John 9 *The Grave Robber: One Thing I Do Know*

When you go to a play, or watch a movie, if it’s a good one, then you get pulled into the story. You start to identify with the characters. You put yourself in their shoes and ask yourself how you would react if you were in their situation. The really good stories help us discover things about ourselves.

I think that’s one of the reason movies are so popular, why theater goes all the way back to the ancient Greeks. Because drama teaches us about ourselves. Sometimes it’ll be a character going through something similar to what we are currently facing. Sometimes it will be a character who does something right that we should emulate. Sometimes it will be a character who is doing something wrong, and we’ll recognize the same error in ourselves.

And that works with Bible stories as well. As God unfolds His story to us, He’s inviting us to identify with the different Biblical characters. He wants us to see ourselves in these stories.

So today, I want us to think of our text, John 9, as a play. We’re looking at the 7 miraculous signs in the gospel of John, and today we’re talking about the healing of the man born blind. I’m going to break the story down into six scenes. And as we watch each scene unfold I want you to ask yourself: “Which character do I most identify with?”

There are several characters: Jesus, the disciples, the man born blind, the man’s neighbors, the man’s parents, and the Pharisees. As we go, ask yourself, “Which character sounds like me or acts like me? Which character is making right choices that I should imitate? Which character is making bad choices that I should avoid?” As we watch the drama, allow yourself to get pulled in and see if anything looks familiar.

***Who Sinned?***

Scene #1 is **verses 1-7:**

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

--John 9:1-7

As the curtain goes up at the beginning of the play, we find three characters on the stage. Jesus, the main character; the disciples, who we’ll consider as a group; and a man born blind.

It’s this last character who causes a problem for the disciples. They ask Jesus: “Teacher, whose sin is responsible for this man’s condition?”

You see, this was a pretty common belief in that culture. If someone had something dreadful happen to them, then it was because of something awful they had done. If you got leprosy, it was because you were a sinner. If you were in a farming accident and lost a limb, well then you had it coming.

But this fellow is different. He was blind from birth, so how can that be his fault? Was it something his parents did? For the disciples, this is an opportunity for an interesting theological debate.

Jesus sees things differently. Jesus knows that disease and death are the result of sin—if it wasn’t for humanity’s rebellion against God we wouldn’t have things like blindness—but He also knows there isn’t always a direct one to one connection between illness and sin. This man’s parents didn’t sin so that he was blind. He certainly didn’t do something wrong in the womb that God took away His sight. That’s just not how it works. Ask Job.

The disciples are being **Selfish** here. Selfish. I think that’s the word to describe them in this story.

Their question betrays an incredible arrogance: if blindness really is the result of sin, then they must feel pretty good about themselves, because they’re not blind. By asking the question they’re pumping themselves up, and putting the blind man down. They don’t see this blind man as a person to be cared for. They see him as a theological problem to be debated, or a burden to be avoided.

But not Jesus. He always sees people. Never theological problems or burdens, just people to be loved. So in the special effects portion of our play He approaches the man, spits a gob of saliva on the ground, mixes up a mud-pie, and sticks the mud-salve on the blind man’s eyes. And then, not even bothering to wait to see if the miracle will work, He sends the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam.

The healing works, as we knew it would. The opening scene ends with the once blind man coming home with a dirt streaked face and the newfound ability to see. Where once there was only darkness, there is now vivid color. Where once he had to shuffle so as not to trip, now he can dance across the street. Where once he had to depend upon his fingers and ears to identify family and friends, he can now look smiling into their astonished faces. He can see.

And that’s the end of scene 1.

***I am the Man***  
Scene #2 is a transition scene. **Verses 8-12:**

 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was.   
      Others said, "No, he only looks like him."   
      But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

 "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

 "Where is this man?" they asked him.   
      "I don't know," he said.

--John 9:8-12

When the curtain opens on scene 2, Jesus is no longer on stage.  In fact, he disappears from the action until the last scene of this story when he comes from offstage to deliver the most important concluding lines.  But the dialogue throughout these scenes have everything to do with Him.

The word to describe the neighbors in this story is **Skeptical**. They are filled with doubt that this could be the same man they’ve known. Obviously, they know it looks like him and all, but he’s been making his money as a beggar—has he been fooling them all this time?

Perhaps we can sympathize. Even with the evidence right there in front of them, it’s hard to believe a little dirt and spit could give this man sight. But the formerly blind man insists, “I’m that guy” and so the neighbors decide some higher authorities need to be brought in.

