

Group Study Outline

Launching Question

What must happen for someone to become a Christian? List the steps.

Questions

Turn up John 20:31 again. Why did John include chapter 9 in his gospel?

READ John 9:1-7

Why was the man born blind? Why did Jesus heal him?

What is *the work of God*? (cf 6:29). So what will this chapter show us?

Why does John say 5b here? How does opening blind eyes show this?

READ Isaiah 6:8-13. What is 'blindness' here in Isaiah?

READ Isaiah 42:6-7. What will 'my servant' (= the Messiah) do?

What is Jesus' claim here in Jn 9:1-7? How does this fit with 20:31?

READ John 9:8-34

What are the various scenes or interviews through this section?

By the last scene, in 24-34, describe the blind man and the Pharisees.

Trace through the whole story the increasing sight of the blind man/

Trace through the story the blindness of the Pharisees/Jews.

What is spiritual sight in this chapter? what is spiritual blindness?

READ John 9:35-41

Why has Jesus come into the world?

How has this story illustrated verse 39?

How does this story illustrate what we read in Isaiah?

How can this chapter help us Christians who think that we do 'see' (cf 41)?

What is the positive aspect of Jesus being *the light of the world*?

What is the negative aspect of Jesus being *the light of the world*?

Jesus is absent from the story in verses 8-34: what does that tell us about *the work of God*?

Conclusion

(cf 'Application' box on previous page)

Summarise all that this passage tells us about Jesus.

Why does John include so many stories that are basically making the same point?

How might this story help someone considering whether to believe in Jesus?

Why has Jesus come into the world?

How does this passage challenge how we normally think about Jesus?

How can this chapter help us in our attitude to evangelising others?

What must happen for someone to become a Christian? (cf *Launching Question*)

John 9:1-41

John at a glance

'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:30-31).

This is why John wrote his Gospel (and this is why we're spending this term considering each of the miracles he includes): so that we can 'read' the signs (which, of course, we are not able to 'see') so that we may believe something about the identity of Jesus: namely, that he is the long-promised Christ. For it is only through him (and therefore through believing this about him) that we can have the life that God had promised to give to us through his Christ.

Where this passage fits in...

John has been showing that Jesus is the one from God who provides God's rescue, but in a way which is radically different from what the Jews expected. God's historical people were unable to accept the Son because they did not really belong to God: their unbelief shows their sin, rather than that Jesus is false. John writes to persuade his readers to believe (20:31), even if the Jews won't. Ch 9 answers the pressing question: 'how will they come to believe?' or 'how then can anyone see?' The answer is that spiritual sight requires the miraculous intervention of Jesus: a blind man becomes progressively more spiritually-sighted, whilst the Jews (who consider themselves self-sufficient, and so reject their sight-giving Messiah) become progressively more blind.

Old Testament ideas

Light of the world

Blindness in the OT is more than just a physical thing. It is used as a metaphor to illustrate total spiritual failure. This is a key theme in Isaiah:

- blindness is a sign of refusing to 'see' and believe God (cf Isaiah 42:18-25; 29:9);
- in judgement, God spiritually blinds those who rebelled (Isaiah 6);
- this blindness will be remedied for God's people when the Messiah comes to rescue them (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7).

Thus in John 9, Jesus is developing the 'light of the world' theme begun in 8:12 (and cf 12:46). In ch 8, Jesus offers freedom to his people, but they reject him. In ch 9, he gives sight to the blind, but blinds those who rebel. Jn 9 is a fulfilling of Isaiah 42:6-7 (written of 'my servant', the Messiah).

Theme Sentence

Jesus is the long-awaited Christ who gives sight to the spiritually blind.

Commentary

The best way to unravel this chapter is to see it as a series of interviews. The initial *sign* is the fifth in the gospel (with just the raisings to come).

1-7 The significant sign

As with all the signs in John's gospel, this healing has a purpose (20:31), identified here in 3-5. *Displayed* could be translated 'become visible, known, revealed'. This man is born blind to make God's work visibly apparent. We know that His work is to bring people to believe (6:29), so this chapter will display how that happens (namely, as Jesus opens our eyes). 9:5 explains 1:4-9.

