



LifeGroup Bible Study

August 25, 2024

John 9:1-12; Psalm 112

Community

TODAY'S THEME

Jesus is the light of the world, but to the man born blind the world was simply darkness. There are plenty of dark places in our world and in each of our lives. Jesus is able to open our eyes and shine his light into any situation or circumstance we might face.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

We'd like our small group participants to consider the various kinds of blindness we struggle with. What keeps us from seeing the light? Here are three possibilities:

- Bad theology. Why do we assume there's a connection between suffering and sin?
- Self help (legalism). Do we simply work harder to make ourselves whole, or do we rely on the power of God to make us whole?
- Limiting God. Why couldn't the Pharisees imagine God healing on the Sabbath? What boxes do we stuff God into?

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to have open eyes to see the people all around us who smile but, beneath the surface, are living in guilt, shame and fear of the angry gods. We want to be able to speak through our mouth and through our life the truth of God's love.

ICEBREAKER

Do you think this kind of app sharing is helpful or hurtful? Have you ever had someone try to argue you into faith in Christ?

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, all around us, every day, we encounter people who smile but, beneath the surface, are living in guilt, shame and fear of the angry gods. Open our eyes to see you with a new vision. Open our lips to speak your truth. Open our hearts to live in a whole new world in which love really does conquer and heal all things. Amen.

Content

Today's text is part of a larger narrative which takes place during the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles. This festival was held in late autumn and celebrated both the harvest of orchard and vineyard and the autumnal equinox, as the days became shorter. The cel-

ebration included water ceremonies and light ceremonies, both of which drew their theology from Zechariah 14 (In the Day of the Lord living waters will flow into Jerusalem and it will be continuous day ... symbolizing the gracious presence of God.)

During the festival, 16 golden bowls were filled with oil and lighted. The rabbis said that when these bowls were lit at night they illuminated all of Jerusalem. In a culture without electricity and public lighting it would have been quite a sight. It is against this backdrop that Jesus first speaks his second "I am" statement: "I am the light of the world" (8:12). Today's text is a case study of the meaning of this saying.

As is so often true in John, this text operates on multiple levels. Physical healing becomes symbolic of spiritual healing, and physical blindness is replaced with spiritual blindness. There is also the level of reversal. A man living in darkness all of his life sees the light, but those who are supposed to illuminate spiritual truth to the people (the Pharisees) are lost in darkness. They cannot perceive the light. In addition, Jesus shows himself to be the fulfillment of the tabernacle lights. (*Read John 9:1-12.*)

The text begins with Jesus encountering a blind man. Blindness was much more common in the ancient world, with no cures available. This fact, along with its symbolic nature, explains the sheer number of Biblical stories about blindness. This particular man, John tells us, has been blind from birth, which leads the disciples into a theological discussion about the origin of the man's suffering. They assume that there must be a connection between this man's suffering and either his own sin or the sin of his parents.

DISCUSSION Do you believe suffering is caused by sin? How do you think you came to believe this?

Jesus utterly rejects this line of questioning. Jesus' response (9:3) is puzzling to many. The way most English translations state the verse implies that God caused the man to be born blind so that Jesus, in this moment, might heal him and show God's glory. Not only is this a bad translation, it's bad theology. While we affirm God's sovereignty, it is hard to reconcile the cruelty of such an act with the abundant grace of God seen in Jesus. The "purpose clause" in verse three is better translated this way: "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." In other words, Jesus must work so that God's work may be displayed in this man's life. God had not made the man blind in order to show his glory. God has sent Jesus to do works of healing in order to show his glory.

DISCUSSION Is it hard to believe that God would not cause this man to be blind? Why? What do you think God causes? Allows?

Jesus makes a mud plaster from his saliva and soil and applies it to the man's eyes. In the ancient world, spittle was thought to have

medicinal power, so this would not have been an unusual act. Because the man is blind, we might even see this act as a gift of kindness: using something tactile to engage the man's senses in the healing.

DISCUSSION What are other examples of Jesus using something tactile to capture the imagination of those he's teaching or healing?

