

# The Gospel of John

## The Power of Unbelief (Part 1)

### John 9:13-16

#### INTRODUCTION:

Open your Bible to the ninth chapter of the Gospel of John verses 13-16. I wanted to cover verses 13-34 this morning, but found it impossible to do in one sermon. So I have decided to make this a two part sermon. It may seem like an unequal separation, but this morning I will be setting up the context and beginning the narrative.

From the first chapter of the Gospel of John to the very end, it talks about believing. But we have also noted, all the way along, that it is also a gospel of unbelief. And while it presents to us the truth concerning Christ in order that we might believe, it also shows us the rejection of Jesus Christ. We told of the rejection as early as chapter 1 verse 11. “**He came into His own, and His own received Him not.**” It is the Gospel of Belief set in a context of unbelief. So, we see John writing that you may believe, but at the same time, realizing, that even as Christ comes to prove who He is, He is confronted by constant unbelief. That is still true today.

God Himself calls all men to believe in His Son. But, the vast majority do not, and the vast majority **did not** when His Son was here, walking in their midst. So while John’s gospel is designed to bring us to belief, it is at the same time an account of unbelief.

Our passage this morning can be read as a narrative. A blind man born blind. Jesus meets him at the gate of the temple, puts saliva in dirt, makes a little mud, puts it on his eyes, tells him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He does as Jesus asked by finding his way to the pool while blind. He comes back seeing with two newly created eyes. This incredible miracle has happened in the first twelve verses. The man born blind can now see.

We continue with the story this morning starting in verse 13. The religious leaders, the Pharisees in particular, are investigating a miracle. They’re going to investigate this dramatic demonstration of divine power. As we experience the story, it will be dramatic and dynamic on its own. But the undertones of the story will reveal the nature of unbelief. This is one of the challenges that we face as we study the Bible. The challenge is to make sure that we do not just read the history and miss the revelation that it is giving to us that is not immediately on the surface. As we look a little deeper and examine what is going on in the story, we begin to get a better understanding of how unbelief functions and how it operates.

That understanding is very important. Our responsibility to Christ is to proclaim the gospel and preach Jesus Christ. When you proclaim Christ, you are going to confront unbelief. Most all of the people to whom you give the Gospel will reject it. So as you confront unbelief, you will need to know how unbelief operates.

There is also a second underlying message here that **is** historic. The conversation that the blind man has with these leaders gives us a graphic demonstration of the divide between Christianity and Judaism. Or, if you will, the church and the synagogue. This is where the Jews and Christians divide into two separate realms. The Jews affirmed Moses. The believers affirm Christ. This division has existed ever since Christ's ministry to this very hour.

But the main lesson here is about unbelief. We're going to see how unbelief makes conclusions before it does examinations. It makes decisions based upon its own viewpoint. We're going to see how unbelief establishes false standards. We're going to see how unbelief demands more and more evidence, but when it receives that evidence, they try to twist it to meet their preconceived conclusions.

So, there's a kind of irrationality in unbelief. Unbelief does biased research. It can look at facts and come to the complete wrong conclusion. Unbelief is self-centered, selfish, ego-centric, and has a very powerful influence over the person who is deceived by it.

## All Stand and Read Scripture

### **John 9:13-16 (NASB)**

#### **Controversy over the Man**

<sup>13</sup> They \*brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. <sup>14</sup> Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." <sup>16</sup> Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them.

## Prayer

### BODY:

#### **I. UNBELIEF IS HOSTILE.**

**First of all**, I want you to see that unbelief is **hostile**. When you are dealing with unbelievers, you are dealing with someone with an aggressive attitude. When you do not believe in the Gospel, and you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you inevitably are hostile. They are spiritually blind and do not understand the truths of God. That is why it is unbelievers who ultimately persecute Christians. It was, religious unbelievers, rejecting the Gospel, who crucified Jesus by the hands of the Romans. It was unbelievers who persecuted the apostles and martyred almost all of them. It was unbelievers that were pouring out threats and slaughter against believers in the early chapters of Acts. It is unbelievers throughout all of human history that have killed Christians. It is unbelievers today that massacre Christians in various parts of the world.

