

Believe

JOHN

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Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 9:1-7; 35-41

1 As he was passing by, [Jesus] saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” Jesus answered. “This came about so that God’s works might be displayed in him.

4 We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. **5** As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

6 After he said these things he spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes. **7** “Go,” he told him, “Wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). So he left, washed, and came back seeing...

34 “You were born entirely in sin,” [the Pharisees told the man], “and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, and when he found him, he asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

36 “Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?” he asked.

37 Jesus answered, “You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

38 “I believe, Lord!” he said, and he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind.”

40 Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things and asked him, “We aren’t blind too, are we?”

41 “If you were blind,” Jesus told them, “You wouldn’t have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

(John 9:1-7; 35-41 CSB)

SUMMARY: In John 9 Jesus encounters a man blind from birth. His disciples ask the age-old question—‘who sinned?’ Jesus transcends their simplistic view, seizing the opportunity for God’s work. This underscores a nuanced truth: while sin correlates with suffering, it lacks a consistent causal connection.

Jesus heals by unconventional means: forming a paste from clay and saliva to anoint his eyes, he instructs the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. He obeys in faith and returns seeing. This isn’t ancient folk-medicine, or mystical practice; rather, it shows Jesus shares the divine identity of the Creator. Its not merely a restoration of sight; its a remarkable act of new creation—a foretaste of the coming kingdom when the blind will see, the lame leap, etc.

However, gaining physical sight is only the beginning. Under relentless questioning from skeptical Pharisees, the formerly-blind-man gains spiritual insight regarding Jesus, culminating in recognizing him as the ‘Son of Man’ and offering his worship.

In stark contrast, the Pharisees, trapped in their disbelief, plummet into spiritual darkness. Their refusal to embrace the truth about Jesus blinds them further. Ironically, the sin of unbelief causes their spiritual blindness. This illustrates that possessing clear physical sight—20/20 vision—is insufficient. We all need enhanced spiritual insight into Jesus’ Person and Work.

- John 9 is “one of the most brilliant passages of the Gospel.”—Charles H. Dodd
- “John 9 is...the best example of symbolic narrative in the 4th Gospel...something of a masterpiece.”—Dorothy Lee
- “The healing of a man blind from birth was a unique miracle. It was the first time in Jewish history (OT) that congenital blindness had been healed. And it was never repeated in the NT era.” –Kenneth D. Johns

I. The ‘Man-born-blind’—A Drama in Seven Scenes

A. Overview

1. A ‘Seven Act Drama’

– John 9 can be viewed as a “drama...[in] seven sections, wherein the rule is largely followed of two active characters [either an individual or group] only ‘on the stage’ at one time.”
[George Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 152]

2. Sight & Blindness—Spiritual & Physical

– “In John 9, Jesus gives sight to a blind man who was ‘[conceived] & born in darkness’. Gradually the man gains spiritual insight, while the blindness of the Pharisees is revealed. Meanwhile, the Jews attempted to gather condemning information to use against Jesus.

They also threaten to banish from the synagogue anyone who confesses Jesus as the Messiah ... This threat explains why people feared the Jewish leaders.” [Jacobus Kok, *New Perspectives on Healing, Restoration...in John*, p. 151]

– “‘Darkness’ is... a way for characterizing human ‘ignorance & unbelief.’... The man born blind... lives in a state of darkness because literally he cannot see & metaphorically, he is ignorant of Jesus’ identity; yet Jesus refuses to associate his ‘darkness’ with sin or evil. Whereas the religious leaders excommunicate the man after his healing & revile him as a sinner... Jesus vindicates the man of sin & illuminates his life, physically & spiritually ... The man both sees & ‘sees’ Jesus for the first time at the end of the story, & responds by acknowledging [Jesus’] identity & worshipping him.” [Dorothy Lee, pp. “*Theodicy & Eschatology in John*,” in B. Barber (ed.) *Theodicy & Eschatology*, pp. 45-46]

3. Contrasts

- John 9 has “contrasts: Physical blindness is contrasted with spiritual blindness; assumptions about personal sin are contrasted with true sin; claims to spiritual wisdom & insight are contrasted with true wisdom & insight; the boldness of the healed man & his willingness to publicly acknowledge Jesus is contrasted with the fear & reluctance of his parents; and the growing faith and spiritual insight of the healed man is ... contrasted with the spiritual ignorance of the Jewish authorities.” [Louise A. Gosbell, “*The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, & the Lame*”: *Disability in the Gospels*, p. 316]
- “More than a mere miracle, this sign represents a *highly symbolic display of Jesus’ ability to cure spiritual blindness*.” — Andres Kostenberger, *John, Commentary on the NT use of the OT*, p. 460]
- “This is not [merely] a healing miracle; Jesus is *not* restoring sight to a man who had once enjoyed it but lost it through illness. This is the gift of new life [sight] to a man who had never seen.” [Anthony M Moore, *Signs of Salvation*, p.]
- The Synoptic Gospels record multiple cases of Jesus healing blind people. In contrast, “there is only one story of a blind healing in... John (Jn. 9), but it is a long & carefully-crafted portrayal of spiritual blindness. As the drama unfolds, the man born blind recovers not only physical sight but spiritual insight.” [CDC. Howard, “*Blindness...*” in JB. Green (ed.) *Dictionary of Jesus* p. 81]