***The Sabbath***

So the curtain closes on scene 2 and then reopens as the man’s neighbors bring him to see the Pharisees. **Verses 13-17**:

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."   
      But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.  Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."   
      The man replied, "He is a prophet."

--John 9:13-17

The key point here is that Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath. For the Pharisees, that’s a real problem. And a clear indication that Jesus is up to no good.

You need to know that the idea of the Sabbath is important in scripture. In fact, I had an Old Testament professor in seminary who believed that Sabbath was *the* key idea that ties the whole Bible together. His argument was that Sabbath means rest, and that from creation all the way to the book of Revelation God’s purpose is to take us from chaos and sin to rest and peace. Sabbath. And if that is the case, then what Jesus did by healing this man was absolutely a Sabbath principle. He was bringing him wholeness and peace.

But for the Pharisees, the law says you don’t work on the Sabbath and that means no work, period. Many of them are certain that Jesus is up to no good.

Though some of them are starting to wonder. It *is* a pretty nifty miracle. And it’s hard to deny that this man in front of them can see. He’s reading eye charts and the whole thing. So they decide to investigate further.

***Ask him.***  
Scene 3 ends with the Pharisees shaking their heads in disbelief. The curtain opens on scene 4 with an effort to get another side of the story. If anybody knows whether or not this man has been pretending all this time, it’s his parents. **Verses 18-23:**

 The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

  "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

--John 9:17-23

If the word that describes the disciples is Selfish, and the word that describes the neighbors is Skeptical, then the word to describe the parents is **Scared.**

Word has gotten out that the Pharisees are prepared to force out of the synagogue anyone who acknowledges Jesus as the Christ. This is a big deal. More than just moving from one church to the other down the street, this would mean they would be essentially shunned by their neighbors. Nobody would do business with them. Nobody would share a meal with them. They’d be isolated and alone.

So these parents are scared. They probably know that Jesus healed their son. They were probably among the first who had been told. But they aren’t going to stick their necks out for him. They told the truth that couldn’t be denied and nothing more. “Yes. He is our son. Yes. He was born blind. Yes. He is healed.” And then, they shift the attention away from themselves as fast as they can. “Ask him who healed him. He’s a grown up. Don’t ask us. We don’t want any trouble.”

They are scared of persecution for Jesus’ sake. Scared.

And scene 4 ends with them pointing a quaking finger back at their son.

***One Thing I Do Know***  
Scene 5, then, brings the action to a climax. The Pharisees again summon this man whose only crime appears to be that he had something great happen to him. **Verses 24-27**:

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

--John 9:24-27

At this point the man is catching on that these Pharisees aren’t really searching for the truth. When they say “Give glory to God” what they’re really looking for is: “Tell us what sort of scam you and Jesus are running.”

But the man is ready to hold is ground. He gives one of the simplest and most profound testimonies of all time. “One thing I know. I was blind but now I see!”

That line, of course, is made famous by the hymn *Amazing Grace*. But it is also one of the most effective ways of witnessing to Jesus. Who can argue with personal experience? This is what happened to him. He was blind, now he sees.  
  
But they press him on the issue. You can almost see them inching closer. Putting the pressure on. Hoping to find a flaw in his story. “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

His answer is great. A little sarcastic, maybe. But he knows how to turn the screws. “Why so interested? Do you want to become His disciples, too?”

**Verses 28-29:**

Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

--John 9:28-29

They can’t get him to change his story, so they insult him. And then, in one of the gutsiest declarations of faith in the gospels, the man lays it on the line for Jesus. He doesn’t know much about Jesus—doesn’t even know what He looks like yet—but he knows one thing. He was blind, and God has been doing stuff through Jesus. **Verses 30-33:**

The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

--John 9:30-33

The man tells it like it is. If the disciples were Selfish and the neighbors were Skeptical and his parents were Scared, then this man is **Sold-Out.** He’s Sold-Out for Jesus. He boldly says that He believes Jesus is from God. He counts himself as one of Jesus’ disciples.

The result is that he’s thrown out of the synagogue. **Verse 34:**

To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

--John 9:34

He is now an outsider with Jesus. Never welcome in the synagogue again. Shunned by his neighbors. But committed to the One who restored His sight.  
  
***Those Who See Will Become Blind***  
Now we come to scene 6, and Jesus returns to stage. Sometimes at the end of a play, you get the moral of the story. Now our hero, Jesus, gets the honor of bringing the point.

First, though, the formerly blind man gets to lay eyes, for the first time, on the man who healed him. **Verses 35-38:**

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

--John 9:35-38

Again, this man is Sold-Out for Jesus. First he stood up for Him before the Pharisees. Now He worships Him in saving belief.

