

Jesus and his disciples observe a man begging for money who is blind and has been so since birth
The disciples ask Jesus who sinned—this man or his parents?
Jesus replies that neither of them sinned—he is not blind as a punishment for sin
This blindness is an opportunity for the glory of God to be shown
Jesus declares that he is the Light of the world
Then he spits on the ground and made mud, which he spread on the man's eyes
Jesus told the man to wash his face in the pool of Siloam, which he did—and he could see

People were confused because they had known this man all his life and he was definitely blind
Maybe it was someone that looked like the blind man
But no—the man said he was the blind man, but now he could see and told how it happened
The people ask to see Jesus, but by now he is gone and no one knows where he is

The people end up taking the man to see the Pharisees, who asked how it was that he could see now
The man repeated his story about Jesus, the mud, and washing in the pool of Siloam
The Pharisees were upset because this “work” had taken place on the Sabbath Day
Others asked how a sinner could perform such signs—it doesn't make any sense
They asked the man who he thought this man was and he said, “He is a prophet”
They ask the man's parents—maybe this is all a lie and he could see before
They affirm he is their son and he was born blind, but they know nothing of the miracle
They shove the responsibility back on to their son, saying he is an adult and can speak

The Pharisees have a problem—they are the keepers of the Jewish faith
They know what to do with the pagan outsider—the non-Jewish religion, money and power
But this is an “insider”—a threat to their ways comes from inside the Jewish world
One that claims to act in the name of the one true God—now that's a problem!
This Jesus broke up the temple system of money changers, he healed on the Sabbath,
He refused to condemn sinners and in fact, he ate with sinners
The Pharisees decided that if anyone said that Jesus was the Messiah
They would be put out of the synagogue—excommunicated from the Jewish faith
But the synagogue was the center of community life so it was particularly excruciating

The Pharisees call the man back, telling him to give up on Jesus and give the glory to God
But the man won't go along—he doesn't know if Jesus sinned—he does know he can see
They push him even harder to choose between being a disciple of Moses who follows God
And a disciple of Jesus—who by implication doesn't follow God
The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." John 9:30-33 NRSV
At that, the Pharisees said he was born entirely in sins and they kicked him out of the synagogue

Jesus finds out what happened so he finds the man who had been born blind but can now see
Jesus asks if he believes in the Son of Man and the man asks who he is so he can believe
He may have recognized his voice and only needed confirmation about who he is
Jesus tells him he is the Son of Man and the man says, “Lord, I believe” and he worshiped him
He may be excommunicated, but he's found new life in Christ—and I daresay becomes a follower

Jesus says he came so that those who cannot see, may see, and those who do see may become blind
The Pharisees overheard and said, *“Surely we are not blind, are we?”*
Jesus said, *“If you were blind, you would not have sin.
But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”*
It is a sin to claim to see when in fact, you are blind

NT Wright says of this passage, *Not only are [the Pharisees] wrong, but they have constructed a system within which they will never see that they are wrong. It is one thing to be genuinely mistaken, and to be open to new evidence, new arguments, new insights. It is another to create a closed world, like a sealed room, into which no light, no fresh air, can come from outside.*¹

Doug Gwyn says that when we turn towards the Light—we live in its truth
When we turn away, we choose blindness
Jesus can heal our blindness and our resistance to the truth
But when we insist that our blindness is sight—we say that our untruths are true—our lies are true
In so doing, we resist life and we are judged by the Light, which shows us as sinners²

There are several lessons here...

1. That blindness is not a result of our sin or the sin of others

We are tempted to say of course blindness isn't the result of sin, we're more enlightened
But I regularly hear people say natural disasters are God's punishment for our sins
And somehow shame is a way that we hold people hostage to the past

2. Jesus says this man was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him

But this doesn't mean that God caused him to be blind so that God could teach him a lesson
We live in a broken world and blindness happens—sometimes we are shown how to live blind
This time, Jesus healed him and God's glory and healing power is revealed
But God does not cause bad things to happen to us so that God can teach us a lesson

3. We can accept the healing as fact and move on without it transforming all of life

For this man—first we see him healed, then he calls Jesus a prophet,
Then he speaks out against the Pharisees in defense of Jesus
Finally, he believes and worships—becoming a follower of Jesus

4. But the greater lesson has to do with the Pharisees and their refusal to see God doing something new

As keepers of the faith, they could not see God at work in their midst and worked to get rid of it
But in so doing, Jesus says they were blind, but said they could see and that was their sin
It is a caution to us to stay in truth and to not create truth, declaring that what we do is right
God can only work in truth and we must live in truth—telling what we know, all of it
As humans, we're tempted to shift stories to our liking and benefit—in doing so we create untruth
Instead, we must admit honestly where we are blind and our stories go awry
It means putting all of our pieces on the table, both the good and the bad
Then, and only then, can God be fully present in our lives, working to transform and change us

¹ Wright, N.T.. John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10 (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 146). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

² Gwyn, Douglas, Conversation with Christ: Quaker Meditations on the Gospel of John, (p. 62). Quaker Press.