4. Indicative of God’s Kingdom Future (Is. 35:5-6; 29:18)

- “The prophet Isaiah predicted... that the Messiah would ... ‘open eyes that are blind’ (Is. 42:6-7) ... The healing of the man blind from birth illustrates... the kingdom when ‘the eyes of the blind will be opened’ (Is. 35:5). In fulfillment... Jesus gives sight to the blind [& thus] ... provides a foretaste of... the promised kingdom when ‘the eyes of the blind will see’ (Is. 29:18). As the promised Messiah ... Jesus *will give sight to the blind in His coming kingdom*.” [Stephen S. Kim, *Miracles of Jesus According to John*, p.]

B. *Inclusio* (‘Bookends’): Who’s a Sinner? Does Sin cause Blindness?

- “By *inclusio* we mean that John mentions a detail (or makes an allusion) at the end of a section that matches a similar detail at the beginning of the section... [e.g.] **9:2-3 with 9:41**.” [Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the NT*, p.]
- “Contrary to what the elite supposed (9:34), the man was not born blind due to a sin (**9:2-3**), nor was his healer a sinner (9:16, 24); by contrast, the elite themselves are sinful & spiritually blind (**9:39-41**).” [Craig Keener, *Gospel of John*, p.]

- “Jesus’ concluding words in **9:39-41**...[&] the collocation of blindness & sin forms an *inclusio* with the opening verses of John 9. The question of who is a sinner has now come full circle, & the import of **9:2-4** is further underlined. By conventional standards both Jesus & the blind man are sinners...Jesus refuses to regard [the blind man] as a sinner & carries out the compassionate work of God toward him. It culminates in his final confession of Jesus...At the end of the story...we’re reminded ...*it’s not a sin to be blind; sin comes from rejecting the work of God*, & it is this sin which...blinds those who claim to see. So, *it’s not the Pharisees...who see...but a blind beggar*, who sees more & more...as he takes a stand against them [Pharisees].” [David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith & Liberating Community*, p. 47]
- “Among this story’s remarkable features is...Jesus himself is absent from it for 27 of its 41 verses, much longer than any other span in the Gospel...Verbs & nouns relating to sin occur in a higher concentration in this chapter than anywhere else in John... The entirety of John 9 is dominated by the question ‘Who is a sinner?’” [David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith...*, pp. 42, 44]

II. Jesus’ View of Blindness/Sight, Sin & Sovereignty (9:1-5)

1 As he was passing by, [Jesus] saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”
 3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” Jesus answered. “This came about so that God’s works might be displayed in him. 4 We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (9:1-5)
 6 After he said these things he spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes. 7 “Go,” he told him, “Wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). So he left, washed, and came back seeing.

A. Disciples concerned with the Cause; Jesus sees an Opportunity

- “The disciples lighting upon the [blind] man, immediately enter into a debate as to whether the man or his parents sinned in order to lead him into such a miserable state. Jesus...recasts the discussion. The man’s predicament is not an arena for theological [discussion], but an opportunity for God’s grace & power to be displayed. The disciples assume that the Fall has the last word; the affliction is a *fait accompli* [‘done deal’] & can serve only as an object lesson in divine retribution. *Jesus*, by contrast, *works to realize God’s creative design*.” [Sean M McDonough, *Creation & New Creation*, p.]

B. Blindness in the Ancient World

- In the ancient world encountering a blind person “would inevitably cause the...observer to make assumptions about the moral character of the blind person...[to] suspect that [they are] being punished for something...’ (Chad Harstock). This association between impairment & divine punishment is also present on occasion in the Hebrew Bible [OT].” [Louise A. Gosbell, “*The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, & the Lame*”: *Disability in the Gospels*, p. 303]

C. Who Sinned? (9:3-4)

- “Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but he was born blind so that the acts of God may be revealed through what happens to him. **4** We must perform the deeds of the one who sent me as long as it is daytime. Night is coming when no one can work.” (9:3-4 NET)
- **Jesus denies a direct Sin-Suffering Link—“The world’s not fair, but God’s not finished.”**

- Encountering this man, the disciples ask: “Who sinned?” ... This question is a deeply instinctive one: when something goes wrong, we want to know who to blame. For e.g., in a car accident: was it a drunk driver? were they wearing seat belts? Or if someone has lung cancer: were they a smoker? Especially if we believe that we deserve what we have, we want to believe that the world is a basically fair place. That’s why Jesus’ answer is so interesting: he doesn’t answer directly, & what he does say is somewhat mysterious. He acknowledges the seeming unfairness of this situation (‘neither this man nor his parents sinned,’) but *this healing is a sign...that it won’t always be this way*: “The chaos & misery of this present world is, it seems, the raw material out of which the loving, wise & just God is making his new creation.” (N. T. Wright).

