharisees in chapter 5 and chapter 9. The man in chapter 5, based on what Jesus said to him, don't sin anymore unless something worse happens to you, might imply that the man was a sinful man and the paralysis had something to do with that.

At the very least, it implies that Jesus is saying to him, you better straighten up or something worse could happen. Nothing at all about that in chapter 9. Jesus affirms that man was not a sinner, and that all this was happening simply for the glory of God. Nothing in chapter 5 about this paralyzed man becoming a believer.

An argument from silence, I grant you, we're not trying to consign his eternal destiny here in any way. Just to say from the story itself, there's nothing about him being a believer. However, in chapter 9, obviously, this man becomes not simply a believer, but an exemplary believer, a believer whose faith now is teaching quite a lesson at the end of chapter 9 about the nature of faith.

Both of these, of course, lead to an ensuing dispute in the context of chapter 5, Jesus teaching about all the witnesses who bear witness to him. Here in chapter 9, the short pithy statement shows the irony of the situation, that those who are supposed

to have great insight actually are blind. This man who had been blind now can see not only physically, but he's able to see spiritually as well, I guess.

We have this ironic conclusion to the passage and we end on this idea of blindness having to do with both a physical problem and a matter of spiritual insight. So, this man who is blind receives his sight and gradually comes to have greater insight about Jesus. At first, he realizes Jesus is a prophet.

His ongoing comments about Jesus as he has a debate with the Pharisees, he thinks he's a good man, something good is happening here, and gradually when Jesus comes to him and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man, he expresses his ignorance, he doesn't even know who he is, but when Jesus says it's me, immediately he apparently prostrates himself before Jesus, prostrates himself, I should say, and worships him. So, this man who is blind, a common man, gains insight. The Pharisees who are people of status, people who are Torah experts, people who have physical sight, who have all the status and power of the culture on their side, the supposedly insightful Pharisees are shown to be blind.

Their eyes are wide open, yet their minds are totally shut to what God is doing, the works of God in Jesus. So, eyes wide open or eyes wide shut, that's the paradox. Other texts in John speaking of light and sight are interesting to bring to bear on this as well.

So, we have an entire biblical theology I guess we could bring up here, although we don't have time to go into it in depth. You can look at some of these passages and study them out for yourself on how seeing becomes a metaphor for spiritual perception. Perhaps the seed text of all of them that we keep coming back to and get referred to many times in the New Testament is Isaiah 6, which has to do with the mission of Isaiah.

Isaiah sees God lifted up on the throne and opens himself up to serve God. He will go, send me, here I am, send me. So, God says, all right, but the mission that he has for Isaiah is certainly not a pleasant one.

The mission that Isaiah has is a mission of speaking to a lot of hard-hearted people. So we have this text in Isaiah 6 that comes up in Matthew 13 and the other synoptic tradition as well as an explanation of the pool, and the Parable of the Sower. It also occurs in Acts 28 at the end of Paul's ministry there.

So, what is Isaiah being told? He's being told that even though people are seeing and hearing what he is saying, they really won't get it. So even though they see they will not really perceive what's going on. Even though they hear what he has to say, they won't listen to it.

They won't really grasp what's going on. So, this is a huge matter of irony even in the book of Isaiah. And so, it comes up again in the New Testament several times.

So, we have even sayings like this in the pop culture here in the USA and I suspect in other parts of the world as well. There was even a pop song back a few decades ago, 1970, by a guy who did a lot of humorous songs, Ray Stevens, and it was called Everything is Beautiful in Its Own Way. And Ray wrote the song basically to say that you shouldn't be judgmental about other people.

And if you are, your problem is that you are just so blind that you can't see the value in other things that don't fit your worldview. So, I think Ray was basically teaching moral relativism in the song, not endorsing the song. But we have heard the saying many times, there is none so blind as the person who will not see.

People who choose to remain blind then are the ones who are really the blind people, not the people who are physically blind, many of whom are very perceptive and very alert and very well versed in terms of their intellectual achievements. So we just think for a moment now in extrapolating from this incident in Scripture about this one blind man, what does this tell us about the blind folks, people who are visually impaired throughout the Bible? If we go back to the Old Testament, there is no doubt that God cares for the blind. Israel is told to pronounce a curse upon someone who makes fun of a blind person or who leads them astray on the highway.

There is an allusion to the same type of value in the book of Job in chapter 29. The Psalms speak of God as the one who opens the eyes of the blind. You see some prophetic texts about this, amongst them Isaiah 35, which is probably alluded to by Jesus in Matthew chapter 11, when John the Baptist is imprisoned and asks Jesus, should I be looking for someone else or are you going to fix things or not? Jesus alludes to the blind seeing and the deaf hearing and people being raised from the dead and language that probably is alluding back to Isaiah chapter 35.

So, God does open the eyes of the blind. Some of these texts, you wonder whether they are texts which are about physical blindness or whether he's opening the eyes of Israel to what he's doing prophetically to receive the ultimate blessing of God. On the other hand, although I haven't listed these texts, there are texts in Isaiah and other prophetic texts where it says God will strike the people with blindness because of their sin and blindness is a judgment.

Probably in that sense, not so much that God will literally make people blind, but God will essentially blind them to what his realities are because of their sin. So we have many texts where Jesus is showing compassion to blind people and healing them, Matthew and Mark alike. It's interesting to look at how blindness figures into Paul's mission.

In Acts chapter 13, on his first mission trip, Paul encounters a person on the island of Cyprus, I believe, whose name is Elymas. This person is portrayed as some sort of an occult individual, a medium of some sort, or a sorcerer. So, he is opposing Paul.

So, Paul looks at him at him, it says. Interesting that it stresses in Acts 13 verse 9 that Saul is filled with the spirit and it says look straight at Elymas, look him straight in the eye, if you will, and says you're full of all sorts of deceit and trickery. You'll never stop perverting the right way of the Lord.

Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You're going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun. So, the text goes on to explain how this is what happened and how the observers of this act come to believe in the Lord because of it.

So, this sorcerer, Elymas, is blinded to the things of God and opposes Paul. So, Paul strikes him blind. His physical status is befitting for his spiritual blindness as well.

On the other hand, when Paul is on trial in Acts 26 and pleading his case before Agrippa, he characterizes his mission in a particular way. He says that God has called him to, God has rescued him from the persecution of his own people and he is from the Gentiles and God is now sending him to open the eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, so that they might receive forgiveness of sins and a place amongst those who are sanctified by faith in me. So we once again see then in the scriptures how Jesus has come to enlighten the world and the nature of blindness of this man here in John chapter 9 is a picture of the blindness of people to God apart from the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So as Jesus said, and we conclude with this, I'm the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. That is true of those who are visually able and of those who are visually impaired.

If they are following Jesus, they have the light of life.

This is Dr. David Turner in his teaching on the Gospel of John. This is session 11, Tense Times in Jerusalem, The Blind Man and the Blind Men, John 9:1-41.