



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

Unashamed of Jesus (John 9) Group Leader Notes

Dan Claire will teach John 9:1-17, and then dismiss everyone to discussion groups. In the remaining time, the groups will read and discuss John 9:18-41, using discussion questions from the program booklet. Here are some thoughts on how to answer those questions.

1. Describe John 9, particularly the responses of the Pharisees and the man's parents. Discuss what controlled them.

Summary of John 9:

In John 9, we encounter a marvelous story about the man, blind from birth, whom Jesus healed. The disciples had only one way of thinking about the man's disability, but Jesus reframed it in a way that they otherwise could not have imagined: the man's blindness was not due to sin, but so that God's works might be displayed in him. After Jesus healed the man, news spread quickly, and soon everyone was groping for an explanation of how the miracle had occurred. The lengthy dialogue between religious leaders, neighbors, parents, and the man himself take us on a journey of discovery, faith, and – ultimately – courage to confess Jesus not only as Prophet but as the Messiah Savior/King.

In John's Gospel, the Pharisees (and "Jews" in John 9) represent the authoritative, popular interpreters of reality. Want to know what's happening and why? In those days, you would bring your situation to the Pharisees to get their authoritative explanation. However, the Gospels often reveal that the Pharisees were blind guides, and that Jesus is the truly authoritative interpreter of everything. **The whole thrust of this story is about turning to Jesus in order to find meaning and to make sense of what's happening in your own life and in the world.** Following Jesus is the opposite of blind faith, because he provides his followers with a different perspective that makes better sense of everything.

In this story, the Pharisees could not agree on an explanation of what had happened (v16). Some argued that Jesus must be a sinner for performing such a miraculous act on the Sabbath. Others noted that a miraculous sign had occurred, and questioned how a sinner could be responsible for it. To gather more information, they summoned the man's parents and questioned them (v19). The parents confirmed that their son had been born blind, and that he had received sight, but they were afraid to take a position on how or why it had happened. They played it safe, and did whatever they could to shift the spotlight to someone else, even if it meant throwing their own son under the bus (v21). John reports that they did so out of fear of being ostracized, and it was a genuine threat, as excommunication would have resulted in severe social and economic consequences (v22).

The Pharisees called the healed man back for further questioning (v24). The man boldly proclaimed that Jesus must be from God because no one else had ever performed such a miracle. Enraged by his response, the Pharisees excommunicated the man from the synagogue (v34). However, Jesus sought out the man and revealed himself as the Son of God (v37). Seeing Jesus for the first time, the man responded in faith and worship (v38). The Pharisees, however, remained unconvinced and, therefore, blind (v41).

Jesus always sees more than we do. We are reminded of this at the beginning of the story, as Jesus provides his disciples with an entirely unexpected explanation for the man's blindness. Everything happens for a reason, but often for us these reasons are inscrutable. Even in eternity, we will never know them all. But we won't need to know them, because we know Jesus. He is our ultimate source of truth, meaning, and purpose.

Response of the Pharisees - utterly blind

- Confidence in their own sight (explanation of reality) which left them skeptical and opposed to Jesus.
- Some were outraged that Jesus healed on the Sabbath because they believed it violated their strict interpretation of the law. They saw Jesus as a threat to their authority and religious traditions.
- They doubted the validity of the formerly blind man's story and sought to discredit the miracle by threatening the blind man's parents with excommunication.
- They remained stubbornly incredulous after they interrogated the blind man.
- They dismissed Jesus as a sinner even in the face of undeniable evidence.
- They excommunicated the once-blind man from the synagogue for defending Jesus and speaking back to their spiritual authority.

Response of the Man's Parents - also blind

- They responded with fear and reluctance
- They acknowledged that he was their son but refused to comment on the miracle, deferring to their son because they feared being thrown out of the Synagogue.

Note: The synagogue was an important institution in Jewish society, serving as a place of worship, study, and community gathering. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a punishment imposed by religious authorities on people who deviated from the accepted beliefs or practices of the Jewish community. It was basically excommunication. An excommunicated individual was "canceled" and could no longer attend synagogue services or receive any form of spiritual leadership or guidance from the synagogue's leaders. This would inevitably strain family relationships and have a profound effect on the individual's identity and sense of belonging. It would also have grave economic consequences, since one's livelihood depended on the social network of the community.

2. Describe the man's journey to faith in Jesus. How did he end up in a different place from his parents?

The Blind Man's Journey to Faith

1. Surrender: Though he could have resisted Jesus' ministrations, he let Jesus apply mud to his eyes.
2. Obedience: He obeyed Jesus and washed his eyes in the Pool of Siloam. Miraculously, he received his sight.
3. Truthfulness: When asked by the neighbors who healed him, he said, "A man called Jesus" gave him back his sight (v11), and he truthfully described what had happened.
4. Steadfastness: To the religious leaders, when asked about Jesus, the man said: "He is a prophet" (v17). It was true enough, but a better answer will be forthcoming. (Muslims believe that Jesus is a prophet, and though insufficient, it's a good starting place). Here, even with the threat of excommunication hanging over his head, the man provided a courageous answer, revealing the Holy Spirit's work within him.
5. Boldness: In his second meeting with the religious leaders, the man testified to his experience, overruling their inadequate interpretation of reality. Until he met Jesus, his only experience since birth had been blindness. Then Jesus gave him sight. Now, regardless of what the religious leaders said, he was with Jesus, even if that meant excommunication.
6. Revelation: After the once-blind man was expelled from the synagogue, Jesus found him and revealed himself as the Son of Man, i.e. the Messiah Savior/King.
7. Faith and Worship: The man believed in Jesus and worshiped Him.

The once-blind man ended up in a different place from his parents because he could not deny that something wonderful had happened to him because of Jesus. His parents, on the other hand, were afraid of the influence of the religious authorities and chose to maintain the status quo rather than recognize the work of Jesus in their own son.

Note: It's sad to note that the blind man may have seen his parents for the first when they refused to back his story (John 9:18-23)

If you have extra time, here is an additional question for discussion (also printed in the retreat program book).

Discuss Rom 10:9. Did Paul intend this to be a “salvation incantation” for one-time use? Or was he advocating a continual Christian practice?

It's best to interpret Romans 10:9 as a continual Christian practice for the following reasons:

1. Throughout Romans, Paul emphasizes the importance of a continuous active relationship with Christ lived out daily in faith.
2. The present tense of the word “confess” and “believe” implies an ongoing action beyond the initial conversion experience.
3. A *pledge* of allegiance is worthless if it isn't followed by the *practice* of allegiance.