1. Popular Concept: ‘people get what they deserve & deserve what they get.’

- “In John 9 Jesus heals a blind man &... show[s] his disciples that he was not in that condition because of his sin or that of his parents ... Thus, suffering people should not automatically be blamed for their condition. This biblical idea...contrasts with ... karma, [&] goes against ‘common sense.’ Psychologist Mel Lerner...demonstrated that most people... believe ‘people get what they deserve & deserve what they get.’ They tend to assign blame to victims of tragedy especially if it’s not possible to blame a perpetrator. This comes from a normal human impulse to make sense of things... [&] the deep human need to believe that we’re in control of our lives. People want to believe ‘that couldn’t happen to me—because I’m wiser, I’m better, I know what I’m doing.’ The Bible’s assessment is less flattering...” [Timothy Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain & Suffering*, p. 135]

2. Sin causes Suffering in General, but not all suffering is due to sin

- “Gregory the Great (~540-604 AD) ...rejected the belief that...our suffering is [in] proportion to our sins. Gregory taught that while suffering in general is caused by human sin, that does not mean particular forms [cases] of suffering are always the result of specific sins. He warned against making too direct a connection between sin & suffering, since that...is one of the main lessons of the book of Job.” [Timothy Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain & Suffering*, p. 47]
- “We must never say that every particular instance of suffering is caused by a particular sin, it is fair to say that suffering & death in general is a natural consequence & just judgment of God on our [humanity’s] sin” [Timothy Keller, *Walking with God*, p. 115]

D. Due to God’s Sovereignty? Textual & Moral Issues

1. Moral Questions (9:3-4)

- Regular “English translation[s]...[like] the NRSV, raise serious moral questions ... ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; *he was born blind* so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.’ (9:3-4 NRSV). Did God patently cause the man to be born...[blind] in order to use him in a divine [miracle]? Does God simply impair the man to use him as the means to an end? What kind of God ‘shows off’ by curing the very problem that God caused in the first place? And if God does behave this way, why does God choose...not [to cure] others? ... [Note that] the phrase the NRSV translates as ‘he was born blind’ [9:3] does not actually appear in the Greek text.” [Jaime Clark-Soles, “*Love Embodied in Action*,” in C. W. Skinner (ed.) *Johannine Ethics*, p. 102]

2. Textual Issues—Punctuation is Interpretation

- “In its early history the text of the NT appeared only in scriptio continua, [continuous script, no punctuation], so that punctuating the text was a matter of interpreting the meaning of an unbroken stream of Greek letters. At times [it] required a certain amount of guess work.” [John C. Poirier, “*Night & Day’ & the Punctuation of Jn. 9:3*,” NT Studies, (Feb., 2009) p.]

a. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” Jesus said. “*This came about so that God’s works might be displayed in him.*” (9:3)

- “As Jn. 9:3–4 are usually read, Jesus denies that [generational sin] holds true in this instance, & *instead attributes the man’s blindness to God’s preparation for the healing about to occur.* In spite of how widespread this reading is...several factors favor ...an alternative reading, based on a different punctuation, in which Jesus does not attribute the man’s blindness to God’s action.” [John C. Poirier, “*Another Look at the ‘Man Born Blind’ in Jn. 9*,” J. of Religion, Disability & Health, V. 14, #1, p. 60]
- “In this rendering the blindness *was given to him* so that God might be glorified. It isn’t hard to see the theological implications ... God brought this suffering to the man so that God might glorify himself in this man’s healing. While a sound theology cannot doubt God’s sovereignty to do as he pleases, still, thoughtful Christians might see this as a cruel fate in which God inflicts pain on people simply to glorify himself.” [Gary M. Burge, “*Gospel...of John*,” D. Lauber (ed.) T&T Clark...*Doctrine of Sin*, pp. 86-87]

b. *‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus. ‘But so that the work of God might be displayed in his life, we must do the work of him who sent me while it is still day.’* (9:3-4a)

- “*The purpose clause of Jn. 9:3b* (‘so that {hina} the work of God...’) *can just as well be applied to Jn. 9:4 & no doubt it should.* Such clauses may begin a main sentence in Greek rather than follow it...This means Jn. 9:2-4 might be translated: ... ‘*Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘But so that the work of God might be displayed in his life, we must do the work of him who sent me while it is still day.’* The purpose clause now explains that Jesus must work so that God’s work might be displayed in the man’s life. God did not make the man blind in order to show his glory; rather, God sent Jesus to do works of healing in order to show his glory. The theological nuance...could not be more different.” [Gary M. Burge, “*Gospel & Epistles of John*,” in D. Lauber (ed.) T&T Clark...*Doctrine of Sin*, pp. 86-87]

