John 9:13-23 Commentary
New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

(John 9:13) They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

"They" were the neighbors of the "beggar" Jesus healed. We have no evidence that his neighbors praised God for his healing, but they were curious to learn how he had regained his sight. They showed no regard for the man personally and only regarded him as a blind man who used to beg (see John 9:8). Knowing that the religious leaders had determined that anyone who confessed Jesus would be put out of the synagogue, his neighbors brought the man to the Pharisees (see John 9:22). Their actions remind us of the man Jesus healed in John chapter 5. As soon as the man Jesus healed learned Jesus was the one who had healed him, he went immediately and told the religious leaders: "Therefore they began persecuting Jesus" (John 5:16).

(John 9:14) Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

Even though Jesus suffered persecution for doing good, Jesus continued doing His Father's work on the Sabbath (John 5:17). The Pharisees had many manmade rules that they had added to the Law of God or the law given to Moses. They expected everyone to obey their rules, and they refused to even listen to other points of view or interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures. As the Son of God, Jesus expressed different interpretations of the Law of God from theirs and violated their self-centered rules, so they became furious with Jesus.

The Pharisees' interpretations of God's law violated the intention of God when He gave the law to Moses. God's law requires people to love their neighbor as themselves, the Law of Love (see Mark 12:31). According to the Pharisees' interpretation of God's law, a person could help keep a person from dying on the Sabbath, but it violated their Sabbath rule to make the person better. They considered making a person better a work. Thus, their interpretation made the Law of Love invalid. They considered it a sinful work to knead on the Sabbath, such as kneading bread, for that violated their Sabbath law. They forbid a person from rubbing their eyes with their spit on the Sabbath to make their eyes feel better or perhaps to remove dust, for that too was considered a work that violated their Sabbath law.

On the Sabbath, Jesus violated at least three and perhaps four or more Pharisaic rules. First, Jesus made the man better when He gave sight to the man who had been born blind. Second, Jesus kneaded when He took dust and spit and made mud to use as medicine for the man's eyes. Third, Jesus worked when He used His spit to make medicine. Fourth, Jesus may have violated a Pharisaic rule when He told the man to wash in the Pool of Siloam on the Sabbath, which may have been more than a "legal" (according to the Pharisees) Sabbath day's journey. The Pharisees considered a Sabbath day's journey to be less than a mile (though they found "legal" ways to extend the distance on the Sabbath to benefit themselves). From where the man met Jesus (and John does not tell us where Jesus met him) he may have had to walk more than a ½ mile, and we know this too would have concerned the Pharisees, who were very particular about criticizing anyone who did not obey all their laws (see Acts 1:12, for the distance of a Sabbath day's journey).

(John 9:15) Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."

The man who could now see clearly, bravely answered the Pharisees truthfully and succinctly. He probably knew that telling them much more than the basic facts would only get Jesus and him in more trouble with the Pharisees. Jesus had practiced medicine on the Sabbath and had made him better, for Jesus had healed him. Since putting spit on your own eyes to wash them on the Sabbath was considered sinful by the Pharisees, we can only imagine all the Pharisaic laws Jesus and the man probably broke when Jesus told him what he needed to do to be healed.

(John 9:16) Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided.

Like the man's neighbors, none of the Pharisees praised and thanked God for the miraculous healing of the man who had been born blind. He continued only as an object for debate and a means to attack Jesus. Some of the religious leaders did not praise God because they said Jesus could not be from God, for Jesus had violated their Sabbath rules. They believed anyone who did not adhere to their strict rules of conduct could not be from God (even as they looked for an opportunity to kill Jesus: see John 7:1). Others thought Jesus could not be a sinner because Jesus had performed this and other signs that showed He was doing God's work. Both groups acknowledged that Jesus had probably healed the man, but one group wanted more evidence. They showed no concern for the man who revealed "God's work in him" (see John 9:3). The Pharisees remained divided. The more objective group of Pharisees did not say much in defense of Jesus, because they knew the consequences of confessing Jesus as the Messiah. At some point, a Pharisee named Nicodemus (and other unnamed Pharisees) came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah (John 19:39).