Verse 4 is explained by 13:30: 'night' comes when Jesus is betrayed and taken to the cross; but, other than at that time, *the work of God* must continue. And, after the ascension, it will (14:12).

8-34 Different responses to the sign

8-12 INTERVIEW WITH THE BLIND MAN'S NEIGHBOURS

John's whole gospel depends on the miracles actually having happened, in real-history time and space, so the authentication by these neighbours is vital. At the same time, we have our first glimpse of the blind man's understanding: Jesus is '**the man** called Jesus'.

13-17 THE BLIND MAN'S FIRST INTERVIEW WITH THE PHARISEES

John has already shown the division and blindness of the Pharisees (in ch 7-8): here it is again. Although healing and kneading (eg by mixing dust and saliva to make mud) were both forbidden on the Sabbath, they cannot see beyond their rules to the reality to which the Sabbath pointed: 'future rest' is at hand. Meanwhile, the blind man sees more clearly: 'he is **a prophet**'.

18-23 PARENTS INTERVIEWED BY THE JEWS

The parents provide further authentication (cf 8-12), but John puts the emphasis here on the stubbornness of the Jews who will not believe despite the evidence (18, 22). They *had already agreed* (ie pre-decided) that Jesus is not from God and so must disprove the miracle. Their hostility is extended to include anyone disagreeing with them (22, 34).

24-34 THE BLIND MAN'S SECOND INTERVIEW WITH THE PHARISEES

This scene is full of tragic irony. The blind man is urged to *give glory to God* by condemning Jesus, but actually of course the way he gives glory to God is by recognising that Jesus must be '**from God**'! Still the Pharisees claim to be Moses' disciples, despite the accusation that if they were, then they would believe in him (5:45-46; 6:32; 7:19, 22-23): even a blind man can see the claim is bankrupt! And their harsh reaction proves that they are false shepherds (cf ch 10).

Note the big emphasis here on Jesus' origin (29, 33). Throughout John, this is a big issue (cf 6:41-51; 16:28) because Jesus must come *from above* if he is to be able to do what John claims he came to do.

Jesus is absent from all of 8-34. This encourages us that a person can come to faith even if Jesus himself is 'absent': he's still at work to give 'sight' today.

35-41 The significant sign is even more significant than you thought!

Jesus seeks out this blind man because He's not finished with him yet. Although Jesus had left him in a hostile climate, the man's tenacity demonstrated that a genuine work of God had begun in him (cf 6:39; 8:35; 10:29 where any true disciple is a permanent disciple). The question of 35 is filled out with the meaning that John has already given to this title, *Son of Man*. The climax of this chapter comes as this blind man declares what he has 'seen' (37) and grown to **believe**: he worships the authoritative, life-giving and self-giving Christ (cf 5:25-27; 6:53).

39 explains what has been going on throughout ch 5-8, and the main point to learn about Jesus from ch 9. Jesus is *the light of the world* (5) ... but his light does two different things:

- it illumines all who are willing to believe in the significance of the signs: those who come to Jesus and can say 9:38 will be rescued.
- but, at the same time, it also blinds the hard-hearted (like these Pharisees): those whose very conviction that they see everything is in fact their blindness ... they will receive God's judgement of *ever-seeing, but never perceiving* (Isaiah 6:9).

So, in fulfilment of Isaiah 42, the Son of Man brings his judging and life-giving light into the world.

And in a last interview with the Pharisees, Jesus applies what he means to the Pharisees. First, only those who know that they are blind will bother to come to *the light of the world*: the Pharisees won't come for precisely this reason. Second, their self-confidence about their sight is not evidence of sight, but of their sin. Jesus could not be more clear: you are blind, you are guilty.

Application

- Be convinced that this Jesus who gives sight to the blind really is the OT-promised Messiah: believe in him!
- It may seem impossible that anyone could recognise God's rescuer, but we should not be dismayed: Jesus does give sight to the blind.
- Jesus' work as the light of the world involves both spiritual blinding and the giving of spiritual sight: this explains our experience in evangelism, and should encourage us that our friends' persistent rejection/blindness doesn't mean that our evangelism 'isn't working'!
- Pray for God to have mercy on our friends who think they 'see'.