3. God’s Purpose—Not the Cause, but the Possibility

- “Jesus’ answer shifts the emphasis *from the cause* of the man’s blindness...the focus of the disciples’ question *to its inherent possibility* for God’s purpose...Thus *Jesus’ reply...is not concerned with the issue of whether or not God intentionally made the man blind* for the sole purpose of revealing his works in him [the blind man]. *It simply takes into account the fact of the man’s blindness & indicates that God is to use his condition to reveal his works.* It therefore points forward to the healing miracle which is to follow. (Several scholars have proposed an alternative punctuation...joining 9:3b with the 1st part of 9:4: ‘It’s not that this man has sinned or his parents (9:3a). *But that the works of God might be made manifest in him (9:3b), we must keep on working the works of God’* (9:4a).” [Martin Asiedu-Peprah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy*, p. 122, #21]

4. Disciples’ Question Deferred

- “The disciples raise a question [What causes blindness?] ...is not immediately answered [so,] the entire narrative can be structured [to] show the answer to that question...Ironically it

will be the religious authorities who... illustrate the cause of blindness, not the blind man.”
[James L. Resseguie, “*John 9: Literary-Critical*,” in M. Stibbe (ed.) *John as Literature*, p. 116]

III. Jesus the Logos—Creator & Healer (9:5-7)

- 5 ‘As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ 6 After he said these things he spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes. 7 “Go,” he told him, “Wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). So he left, washed, and came back seeing.” (9:5-7)

A. The Man’s first experience: Jesus as Healer.

- “In John 9 Jesus heals a man born blind...for this is what God does: mend human bodies. He does more than this, to be sure, but...he does no less, for through these...acts, Jesus displays God’s glory.” [W. David O. Taylor, *Theater of God’s Glory*, p. 176]
- “The story...sheds light on *Jesus as healer*...Jesus’ identity is [first] established...in relation to the healing he offers ...The healed man’s first description of Jesus is, ‘The man named Jesus made mud’.” [Craig R. Koester, *Portraits of Jesus in...John*, p. 87]

B. The Healing’s Symbolic Process

1. Jesus as the ‘Light of the World’ (9:4)

- “This sign of a man born blind receiving sight has a revelatory function in confirming Jesus’ self-disclosure when he says, ‘I am the light of the world’.” [Gilbert Soo Hoo, *From Faith to Faith: Blindman’s Bluff*, p. 51]
- In “the healing of the man born blind in Jn. 9...John makes overtones of re-creation ...in his detailed recitation of the event. He sets up the reader...with Jesus’ declaration in 8:12 ‘I am the light of the world,’ such that the healing of the blind man in chap. 9 becomes the proof of this assertion (note...the statement in 9:5). The allusion to Genesis 1 is of paramount importance...” [Sean M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, p. 34]

2. Jesus’ Touch (9:6)

- “Jesus’ touch...express[es] the intimacy of love. Jesus touches the eyes of the man born blind...anointing them with paste (9:6-7, 15). The spittle, the dust, the physical touch, & the waters of Siloam work together as primal elements to give the man a sight he has never possessed (see Gen. 2:7). This is *the only healing story in John where Jesus uses touch* (cf. Mk. 1:31; 5:29, 41).” [Dorothy A. Lee, *Creation, Matter & the Image of God*, p.]

C. Jesus’ Creative Act of Healing (9:6)

1. Not a Restoration, but a New Creation

- Jesus heals “a man ‘blind from birth’ which indicates the story concerns *not a restoration but a new creation*”—MT Winstanley
- “The fact that the man was born [blind,] in this condition means *Jesus is not restoring some lost ability*—He is about to give this man a perception [–sight–] he never had before. [In his case it’s *a matter of creation*].” [“John 9:6,” BibleRef. com]

2. Something only God can do (9:32)

- “Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind.” (9:32)
- “In healing a man of congenital blindness Jesus demonstrated His deity, for *only God can heal a man born blind*”—Stephen Kim

3. Jesus’ ‘mud’/‘clay’ an Allusion to Humanity’s Creation

- “There’s...an underappreciated allusion to creation in the ‘mud’ used to heal the blind man. Few modern commentators...[are] comfortable [with] Irenaeus’ assertion that the passage casts Jesus in the role of creator. The chief problem is that the creation of Adam in Genesis 2 uses ‘dust’ (*chous*) rather than ‘mud’ (Jn. 9:6 *pelos*). But, a look at the use of *pelos* in both biblical & extra-biblical literature shows it [*pelos*] would have been *readily understandable as the stuff out of which humanity was made*...In the Bible *pelos* is the ‘clay’ in the repeated assertion that God as creator is the potter, with humanity being the clay (Is. 29:16; 45:9; Jer. 18:6 [etc.]) The lexical analysis supports Irenaeus: *John portrays Jesus as standing firmly in the place of the Creator God, fashioning from the earth ‘new eyes’ for the man born blind, bringing his portion of the creation to its intended completion.*” [Sean M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, p. 35]