Then Jesus gives us the moral. **Verses 39-41:**

 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

--John 9:39-41

All of this healing from physical blindness was to prove a point about spiritual blindness. Spiritual blindness is the inability to recognize truth--specifically the truth of who Jesus is.  Truth with a capital T.  When you are spiritually blind, you are lost.  You don't know the way.  You may think you are groping in the right direction, but you are in fact, lost and without hope.  
  
Remember, Jesus is the light of the world.  "Whoever follows [him] will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (8:12)  
  
But.  But what if you don't follow Him by faith?  What if, after listening to His message and checking out His claims, you don't believe?  Jesus says that then you will walk in darkness.  Then you will remain in your guilt.  Then you will stay spiritually blind.

And that’s the problem with the Pharisees in this story. They are choosing not to believe. They are choosing blindness over the light.

Let’s break down what Jesus is saying here. “The blind will see” means that those who admit their blindness and come to Jesus by faith will be given spiritual sight. They’ll be healed just like the man with mud in his eyes. But “those who see will become blind.” Those who think they know, those who think they can see apart from Jesus, those like the arrogant Pharisees who think they have it all together, will be left in the dark.  
  
The Pharisees were stubbornly, **spiritually blind.**  They chose blindness.  They wouldn't admit their need for light and for healing. And Jesus left them in their blindness and their guilt.  
  
***Where Are You?***

So there’s the story. The play is over. The curtains close for the last time. Now it’s time to think about what you’ve seen and find yourself in the characters. Which character do you identify with?

There’s Jesus, of course. He’s the hero of the story. I don’t know if it’s a good idea for us to say He’s like us. Obviously, we want to imitate Jesus as much as possible. But He’s in a whole different category than us.

But what about the others? Can you identify with any of them?

1) First, there’s the disciples. They don’t come off so well in this story. They’re blinded by **selfishness**. Looking to belittle the blind man in order to feel better about themselves. Casting judgment elsewhere so they don’t have to look at themselves. Do you see some of yourself in them? Do you look at others more as problems and burdens then as opportunities to show love and concern? We need to ask Jesus to heal the blindspots of selfishness in our lives.

2) What about the neighbors? They are blinded by **skepticism**. They just can’t believe that Jesus can make such a dramatic difference in a person’s life. And maybe that describes you. You hear people’s dramatic testimonies, you sit here in church week after week and hear the Bible stories, but you’re skeptical that Jesus can really make a difference. You’re not sure it can be real. We’re all skeptical from time to time. But we need to ask Jesus to heal the blindness of our doubt and replace it with faith.

3) How about the parents? **Scared.** Blinded by fear. Does that describe you? You don’t lie about Jesus. You just don’t say anything about Him. You’re concerned about fitting in. You’re afraid of what your friends will think if you come out strong for Jesus. We’ve all been here too: knowing what the right thing to say or do is, but too scared to follow through. We need to ask Jesus to heal the blindness of our fear.

4) What about the Pharisees? Stubborn **spiritual blindness**. I hope this one doesn’t describe you by the time we leave this morning. Spiritual Blindness. This is the worst place to be. At least if you are skeptical it implies that you are willing to be convinced by the truth. But stubborn spiritual blindness means you aren’t even interested in changing.

If this is you this morning, don’t stay there. You’ll end up like the Pharisees. Blindly waking into a hellish eternity. Because you didn’t admit your blindness. Jesus says: “If you come to me and admit you are blind--ask me to save you by my grace through your asking in faith, then you will be healed of your sin, just like the physically blind man. But if you don't--you won't."  
  
God wants to give you spiritual sight.  To give you the new ability to recognize truth. Specifically recognizing the truth of your blindness and how to see again. Specifically seeing the truth of who Jesus is--the Savior and Son of God.  
  
5) Then, finally, I hope that lots of us identify with the man who was once blind. He was **Sold-Out.** He wasn't fearful in the face of persecution. He stood up for what he knew about Jesus.  He told his neighbors and the Pharisees "I was blind but now I see. And Jesus is the reason."  He worshiped Jesus in the presence of Pharisees.  He counted the cost and became a disciple of the one who healed his eyes.

Is your life characterized by faith and worship?  That's what I want for this church.  I want to excite in us a passion for Jesus, a faith in Jesus that is more to us than all that this world offers.

That kind of faith fills us with life.  It gives our testimony an irresistible appeal. It enables us to go out and live for Jesus and be His hands and feet. Sold-Out for Jesus. Completely devoted to Him.