Jesus then sends the man to the Pool of Siloam to wash, and John lets us know that the word Siloam means "sent." This pool is at the south end of the city of Jerusalem, and is an important detail in the story for two reasons. First, this pool is the source of water in the Feast of Tabernacles water ceremony. This is the pool built after Hezekiah redirected the Gihon Spring by tunneling west under Jerusalem. It is the only source of spring water in the city, and thus has religious and ceremonial value. If Jesus is the source of the Feast of Tabernacles' water (7:37-39), this man has now experienced such living water in a profound way.

Second, the name of the pool bears symbolic meaning. More than 20 times in John's Gospel, Jesus is described as the one who has been "sent" by God. The blind man is being told to go wash in the pool called "sent" by the one who was "sent" by God. Jesus, then, is the source of this healing, not the pool.

DISCUSSION When do you place faith in an object or thing for healing, instead of placing faith in Jesus? In your opinion, where is the line between superstition and faith?

GOING DEEPER: THE DEBATES

This healing story is followed by four debates or interrogations. Our text only includes part of one, but all four unveil something unique about God's divine power.

The neighbors (John 9:8-13). They are primarily concerned with verifying the miracle and wanting to know how it happened. They naturally take the healed man to the theological interpreters of their day for further explanation.

DISCUSSION What is a modern-day example of this behavior? Have you ever witnessed a healing? Describe it.

The Pharisees (John 9:14-17). They are most concerned with the fact that Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath.

DISCUSSION In what way are the Pharisees missing the point? In what ways do we often miss the point?

The man's parents (John 9:18-23). They are interrogated by the Pharisees, who want to know if there is some kind of conspiracy at work. The parents, fearful of the repercussions of this healing, deflect the Pharisees' questions back to their son.

DISCUSSION Do you ever feel like the sins of a past generation are still impacting you? How can these cycles be broken?

The formerly blind man (John 9:24-29). The encounter between the formerly blind man and the Pharisees is both meaningful and hilarious. The formerly blind man sees far more light than those whose eyes have been physically open all their lives. To translate the formerly blind man's bottom line, "What part of 'I was blind but now I see, and Jesus did it' don't you people get?!"

DISCUSSION What are some things we don't see? Prefer not to see? Are unwilling to see?

Verses 35-41 summarize and bring to conclusion this unit of material. Notice that Jesus heals this man before he has faith. Now Jesus truly opens his eyes, and reveals himself as the Son of Man. True vision, according to John, is when we "see" Jesus for who he is, and believe and worship him.

DISCUSSION How can we more clearly see Jesus?

Application

DISCUSSION: AVOIDING THE THREE TRAPS

Discuss the three traps from the "what do we want our small group to do" section on the previous page. This week, on a daily basis, check yourself against these three pitfalls.

PRAY TOGETHER

You are the God who gave yourself away for the sake of the world. You healed the sick, exorcised the demon-possessed, strengthened the legs of the lame and restored sight to the blind. In your greatest act of love, you willingly died on a cross and rose from death to resurrection life. Make us your disciples who long to take up our cross and follow you, with lives that are called and empowered to be living proclamations of your love, in a world that still fears the gods are angry. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Giving What You Have

JOHN 6:1-15

Providing lunch for over 5,000 people? That would be a challenge for even the biggest caterers, let alone for a few unprepared disciples. Faced with such a monumental task the disciples turned to a most unlikely accomplice – a young boy with a few small loaves and fish. What difference could so little do in the face of so much hunger? In Jesus' hands, it made all the difference! What a great lesson for us. Faced with so many needs all around us – hunger, unemployment, abuse, injustice, disease – it would be so easy to throw up our hands and just give up. What difference could I possibly make in the face of such monumental issues? This story encourages us to give what we have – our selves, our time, our skills and our money – and to trust that in Jesus' hands it'll make all the difference.

John 9:1-12 NLT As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. (2) “Rabbi,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?” (3) “It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. (4) We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. (5) But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.” (6) Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes. (7) He told him, “Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “sent”). So the man went and washed and came back seeing! (8) His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?” (9) Some said he was, and others said, “No, he just looks like him!” But the beggar kept saying, “Yes, I am the same one!” (10) They asked, “Who healed you? What happened?” (11) He told them, “The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.’ So I went and washed, and now I can see!” (12) “Where is he now?” they asked. “I don’t know,” he replied.



