# John 9:13-41

Last week we heard an inspiring message from Missionary James Lee, about how the man born blind was healed by Jesus, who used mud and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. This week we will continue studying how this man testified to the Pharisees, and then expressed his devotion to Jesus.

## Part 1: The “logic” of the Pharisees

The Pharisees were well educated, and living in Jerusalem at this time, they had access to learning from all around the Roman Empire, including understanding of logic and argument that was developed by the Greeks several hundred years before. And they certainly had access to sound reasoning from the scriptures, where God says (through Isaiah), “Come now, let us reason together….”

However, we can find a few flaws in their logic if we read carefully.

### “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

Jesus himself refuted this logic several times in several ways:

* Matt 12:3-8 “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? I tell you that **something greater than the temple is here**. If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For **the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath**.”
* Matt 12:11-12 “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? **How much more valuable is a person** than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to **do good** on the Sabbath.”

### “How can a sinner perform such signs?”

This logic is well-intended, perhaps, but not sound or effective. It’s possible for evil people or for demons to do amazing things, but that doesn’t mean they are representing God.

### “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

It was fortuitous that they asked him this question, and it might seem relevant, since he had a personal encounter with Jesus, but that doesn’t make him an authority on who Jesus is. They already had the relevant information from him on what Jesus had done for him. We can err in judging matters or setting policy based on what someone with a single experience has to say.

(Fortunately, the man born blind had more than feelings to back up his assertion that Jesus was from God.)

### They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents.

Their standard for evidence was going beyond what Moses said in Deut. 19:15: “A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” They should have been able to accept the testimony of any two witnesses – which they already had from the neighbors who brought him.

### 19“Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

When you ask multiple questions at a time, that’s a form of invalid argument, since it’s unreasonable to expect someone to have a sound and instant reply ready for every such question. The wording of this question, “*Is this the one you say was born blind*?” seems to insinuate that the parents are fabricating a story, so the tone of their questions shows disrespect for the parents.

### His parents … were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

This shows that the Pharisees had pre-judged the matter, and were using threats to try to get the answer they were looking for.

### “Give glory to God…”

We can tell from other translations, such as ESV, that the text of John’s gospel in Greek doesn’t contain the words “… by telling the truth” – but it’s a reasonable translation in the NIV, because that’s what the Pharisees were intending to communicate. [And of course, telling the truth is one way to give glory to God.]

This, however, is an appeal to religion, which may have nothing to do with the truth of the matter. They were concerned for their reputation and their control of the synagogue establishment, not for the actual truth about who Jesus is. It doesn’t bring glory to God to pretend or hide things, even if the truth comes out, for instance, that a famous preacher is cheating on his wife, and it brings shame on his ministry. Hiding abuse of children by clergy, for another example, may protect the clergy for a while, but it does not bring glory to God. It’s better to have such matters exposed, and let God handle his own reputation, even if we look bad.

### “We know this man is a sinner.”

Again, this shows that they had prejudged the matter. They were using bully tactics, appealing to their authority, not looking for the truth. Fortunately, this man was not falling for their tactics, so he replied admirably, sticking to the indisputable facts: “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

### “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

This sounds like a fishing expedition: maybe if they get him to say more, they can find more angles to attack Jesus. Repeating the same question could simply be a way to dig up dirt on their opponent.

### 28Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses!

This is an **ad-hominem** (Latin: “*to the person*”) attack; directed against a person rather than the position they are maintaining. The character of the person making an argument is not relevant to the issue. And their own qualifications as “disciples of Moses” are not relevant either.

### “29We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

This is an argument from ignorance. If I say, “I don’t know why a God who is all-powerful and all-loving would ever allow evil,” that doesn’t prove that he’s limited in power or in love – it just proves that I don’t know everything. The Pharisees tried to use their ignorance about Jesus to make a case against him, but they failed.

### 34To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

What kind of argument is this? Ad-hominem, with appeal to threats and force [Might = right?].

[Parents aren’t always right, even when their children are very young, so we’re grateful that we were taught to give our children a way to appeal our decisions. Supreme Court judges aren’t always right, even though they hold the power to call a same-sex union a “marriage”.]

## Some better questions

I believe the Pharisees were blinded to the truth, not because they lacked intelligence or education, but because of their pride. We all have sin, including pride, which corrupts our understanding, so we need to repent, to be forgiven, to have our minds renewed by the Holy Spirit.

What would you ask the man-born-blind, who had just begun to see? My suggested questions:

* How do things look to you?
* How do you feel about your new sight and your healing?
* What do you like seeing? What would you would like to see next?

## Part 2: The story behind the story

Now I would like to tell you a story of this Man Born Blind, or Man BB, or “Manny” for short.

### Manny born blind

Imagine how difficult it is for people who cannot see. Some lose their sight gradually, or suddenly, which is tragic; others never have sight in the first place, which is tragic as well. Our blind friend Manny had no other option than to sit and beg.

