

Gospel of John — Session 11: Tense Times in Jerusalem, The Blind Man and the Blind Men (John 9:1-41)

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Keywords

John 9, David Turner, Blind Man, Pharisees, Sabbath, Pool of Siloam, Spiritual Blindness, Moses, Suffering, Isaiah 6

Abstract

This lecture by Dr. David Turner provides a comprehensive analysis of John chapter 9, focusing on Jesus' healing of a man born blind on the Sabbath and the subsequent controversies it generated. The discussion examines the literary, archaeological, and theological dimensions of the passage, contrasting the physical healing and growing spiritual insight of the blind man with the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. Dr. Turner explores major theological themes, including the relationship between suffering and sin, the physical setting of the Pool of Siloam, and the broader biblical metaphor of sight as spiritual perception.

Outline

I. Introduction to John Chapter 9 (John 9:1-41)

A. Contextual Connection to Chapter 8

1. Jesus as the "Light of the World" (John 8:12, John 9:5)
2. Rising tension and conflict in Jerusalem
3. Symbolic departure of Jesus from the temple grounds (John 8:59)
 - a. Echo of the departure of the Shekinah (glory of God) in Ezekiel
 - b. Comparison with Matthew 23-24 (prophecy of second temple destruction)

B. The Healing of the Man Born Blind

1. Challenge to the disciples' worldview on suffering and sin (John 9:2-3)
 - a. Refutation of the belief that congenital blindness is caused by personal or parental sin
 - b. Purpose of the blindness: to bring glory to God
2. The Method of Healing (John 9:6-7)
 - a. Use of saliva/spit and mud on the eyes
 - i. Possible Greco-Roman and Jewish medicinal or superstitious backgrounds

- ii. Theological interpretation: Reenacting the creation of Adam from dust (Genesis 2)
 - iii. Practical interpretation: A test of the man's obedience and faith
- b. Washing in the Pool of Siloam
 - i. Meaning of "Siloam": "Sent" (pun/double meaning of being sent on a mission)

II. The Narrative Development and Interrogations

- A. First Phase: Neighbors and Skeptics (John 9:8-12)
 - 1. General amazement and skepticism regarding the man's identity
 - 2. The man's consistent testimony: "I am the man"
- B. Second Phase: First Interrogation by the Pharisees (John 9:13-17)
 - 1. Detailed questioning about how the healing occurred
 - 2. Blind man's initial assessment of Jesus: "He is a prophet"
 - 3. Pharisaic division: Jesus as a Sabbath-breaker (making mud/clay) vs. the impossibility of a sinner performing such signs
- C. Third Phase: Questioning of the Parents (John 9:18-23)
 - 1. Pharisaic attempt to disprove the congenital nature of the blindness
 - 2. Parents' reluctant confirmation of his identity and congenital blindness
 - 3. Parents' refusal to explain the healing due to fear of expulsion from the synagogue
 - a. Jewish leaders' decree to expel anyone acknowledging Jesus as Messiah
- D. Fourth Phase: Second Interrogation of the Healed Man (John 9:24-34)
 - 1. Pharisees' charge: "Give glory to God... we know this man is a sinner"
 - 2. The healed man's classic pragmatic defense: "One thing I do know: I was blind but now I see"
 - 3. Humorous and sarcastic response by the man: "Do you want to become his disciples too?"
 - 4. Pharisees' appeal to Moses:
 - a. Declaration: "We are disciples of Moses"
 - b. Historical contrast between Moses and Jesus (John 5, Prologue)
 - 5. The healed man's defense of Jesus' divine origin: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing"
 - 6. Pharisaic epithet and expulsion: "You were steeped in sin at birth!"

III. The Theological and Archaeological Themes

- A. Archaeological and Geographical Setting

1. Location and significance of the Pool of Siloam
2. Recent archaeological excavations south of the Temple Mount in the City of David
3. Features of the Herodian-era pool: 156-foot-long excavated wall, stone steps, and connection to Hezekiah's Tunnel

B. Relationship Between Sin, Illness, and Suffering

1. Occasional biblical correlation (e.g., John 5 paralytic, 1 Corinthians 11, James 5)
2. Lack of absolute correlation: Righteous suffering vs. ungodly prosperity
 - a. Examples: Job, Jesus, the Apostle Paul (Acts 28 snakebite, 2 Corinthians 12 thorn in the flesh)
 - b. Wisdom literature context (Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Habakkuk)
3. Rejection of suffering as automatic divine punishment or wealth as automatic reward

C. Comparison with John 11 (The Raising of Lazarus)

1. Premise: Sickness permitted to proceed to death to reveal God's glory (John 11:4)
2. Jesus' deliberate delay as a means to build faith

IV. Comparison of Sabbath Healings: John 5 (Bethesda) vs. John 9 (Siloam)

A. Key Similarities

1. Longevity and severity of affliction: 38 years paralyzed vs. congenital blindness
2. Divine initiative: Jesus initiates both healings without prior request from the sick
3. Display of the Father's works and Sabbath debates

B. Key Contrasts

1. Role of water: Paralyzed man sought water but healed without it; blind man did not seek water but was sent to wash
2. Relationship with religious leaders: Healed paralytic aligns with Pharisees; blind man defends Jesus and is expelled
3. Spiritual outcome: No mention of faith for the paralytic; blind man progresses to complete faith and worship

V. Biblical Theology of Sight and Blindness

A. Sight as a Metaphor for Spiritual Perception

1. Old Testament background: Isaiah 6 (hearing without listening, seeing without perceiving)
2. Protective laws and caring for the blind in the Old Testament (Job 29, Psalms, Deuteronomy)

B. Messianic Sign of Restoring Sight

1. Isaiah 35 as a prophetic text (alluded to in Matthew 11)
2. Blindness as a spiritual judgment in prophetic literature

C. Sight and Blindness in Pauline Mission

1. Blindness as judgment: The blinding of Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13)
2. Paul's commission: Sent to open the eyes of the Gentiles (Acts 26)

VI. Conclusion: The Irony of Spiritual Blindness

A. The Pharisaic Paradox: Physical sight, theological status, and "oversight" combined with total spiritual blindness

1. Physical sight but complete lack of spiritual insight

B. The Blind Man's Triumph: Physical blindness replaced by physical and spiritual sight and worship

C. Jesus' Final Declaration: Judgment based on claims of sight (John 9:39-41)