4. Humanity formed from ‘Clay’ (Gk. *Pelos*: ‘mud’ Jn. 9:6)

- Jesus’ distinctive action can be related to [the OT] background in which the noun *pelos* [clay] is used in creation accounts:
 - ? Jesus “spat on the ground & *made clay (mud)* with His saliva, and He spread it on the man’s eyes.” (Jn. 9:6 AMP)
 - ? “...LORD, you are our Father; *we are the clay*, & you are our potter; we all are the work of your hands.” (Is. 64:8 CSB)
 - ? “Please remember that you *formed me like clay*...” (Job 10:9a)
 - ? “Has not the potter *right over the clay*, to make...one piece of pottery for honor & another for dishonor?” (Rom. 9:21)
- “Jesus manifested the works of God in the man born blind by anointing his eyes with clay (*pelos* 9:3-6). Similarly, Isaiah says that God’s people are the clay (*pelos*), the work of God’s hands...Some similarities...[exist] between Jn. 9:6 & Job 10. Job refers to God as the One who fashioned & made him of clay [*pelos*] ...Since the same noun used in Jn. 9:6 is used in creation contexts in Jewish lit., one wonders whether *ancient readers related this John...verse to creation*. There are at least 3 ancient Christian authors who posited this kind of connection [Irenaeus, Ephrem the Syrian, & Severus] ...It’s significant that...*pelos [clay/mud] is used 5 times in...the healing of the man born blind* (9:6, 11, 14, 15) because this noun is used only once elsewhere in the NT (Rom. 9:21) ... The evidence allows us to claim that *John is possibly using creation imagery* as he portrays Jesus employing clay [mud] to heal the man born blind in Jn. 9:6. The reader who knows that the Word was behind the divine act of creation (Jn. 1:3, 10) can see in Jesus’ action an instance of creation imagery.” [Carlos R. S. Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in...John*, pp. 114-8]
- “The location of Jesus’ miracle...& the repeated mention...of ‘mud’ [clay]...indicate that John wanted to highlight this story... This healing is Jesus’ 3rd healing...so far. But unlike the 2 previous healings...only by Jesus’ word (4:50; 5:8), here [there’s] a more elaborate procedure [detailed]...The detail that Jesus used mud in healing this man is repeated 3 more times in 9:11, 14, 15...Creation imagery in Jn. 9:6 is used to support the idea...that Jesus

existed with God in the beginning...& functions as a dramatic representation of Jesus' claims in Jn. 7-8." [Carlos R. S. Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in...John*, pp. 118, 120]

5. Jesus' Healing Process Echoes John's Prologue & OT Creation

- "This story calls back to [John's] Prologue...which itself calls back to the Creation story at the beginning of Genesis" NT Wright:

a. *light*: Genesis begins with light: God saying "let there be light." In John's prologue, he writes of Christ: "The light shines in the darkness, & the darkness did not overcome it... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." And here Jesus reminds us of that by saying: "I am the light of the world." The world is dark, but the light has come.

b. *dust & mud*: In Genesis, "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, & breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; & the man became a living being." In John's Prologue, he says of Christ that "The Word became flesh & lived among us." And here, Jesus heals the man with the dust of the ground & the spit of his mouth. After the first Adam fell, God sent a 2nd Adam, so that we can be made new. This is what New Creation looks like." — N. T. Wright

c. *Out of Chaos*: "At the start of the book of Genesis, God was faced with chaos. He didn't waste time describing the chaos, analyzing it or discussing whose fault it was. Instead, he created light; & following the light, a whole new world. So here, John wants us to understand, Jesus is doing 'the works of the one who sent him'. A new chaos is on the way – the 'night', the darkness, when Jesus will be killed & the world will seem to plunge back into primal confusion. But at the moment he is establishing the new world of light & healing. After the chaos of Good Friday & Holy Saturday, he will bring the new creation itself into being with the light of the first Easter Day (John 20.1)." — N. T. Wright

6. Superstitious or Symbolic? (9:6)

- "Historical explanations can only explain Jesus' actions as superstitious and pre-scientific. A better solution is to understand Jesus' actions as symbolic, as a communication through recognizable actions...[Note,] it's not the saliva that the narrator highlights; rather, it's the 'mud' that's mentioned twice [in 9:6]." [Edward Klink, *John*, p. 439]

7. "His (i.e., Jesus') mud"