So, unbelief is hostile. It poses a certain danger. So you need to see that and understand that. Now, already, the Pharisees have decided that Jesus is kind of a combination of demon-possessed, Satan-inspired, and insane. That is the labeling of Jesus that the Pharisees have been continuously spreading around. There is **hostility** in every one of those identifications. If you say He's insane, that's a very adverse kind of comment. If you

say He has a demon or He's satanic, those are very hostile declarations. So, the Pharisees are on record as being aggressively hostile toward Jesus, hostile in their unbelief.

Let us continue with the narrative.

### **John 9:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup> They \*brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind.

Now, who are the "they"? Let's go back to verse 8.

### **John 9:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup> Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?"

"They" were the neighbors and the people who knew him when he was blind and begging by the gate of the temple. So these people bring this man to the Pharisees.

You may ask, "Why did they bring him to the Pharisees?"

There are a number of possibilities of course, and maybe it is a blending of all of them. Maybe they thought that the Pharisees, who were the religious leaders, and the ones who supposedly knew the law, knew the Scripture, and knew God, could sort of sign off on how this happened.

The Pharisees were claiming that Jesus was not of God. **They** were neighbors and friends who had seen the man they had known as blind from birth all of a sudden having fresh eyes and vision. How could this be? This is incomprehensible to them, because as the blind man says later in the story, no one had ever heard of anyone being healed of blindness. And he was right. He knew his Old Testament. There's not one single healing of a blind man in the entire Old Testament. It was unheard of. He knew that.

So this is remarkable! Maybe they just wanted to understand how the Pharisees were going to explain how a man not of God could give him sight. Especially in light of the declaration that they had made in verse 22.

### **John 9:22 (NASB)**

<sup>22</sup> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.

The Pharisees had been continually discrediting Jesus, saying that He has a demon, He is insane, He is of Satan, He is not of God, and they were seeking His death. Since the Pharisees had made this law of excommunication, there was a certain fear and concern on the parts of the people that they were going to have to figure out **how** this Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders claimed was not of God, could heal this blind man. The miracle obviously suggested a divine power. But if they say He's the Messiah, they are going to get thrown out of the synagogue. So maybe they just needed some kind of further explanation why such a severe punishment for someone who wanted to affirm Jesus.

There's another possibility, and this would be a more negative one, and that is that they knew Jesus had broken the Sabbath. They knew that healing was not allowed on the Sabbath. This was not miracle healing, but medicinal healing. According to rabbinic law, if someone was sick, you couldn't do anything to make him better on the Sabbath. But if

someone was dying, you could sort of prevent him from dying, but not make him well. You were allowed to neutralize his moment of dire straits, but not make him any better, because that would be a violation of the Sabbath. So here, Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. They were perhaps going to report Him to the Pharisees on a negative level because He broke the Sabbath. Furthermore, He had taken clay, spit in the clay, and put it on the eyes of the man. You were not allowed to do that because that was doing work on the Sabbath. So, Jesus had violated the Sabbath. It seems to be in their mind. Look at **verse 14**.

### **John 9:14 (NASB)**

**<sup>14</sup> Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.**

This was, most likely, not the Sabbath when they met because they would not have convened on the Sabbath. But, they went back and told the Pharisees it happened on the Sabbath, so that must have been part of the conversation.

He had then been guilty of working on the Sabbath. They had these ridiculous laws. You couldn't fill a lamp with oil on the Sabbath. You couldn't light a wick on the Sabbath. If a man extinguished a lamp on the Sabbath to spare the lamp to save the oil and conserve the wick, he was guilty of violating the Sabbath. So you couldn't light one, you couldn't blow one out. They had laws that said a man may not go out on the Sabbath with sandals shod with nails because nails constitute a burden, and he's carrying a weight on the Sabbath, and that's a violation. A man was not allowed to cut his fingernails or pull a hair out of his head or beard. It just was absolutely ridiculous, adding burden after burden after burden on the Sabbath.

There is even a rabbinical statute prohibiting the spreading of saliva on anyone on the Sabbath because they believed saliva had some kind of medicinal value, and they weren't allowed to spread the saliva on the Sabbath. Jesus had done that. He had broken their Sabbath. The main concern was what do we do about Jesus not obeying the Sabbath laws?

