

John 9 Narrative Study

Introduction

The Bible is filled with stories and narratives. Narratives are different from other forms of writing in that they develop the cast and crew before casting the plot or main purpose. They are written in more of a story form than other literature genres, and, specifically in the Bible, they have some ultimate meaning or purpose behind their telling. In the case of the Bible, a single narrative frequently has many aspects in a single narrative that require much reflection and a much deeper meaning than is initially seen at first glance. The story of the blind man told in John 9 is no exception.

Cases of Irony (Word Count: 291)

In John 9:16, the Pharisees declared, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath." They knew this could not be true, however, because he was able to do things no sinful man could do. They proclaimed this again in John 9:24, saying to the man that was blind, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." The man that was blind essentially told them that he didn't know where else Jesus could be from if not from God. The Pharisees answered that they did not know where He was from. "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes." The man who was blind stabbed at the Pharisees' pride obvious lack of faith. Not only would the Pharisees not admit publically what they knew to be true, someone they would deem less spiritual continually corrected them.

In John 9:34, the Pharisees jeered at the man who was blind saying, "You were born entirely in sins, and you are teaching us?" They retorted this to him after asking him repeatedly how he gained his sight. They didn't want to believe that Jesus had truly done a miracle, so they questioned him. When he finally pointed out their lack of faith, they put him out. Ironically, the Pharisees were born into sin just as the blind man was. They were known as the religious authorities of the time, hence why the crowd brought the blind man to the Pharisees in verse 13, yet they were not willing to see that Jesus, a man who performed miracles only a sinless man could perform, must be greater than Moses of whom they were disciples (v. 28-29).

"Sight" as a Narrative Device (Word Count: 311)

Sight, being the first obvious focus of this narrative, was used repeatedly in both literal and metaphorical ways throughout this passage. The chapter started out by saying that Jesus passed a man blind from birth. The blind man's literal lack

of sight (v. 1) and the disciples spiritual inability to see (v. 2) were both introduced at the beginning of this passage. Jesus corrected the disciples' sight first (v. 3-5) and then healed the blind man (v. 6-7).

The townspeople were unable to fully see the miracle that had taken place (v. 8-13), so they took him to the religious authorities to help them understand. The Pharisees, those who were supposed to know (and see) all things spiritual, could not and would not admit what they knew had happened to the blind man (v. 13-16). They were blinded by their own pride and refused to see the miracle that had truly taken place. Their lack of faith even took them as far as to find the parents of the man who was blind because they could not believe he had really been blind from birth (v. 17-23).

Jesus himself says his reasoning for the miracle and his presence on Earth is so that, "Those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." He is referencing the spiritual awakening of the man who was blind and pointing out the spiritual blindness of the pompous Pharisees.

The blind man did not ask anything of Jesus, yet he received his physical sight and thereby believed Jesus to be something more than just another man. The blind man didn't know who Jesus was, but his spiritual eyes were opened with his physical eyes. The Pharisees, even after being told repeatedly by the blind man, the blind man's parents, and Jesus himself, still remained blind to the Work of God.

"Sinner" as a Narrative Device (Word Count: 420)

The man blind from birth is said, by society, to be a sinner, not because of our innate sin nature, but because of his blindness. The reasoning was that, since he was born blind, he or his parents must have sinned (v. 2). This foolish thinking was even held even by Jesus' own followers, but Jesus revealed that a physical defect or a struggle that we face is not given to us because of some sin we have committed, it is given to us that we might persevere, grow stronger, and illuminate the power of God through healing and victory over this ailment.

The disciples, Pharisees, and people of the society at the time were still stuck in somewhat of a "salvation by works" mentality and did not fully understand what God wanted to reveal to them (that He was the only way to gain true salvation). The Pharisees even went as far as to call Jesus a sinner for performing a miracle on the Sabbath, overlooking the fact that He had healed a man of an incurable sickness.

Jesus then called the Pharisees sinners, saying that they were blind to their own sin because they thought they keep the laws of Moses (v. 28, 41). He pointed out in John 9:41 that their pride was their biggest sin, giving them a false sense of security in the law so they could boast their knowledge of it, but because they think they see it all but fail to see the Son of God standing in front of them, they are truly the blind sinners.

The Pharisees, the townspeople, and even the disciples, to some degree, could not get over the fact that the man who was blind must have sinned to be cursed with blindness. The Pharisees harped on Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, not just in this chapter but in many other places in the Bible as well; this was said to be a sin. If Jesus did work on the Sabbath, he was sinning, and if He was a sinner, he could not be from God. But it was a paradox, because He could not heal or forgive

the sins of a man if He was not sent from God. The Pharisees, being blinded by their own knowledge of the law, could not overlook the fact that he had done work on the Sabbath, so they did not have faith. Their own ignorance was their sin, but they wouldn't listen to Jesus when He told them this.

Revelation of God (Word Count: 318)

In the beginning of the chapter, it is Jesus who seeks out the blind man (v. 1). He puts forth the effort to heal the man (v. 6-7). The man asks nothing of Him, the man doesn't even know who He is, yet Jesus sees the man, spits on the ground to make clay, and heals Him. Interestingly, Jesus doesn't just put His hands on the man's eyes and heal him; He chooses to make clay and tells Him to go to the pool of Siloam (v. 6-7).

Jesus exegetes God, therefore this tale is meant to be an illustration of how God seeks us out, heals us of our ailments, and sends us out. The word "Siloam" can be translated as "Sent," so this symbolism shows that Jesus wanted the blind man to show his faith by going out to receive his sight. Jesus sent the blind man, and similarly God sends us upon receiving healing. God has provided for us a way to be reconciled, even though we never asked for it, all we have to do is receive it. We have to show our faith by putting it in what He has already done for us.

Speaking to His disciples, Jesus reveals Himself as the Light of the World (v. 5), stating that once He leaves, a metaphorical night will be upon them. He reveals Himself near the end of the chapter to the man who was blind, saying that He is the Son of Man (v. 35). The blind man promptly believes and worships Jesus, in turn worshipping God. Both of these are references to Jesus' immediate relationship with God. The Pharisees overheard Jesus revealing himself as the Son of Man, but they still did not believe, and Jesus rebuked them for it at the end of the chapter (v. 41), telling them their sin remains, an authority only a God figure would have.

Conclusion

John 9 contains 41 verses, each of which is full of meaning. Papers of lengths greater than this one could be written on single verses within this chapter. Even still, the surface that this paper begins to scratch gives us a glimpse of the depth of a single encounter with the figure of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the human figure of the living God.