- "Jesus spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, & applied *his mud* to the eyes" (9:6 Klink)
- "The narrator describes the mud as 'his mud', i.e., the mud of Jesus. In light of the... creation motif in the Gospel, the reader is encouraged to understand 'his mud' to be a *reference to the creation of humanity from the earth* (Gen. 2:7) ...The [interaction] ...is not between a miracle-worker & an ailing blind man, but *between the Creator & 'his' creation*." [E. Klink, *John*, p. 439]
- "Jn. 9:6 contains a curious reference to Jesus' use of spittle & clay to heal a man born blind. Beginning with Irenaeus...exegetes saw here an *allusion to God's use of dust to create Adam*. Modern commentators...are generally skeptical of this interpretation & are content to make note...in antiquity that saliva held therapeutic properties..This [author] examines several Dead Sea Scrolls & ancient Near Eastern texts that mention spittle & clay alongside more transparent creation motifs. These texts helpfully illumine the role of spittle & clay in

John 9:6 & lend *substantial support to Irenaeus's exegesis.*" [Daniel Frayer-Griggs "*Spittle, Clay, & Creation,*" JBL Vol. 132, #3 (2013) p. 659]

D. Jesus' Command: "Go & Wash" & the Man's Obedience of Faith (9:7a)

1. Obedience & Faith

- "In the healing of the man born blind, Jesus' instruction to wash in the pool of Siloam is met with *the man's obedience & an act of faith*, resulting in his healing (John 9:7). In this case, the combination of Jesus's action & words of command occurs in the whole process of healing. Jesus 'spat' (*eptusen*) on the ground, 'made' (*epoi?sen*) mud (*p?lon*) from the saliva, 'spread' or 'rubbed' (*epechrise*n) the mud on the man's eyes & 'said' (*eipen*) to the man to 'go' (*hupage*, imperative [command]) & 'wash' (*nipsai*, imperative [command]) in the pool of Siloam. The man goes to the pool as instructed & comes back seeing (*blep?n*)." [Gerard Bernard, "*Jesus as Creator in the...4th Gospel,*" *Conspectus*, Vol. 29 (2020) pp. 9-10]

2. "Wash in the pool of Siloam (which means 'sent')" (9:7b)

- "In the story of the man born blind, Jesus's telling the man to wash his eyes at the pool of Siloam serves 'to reinforce the Gospel's emphasis on Jesus as the Sent One' & 'to highlight the healed man's role as a sent witness to Jesus as evidenced later in the story.'" [Gerard Bernard, "*Jesus as Creator in the...4th Gospel,*" *Conspectus*, Vol. 29 (2020) p. 15]
- "The healing of the paralyzed man...[Jn. 5] is Jesus's work of restoration...[Imparting] sight to the man born blind...(Jn 9) is a work of creation... [which] displays Jesus, 'the Creator...engaging in... new creation... Indeed, 'as the Creator, Jesus...has authority over the Sabbath.'" [Gerard Bernard, "*Jesus as Creator in the...4th Gospel,*" *Conspectus*, Vol. 29 (2020) pp. 12-13]
- "The narrator expects the reader to make a connection between Siloam, which means 'Sent' & Jesus as the 'one who is sent' from the Father...In 9:4 Jesus [mentions] 'him who sent me'." [JL Ressegue, "*John 9,*" in M. Stibbe (ed.) *John as Literature*, p. 117]
- "The man born blind...[is] a potential witness with very dubious credentials...He strikes the disciples only as an object lesson in... divine retribution for sin. But, Jesus, as the light of the world shatters these expectations by his re-creating power...[His] encounter with Jesus is...a prelude to the commissioning of the man for witness. Jesus tells him to go to the pool of Siloam not only to...emphasi[ze] on Jesus as the Sent One, but even more to highlight the healed man's role as a sent witness to Jesus...The man...becomes an exemplary witness to Jesus in the face of relentless questioning, & his burgeoning faith is rewarded with a fuller revelation of Christ...It's only...[then] the reader realizes the full significance of the Pool of Siloam, which means 'sending': the blind man is following in Jesus' footsteps as a delegate of the good news." [Sean M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, p. 229]

IV. Jesus, the Logos, is the Creator

- "The signs of Jesus are miracles, *new acts of creation* in which the light shines forth unambiguously...."—John Painter

A. Jesus shares the Divine Identity with God the Creator

- "The 4th Gospel begins the same way as...Genesis; both indicate that God/Logos [was] before anything else & that *God/Logos created everything*; both [Jn. & Gen.] begin...with 'in the

beginning.'...When Jesus [healed on the Sabbath (5:9; 9:14) he was accused...The Jews viewed Jesus as a mere Israelite who needed to observe the Sabbath...The Evangelist, however, depicts *Jesus as the divine Creator-Logos who shares the same identity with the Father*...One motive [for] Jesus' Sabbath activity is [that] the Sabbath...point[s] toward the future times...[of] complete rest...In [Jn. 9's] healing miracle, Jesus restores the life of the sick person giving him not only physical well-being but also eternal life...In Jesus, God was acting now to fulfill the [End-time] hope, & the Sabbath was a fitting day [for this]." [Riku P. Tuppurainen, *Prologue to Studies in the 4th Gospel*, p.]