But he still had his parents, so I’m sure they did all they could for him, and they raised him to be bold and insightful, despite his disability. In fact, his lack of sight led him to exercise his perception in other ways, so he could understand what people were thinking and feeling, even when he couldn’t see their faces. He could understand the tone of voice, and he thought deeply about the things people said. His parents knew he had a bold streak in his character, and even though he loved God and respected authority, he was not shy around leaders who lack character and charity.

Manny thought deeply about prophets, and about his favorite prophesy from Isaiah, foretelling the coming of a Messiah when “the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped…” (Isaiah 35:5-6), since his family regularly attended their synagogue. And they had heard about the man called Jesus, who had been regularly attending his synagogue, when one Sabbath day he started teaching and healing, and proclaiming that he was the Messiah, after citing his favorite prophesy.

Imagine their talks around the kitchen table about how Jesus had healed a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (just across town), and about how the Pharisees were reacting to him. Manny’s parents were fearful about losing their place in the local synagogue, but they didn’t seem too fearful about their son engaging with those Pharisees.

### The mud

So there he was, one day, minding his begging post, not far from the temple, when the man called Jesus walks by, talking with his disciples about his situation. Manny had heard plenty of talk about how he was conceived in sin, or maybe his parents had sinned – so he felt stung, but not surprised. What surprised him was how Jesus responded: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God should be displayed in him.” That sounded refreshing! So hopeful! So when Jesus spat on the ground and made mud for his eyes, he was totally open to his unusual treatment, and to Jesus’ instruction: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” Fortunately, it wasn’t too far away [map], and a neighbor who was watching with great curiosity was happy to take the walk with him to see what would happen.

[*Israeli authorities have said the embassy will opened on May 14, the 70th anniversary of the state’s establishment, according to the Gregorian calendar*.]

### Manny starts seeing

Imagine how it must feel to suddenly start seeing after a life of darkness. As soon as he washed the mud from his eyelids, Manny got to see the town, and the path to Siloam that he had to grope his way along, trying to avoid obstacles in his path. He got to see trees, sky, birds, and some of the beautiful creation of nature. And he got to see the faces of people, some of whom were neighbors that he could recognize as soon they spoke. He got to see the look on their faces when they realized that he had been miraculously healed. Imagine his great joy!

So Manny was not reluctant to testify about what Jesus had done for him. He kept insisting, “I am the man,” whenever there was doubt about his identity.

How did the neighbors bring the man to the Pharisees? They all knew that the Pharisees were hostile to Jesus, and the neighbors were eager for more drama. That wasn’t Manny’s top priority, but he actually wanted to see the look on their faces when he testified that Jesus from God. His biggest regret at this point was that he didn’t know where Jesus was – he had to admit he couldn’t offer any further information, and he wouldn’t even recognize Jesus until he heard him speak.

### The Pharisees

Sure enough, when they reached those Pharisees in the local synagogue, they provided the drama that the neighbors were eager to see. Their faces showed their consternation, and Manny saw how that look in their eyes matched the tone of their voices. But he regretted getting involved in a long discussion, since he felt this sudden desire to see his parents. Just as he was about to excuse himself, though, the Pharisees decided to summon them. He wouldn’t even have to figure out how to recognize them!

What a happy reunion when the Manny’s parents saw him return their gaze for the first time in his life! We can understand how Manny’s parents were careful about how they replied to the Pharisees questions, since they didn’t want to be expelled from the synagogue, or even to be drawn into the controversy about Jesus. But they really wanted their son to have his opportunity to testify about Jesus.

## Part 3: Seeing Jesus

When Manny was expelled from the synagogue, his first thought was, “I wonder where Jesus is?” How would he find him, not knowing what he looked like, and amid all the crowd?

Fortunately, those nosy neighbors had not only informed Jesus that Manny didn’t know where he was – they also informed him that Manny had been thrown out of the synagogue.

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

Manny thought he recognized this voice, and he knew that “Son of Man” referred to the Messiah, as foretold in Daniel’s prophecy. But he was eager for more instruction from someone in authority who actually cared for him. So Manny asked respectfully, “Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

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

Manny was breathless for a moment as he took this in. He saw in Jesus’ eyes a vast ocean of wisdom, authority, power, and love, and he found he was in the presence of God himself, visiting humanity. “Lord I believe,” he said trembling as he knelt in worship.

What would this mean if a wise and loving God would overrule the shallow judgments of the proud Pharisees?

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

Apparently those Pharisees weren’t simply hiding out in their synagogue. Some were following Jesus around. They heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” I believe Jesus was addressing them at the same time as he spoke these words to Manny. He had compassion on them, even in their spiritual blindness – he wanted to give them a fair warning of their dangerous position. Their question shows they had a possibility of hearing this warning: they 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.”

## What can we learn from Manny and his story?

* Let’s not forget our own spiritual blindness.
* Let’s be grateful for what God has done for us. We’ve been given sight – both physical and spiritual!
* Let’s be bold in our testimony, willing to risk being thrown out.
* Let’s be humble toward Jesus, ready to worship.