(John 9:17) So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a

prophet."

The man Jesus healed revealed the work of God in him up to the level of his understanding. The Pharisees knew what they would do to the man (and so did the man) if he confessed Jesus. But the man who could see for the first time would not deny the One who had healed him. So, based on the sign Jesus had performed when He healed him, the man said he believed Jesus was a prophet. Jesus, who said He is the light of the world, healed the man, and the man could see light with first time in his life. Jesus gave the man physical light and spiritual light beyond the spiritual light of the Pharisees, who were spiritually blind.

(John 9:18) The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight

After admitting that all the evidence pointed to the fact that the man had been born blind and Jesus had healed him, some of the religious leaders still refused to believe the man or that Jesus was a prophet. After they called his parents, they all believed Jesus had healed him, because the parents gave irrefutable proof the man born blind was their son. According to the Law of God, the Pharisees only needed two witnesses to prove something was true. They had the testimony of the man on trial before them who could see. They had the testimony of the man's neighbors. They would soon have his parents' testimony. They had more than enough witnesses to confirm that what the man told them was true. But some still refused to acknowledge that Jesus was from God because Jesus would not teach as they wanted Jesus to teach. Jesus did not endorse their religious views or rules, so they looked for more reasons to kill Jesus.

(John 9:19) and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

Looking for anyone who would dispute the man's story about who healed him and how, the Pharisees called in the man's parents. They asked them the same questions. His parents would not deny their own son and that he had been born blind, but they could not serve as eyewitnesses regarding

how he could now see. They only had the word of their son, but they could have been character witnesses for their son and told the Pharisees that their son always told the truth.

(John 9:20) His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;

The parents affirmed what everyone knew. Their affirmation took some courage because the Jews of that day thought that the parents of blind or disabled people were sinners. Their acknowledgment that the man born blind was their child would have confirmed for the judgmental Pharisees that they were sinners and worthy of condemnation. (Remember the disciples' question about sin and the cause of the man's blindness in John 9:2). By answering as they did, his parents opened themselves up to ridicule when they claimed the man was their son. Eventually, the Pharisees told the man (and his parents), "You were born entirely in sins" (John 9:34).

(John 9:21) but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."

After admitting he was their son, they could truthfully say they had no firsthand knowledge of how he could see or who healed him. They quickly said, "Ask him," for he was of age to answer the questions of the Pharisees. Without coercion or fear, the man did speak for himself when he spoke the truth about Jesus, but his parents were afraid of the Pharisees.

(John 9:22) His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

John explained that his parents were afraid of the religious leaders for they (as well as their neighbors) knew that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah (and their son's healing pointed to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah) would no longer be considered a part of the Jewish community (the synagogue). Not only would they no longer have access to God (as they

supposed) for they could no longer worship in the synagogue or enter the temple, but they would also be shunned by their neighbors. Whatever they did to earn a living would be destroyed, for their neighbors would no longer be their customers. If they were put out of the synagogue, they would need to move away and hope no one discovered that they had been put out. Their son would no longer be able to beg and receive alms; of course, he would want to do meaningful work, but no one in their Jewish community would hire him for he too would be cast out of the synagogue (see John 9:34).

(John 9:23) Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

John carefully explained why the man and his parents answered the Pharisees with as few words as possible. On the one hand, we see the courage of the man who received his sight, and on the other hand we see the fear that the powerful Pharisees could instill in those who disagreed with them and their rules. Throughout the Gospel of John, we see the courage Jesus displayed when He always told the truth and looked for opportunities to always do the loving and merciful works of God.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What was the problem with Jesus healing someone on the Sabbath?

2. How did the man born blind describe His healing?

3. In what way were people divided after Jesus healed the man born blind?

4. When asked, what did the man born blind say about Jesus? Why did this take courage?

5. When questioned, why were the parents of the man Jesus healed afraid?

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