- "In Ex. 3:14, the LORD declared himself to be 'I AM...' and Jesus has associated himself with that divine name in the preceding... material [Jn. 8:58 'Before Abraham was, 'I AM'']... In [Jn. 9] Jesus is giving sight, for the first time, to a man blind from birth. In this sign, once again Jesus is revealed as the Creator, the One Who is." [Anthony M Moore, *Signs of Salvation*, p]

B. Irenaeus' Insights

- "Irenaeus [b. 130 AD] emphasizes the way in which [this] miracle displays the *oneness of Jesus with the Creator*. He links this particularly with the use of clay, which recalls the manner of man's creation in Genesis 2:7. This allusion, & the significance attached to it, was universally adopted, &... reappears regularly..." [Maurice F. Wiles, *Spiritual Gospel*, p. 55]
- Irenaeus: "That which the [Creator], the Word, had omitted to form in the womb [viz., the blind man's eyes], He then supplied in public, that the works of God might be manifested in him." [Quote SM. McDonough, *Creation & New Creation*, p.]
- Irenaeus: "But he, [the Logos/Christ] the same one *who formed Adam at the beginning*, with whom also the Father spoke, saying 'Let us make man after our image & likeness' *revealing himself in these last times to men, formed the visual organs for him who had been [born] blind [in the body which he had derived] from Adam*." [SM. McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, p. 242]
- "In Irenaeus' mind, Jesus' act of healing...is *not merely an act of healing but a profound... creative act as well*. And...it is a symbol of the original creative activity of God through his Word & a demonstration of the *continuity between the original creative work of God & the creative redemptive work of God in his Son Jesus...Jesus who creatively healed the man born blind is that Word who both continues to maintain the creative process*" [RJS. Barrett-Lennard, *Christian Healing After...NT*, p. 102]
- Based on what we know today about human vision: "Jesus radically changed both the man's eyes and mind so that he could see the world immediately and clearly. He did not simply 'open the man's eyes.' He rewired his mind and gave him the world [of vision]." [Ted Olsen, "When the Eyes of the Blind are Opened," Behemoth, Issue 2, Aug. 7, 2014]

V. Progress vs. Regress: From Blindness to Sight & vice versa.

A. Progress: The (formerly) Blind Man gains Spiritual Insight (9:35-38)

- "Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, & when he found him, he asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" **36** "Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?" he asked. **37** Jesus answered, "You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." "I believe, Lord!" he said, and he worshiped him." (9:35-38)
- The man "receives a special revelation from Jesus. Jesus 'found' him & asked him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' To his honest reply, 'Who is he...?' Jesus...disclose[s] unique information: 'You have seen him...he is...speaking with you,' to which he appropriately responds 'Lord, I believe' [& he worships Jesus]. Thus...the man born blind [1.] is favored with a remarkable sign [miracle]; [2.] he makes a bold, public acknowledgment of Jesus; [3.] he suffers

for the sake of Jesus, & [4.] he is a recipient of special revelation. His role is that of a witness.” [Jerome H. Neyrey, *John*, p. 46]

- “Jesus’ address to the man [9:35-38] shows that he not only has the capacity to see, but that he has in truth seen the Son of Man ... The man has rightly apprehended what the sign of his recovered sight signifies, namely, the origin of Jesus with God. So he addresses Jesus as Lord, & worships him.” [Wil Rogan, *Purity in the Gospel of John*, p.]
- “Jesus is here intentionally leading the man to comprehensive faith in Him. Jesus is the ‘light’ of everyone who believes & Jesus intends to give the man not just sight, but also ‘the light of life’ (8:12). Accordingly, it is clear that healing, ‘light’ & life are all related in this context.” [Jacobus Kok, *New Perspectives on Healing, Restoration & Reconciliation in John*, p. 199]
- Jesus is ‘the Son of Man’ (9:35): “As a mere phrase, ‘son of man’...means ‘human being.’ This meaning, however, does not make much sense...[as] Jesus’ self-designation... ‘The Son of Man’...[is] an archetypal Man...More than that, ‘the Son of Man’ replaces Israel...[as] the new humanity, reborn in Christ...[As] the ‘Son of Man’...[Jesus] incorporates in Himself the people of God.” [Riku P. Tuppurainen, *Prologue to Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 209]
- “The closest Jewish texts to the Son of Man saying in John 9:35 are...Daniel 7:13-14...[where] a figure ‘like a son of man’ approaches the Ancient of Days [God] & is given dominion, glory, & a kingdom...[so that] all peoples & nations serve this ‘one like a son of man.’ There are some similarities with John 9:35-38...in the way the man born blind worships Jesus.” [Benjamin E. Reynolds, “*Jn. 9:35 as a Test Case*,” in P. N. Anderson (ed.) *John, Jesus, & History*, Vol. 3, pp. 462-3]