By the way, the Lord did whatever He wanted on the Sabbath.

### **Mark 2:28 (NASB)**

**<sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."**

Remember when Jesus had healed the man at the pool on the Sabbath, and the Jewish leaders were after Him because He did it on the Sabbath?

### **John 5:16-18 (NASB)**

**<sup>16</sup> For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup> But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."**

**<sup>18</sup> For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.**

They accused Him of blasphemy because He made Himself equal with God. He paid no attention to their ridiculous rules that they had concocted to compound the Sabbath into the worst day of the week.

### **Mark 2:27 (NASB)**

<sup>27</sup> Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was made to be a day of comfort, and rest, and joy, and refreshment. And they had turned it into an impossible, ridiculous burden. So, He purposefully violated their Sabbath, the laws that **they** had invented, not God’s.

### **Matthew 15:9 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup> ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’”

So, this is the issue. They bring this man to the Pharisees and they asked him again how he received his sight in verse 15.

### **John 9:15 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, “He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see.”

Why does it say “again?” Because the neighbors had asked him back in verse 10, the neighbors and the others, and the people who knew him were saying to him, “**How then were your eyes opened?**” So, again, he has to answer the question, this time for the Pharisees, how he received his sight. He said to them, “**He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see.**” This was a very straightforward answer. What else could he say? That is all he knew. The Pharisees did not want to take the word of the neighbors or the folks that are there. They want a first-person testimony, so they ask the man. The other testimonies were inadequate for them. The man gives them a simple answer which was verifiable, by the way.

So the Pharisees use their preconceived perception of Jesus and responded in verse 16.

### **John 9:16a (NASB)**

<sup>16</sup> Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.”...

Now, stop right there at that point. This is supposed to be an investigation, which means the conclusion is supposed to come at the end. This is the conclusion before the investigation. You notice that they will not use Jesus' name. They call Him “**This Man**”. They have already made a conclusion. The conclusion is: this man is not from God, because He doesn’t keep the Sabbath.

So this is backwards, as unbelief would always reveal itself. We start with the conclusion, and then reason backwards. The conclusion is: they reject Him. They’re hostile toward Him.

However, there is a group within the Pharisees that can’t be so easily persuaded by this reasoning. They have their own reasoning, and it shows up in the middle of **verse 16**.

### **John 9:16b (NASB)**

**16... But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them.**

We assume the "others" were also Pharisees. How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs? They had their own logical reasoning. It went like this. Only God can open blind eyes. Jesus opened the eyes of this man born blind. Conclusion: Jesus is from God. Group A, it's the Sabbath issue. Group B, it's the supernatural issue. Group A is unmoved. We don't know about group B, but we do know at the end of **verse 16**, there was a division among them. This is hopeful, hopeful for group B, who just fade out of the picture.

So, there was a division among the people. Jesus brought division between people. So, we're going to follow group A because they sort of take charge. They are the hard-hearted unbelievers, the deniers.

The first thing we learn about them is that they have made their conclusion, and they are hostile toward anything that contradicts that conclusion. This is the first thing to know about unbelief. That kind of unbelief that is willful and resistant is also hostile.

Next week, Lord willing, we will look at other characteristics of unbelief.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The warning that we must take from this message is that Satan uses many ways to disguise a true and saving faith. Too many people are convinced in their own minds that they have the path to heaven all figured out. If they just live a moral life, go to church every once in a while to appease God, give to the poor, work hard, and provide for the family then God will reward them with eternal life with Him.

You see, manmade rules and religious views do not override God's Word. Just as the Pharisees diligently tried to follow their own rules to appease God, we find that it was to no avail. We are told to diligently search the scriptures to ensure that we are following the true word of God.

### **2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)**

**15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.**

God is our Creator and He desires that we come back to Him. He wants us to **believe** that Jesus died for our sins. To **repent** of our sins and fully surrender ourselves to Him. To love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength because of Who He is and for all that He has done for us. **Listen to His truths and obey!** This requires reading God's Word regularly to **know** God's truth and obey His commands.

**Go Tell it on the Mountain.**