Daily Walk on the Rock

Week of August 25, 2024

Monday

JOHN 10

In this chapter Jesus describes how he cares for his sheep (those who follow him) like the shepherd cares for his sheep (see Ezekiel 34:23). The shepherd lets his sheep into the sheepfold and protects them from harm. Jesus protects us, and is the gate to God’s salvation for us. Who are the thieves and robbers in 8? How does Jesus identify himself with the good shepherd in 11-15? Who are the other sheep he must bring also (16)? Jesus’ claim to be one with God is interpreted by some as blasphemy. What might be the real intent of the pharisees in 24? When was the turning point for you in terms of hearing God’s voice, and responding? How do you discern God’s voice from all the other voices that call out for your attention? What has convinced you that Jesus is the Messiah?

Tuesday

JOHN 11

What kind of relationship does Jesus have with Lazarus and his sisters? Why do you think Jesus waited until then to go to them (6)? Why does Jesus return to Lazarus at this time (11-15)? What are the disciples fearing (8,16)? Does the way Jesus responds to the sisters’ request to come immediately help you in understanding your own prayer life? Imagine how you would have felt if you were Mary or Martha. Since Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus (11), why does he weep (33-35)? Think about your trust in Jesus, and your confidence in eternal life. What evidence do you have for this? Maybe God’s timing has your life in a delay. You may even feel that he is not answering, or at least not answering in the way you want him to. Read Philippians 4:19 as a prayer of assurance. To those of us who believe, blessed assurance is ours (see John 14:19).

Wednesday

JOHN 12

What previous stories stand in direct contrast to the triumphant entry of 12-15? Why does Jesus ride on a lowly donkey (14; see also Zechariah 9:9)? What kind of king are they expecting? What do you think they are feeling at this moment: faith or fear, belief or anger? What kind of king do you want Jesus to be? Rich and powerful, or a servant of all? What is wonderful and hopeful about Jesus as your King? Spend some time thinking and praying about being a disciple and following Jesus. Perhaps now is the time to give control of your life over to Christ, your Shepherd and your King, so that you might experience eternal life and genuine joy!

Thursday

JOHN 13

What does Jesus know that escapes the attention of the disciples (1, 3, 11)? After reading these verses, what amazes you about Jesus washing their feet? Would you have reacted like Peter? Why or why not? Verse 8 tells us that Peter took the washing literally, but what do you think Jesus meant by his statement in verse 8? Imagine what it would mean in your life if you practiced foot washing in your daily relationships. More forgiveness, patience and affection? More appreciation? In verses 12-17, Jesus instructs the disciples to go out and serve others. How will you put Jesus’ teaching into practice this week at home, and at work, and at church?

Friday

JOHN 14

Read John 13:36, 14:6, 14:8 and 14:23 to find the comforts that Jesus offers his disciples. What tone of voice do you hear in verses 9-14? Look for the evidence that Jesus gives for his claims. Do verses 12-14 give us blank-check promises about prayer? What is Jesus saying about the power of believers in 12? What does “asking in His name” say to you (14)? Think about what happens to the prayers of our hearts when we seek to sincerely follow Jesus. Do you believe that the closer we come to Christ, the more our requests are in line with what he wants? Spend time in prayer.

Saturday

JOHN 15

In the Old Testament, grapes symbolized Israel’s fruitfulness in doing God’s work on earth (Psalm 80:8, Isaiah 5:1-7, Ezekiel 19:10-14). In the Passover meal, the fruit of the vine symbolized God’s goodness to his people. If vine branches were compared to human lives, what pruning do we need? What tools might be used for the pruning? Jesus says to remain in him and bear fruit. What might the fruit be (5; see also Galatians 5:22-24 and 2 Peter 1: 5-8)? Look at the parallels between verse 9 and verse 12. What is the link between obedience and prayer (7, 16, and 14:13-14)? What kind of a branch are you on Christ’s vine: juicy, wormy, green or dead? Why? Think about what you can do this week to produce fruit.

Sunday

PSALM 1

This is a psalm of blessedness for the people who walk with a consciousness of God flowing through all of their lives. They are like healthy fruit-bearing trees with strong roots. They delight in God’s Word and meditate on it day and night. This day, let us spend time in God’s Word and delight in God’s grace, forgiveness and love for each of us.