B. Interrogations & Illumination

- In “John 9 ...Jesus appears only in the opening & closing sections...His presence...brings the narrative to a climax both for the man and his opponents... The *man progresses from blindness to sight while the Pharisees move in the opposite direction*.” [Dorothy Lee, *Symbolic Narratives in the 4th Gospel*, p. 162]

C. Paradox & Reversal (9:38-39)

- “The root [problem] for John...is the *inability* of the [‘Jews’] to recognize Jesus as the one... Moses & the prophets wrote [about] ‘He came to his own, & his own people did not receive him’ (1:11). John’s favorite metaphor to describe their condition...is the *image of blindness*. The blind man in Jn. 9 receives sight & comes to believe in Jesus & worship him, while the leaders who ought to be in a better position to see cannot do so. Jesus encapsulates this paradox...‘I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see & those who do see will become blind’ (9:39). This reversal...is not some random irony...rather, it’s the strange outworking of God’s will as foretold in Scripture ...[The Jews’] opposition is not ...[merely] self-interested stubbornness; it is a genuine case of blindness, & it is God who has ‘blinded their eyes’ (Jn. 12:37).” [Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, pp. 305-6]

D. Pharisees’ Blindness *is* caused by Sin of Unbelief (9:39-41)

- Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind.” **40** Some of the Pharisees...heard these things and asked him, “We aren’t blind too, are we?” **41** “If you were blind,” Jesus told them, “You wouldn’t have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains. (9:39-41 CSB)

1. Jesus denies sin causes *physical* blindness (9:2), yet affirms that the sin of unbelief causes *spiritual* blindness (9:41)

- “Jesus’ reply [in 9:41] ...indicates that he understood the Pharisee’s question... [“We aren’t blind too, are we?” as] a declaration ‘we see,’ & [Jesus] suggests, proceeding from the disciples’ question in 9:2, that *sin & blindness are related after all*...The Pharisees do not recognize Jesus...& do not confess belief concerning Jesus...Therefore they sin and are liable for judgement.” [Mary Marshall, *Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels...*, p. 210]

2. Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus as the ‘Light of the World,’ causes spiritual blindness

- “In the opening scene that disciples ask Jesus...concerning the cause of blindness. The [answer] was deferred so the narrative could show...the true cause of blindness. The closing scene now has Jesus make the judgment so that the reader is told ...[&] shown *the cause of blindness...the reluctance of...the religious authorities to see the light when given the opportunity*. As a result, the verdict is pronounced upon them. “If you were blind, you wouldn’t have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin [guilt] remains.’ (9:41) With the verdict given, the trial is now completed.” [James L. Resseguie, “*John 9: Literary-Critical Analysis*,” in Mark Stibbe (ed.) *John as Literature*, p. 120]

QUESTIONS:

1. Let’s compare our attitude to that displayed by the disciples in Jn. 9:2. Concerning this N. T. Wright says: “Encountering this man, the disciples ask: ‘Who sinned?’ ...This question is a deeply instinctive one: when something goes wrong, we want to know who to blame. For e.g., in a car accident: was it a drunk driver? were they wearing seat belts? Or if someone has lung cancer: were they a smoker?” Can you relate to this? Have you ever responded in this manner? Discuss.
2. The Greek text of John 9:3-4a can be rendered in 2 different ways (a. & b. – below)
 - a. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned...; This [blindness came about] so that God’s works might be displayed in him.”
 - b. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. ‘But so that God’s work might be displayed in him, we must do the work of him who sent me while it is still day.’” (9:3-4a)
 - What are the implications of these alternative translations on God’s role (sovereignty) in the man’s blindness?
 - What are the implications of these alternative translations on Jesus’ role (his actions) affecting the man?
3. John 9:6-7 describe the unique procedure Jesus used to heal the man;
 - a. Was Jesus employing ancient folk-medicine? Was he using a magical/mystical process, or what?
 - b. The Greek word “mud” here, is also translated “clay” in Isaiah 64:8 & Rom. 9:21; how does this help us grasp the significance of Jesus’ action here?
4. Commentators say, “Jesus is not restoring some lost ability” & “the story concerns not a restoration but a new creation.” What is the basis in the text for these statements? What is the significance of “new creation” vs. “restoration”?
5. After Jesus’ unique procedure (9:6), he told the man: “Go...Wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). So he left, washed, & came back seeing...” What implications can we draw from

Jesus' command? How does this apply to us?

6. Dorothy Lee: "The man progresses from blindness to sight while the Pharisees move in the opposite direction." Discuss.