

**The Yale Divinity School Bible Study
New Canaan, Connecticut
Fall, 2007**

The Gospel of John

V. Man Born Blind

Introduction:

This is one of those stories in John's Gospel that seems to give us a picture, not only of Jesus' ministry but of the development of the church in John's time and community. The text reflects tension between the new community of messianic Jews (the Christians) and the traditional Mosaic Jews. The dispute between the man born blind and his interlocutors may well reflect a dispute between those who believe in Christ as God's Messiah and those who think that he is an imposter and a fraud.

Notice how the story unfolds as a kind of drama. Characters exit and enter the scene. There is conflict, crisis and resolution. After the leaders of the synagogue cast the blind man out, Jesus seeks him out. For John's Gospel true sight, true faith seems always to involve both the courage of the believer and the goodness of Christ who seeks the believer.

Notice how the blind man's understanding of Jesus deepens as the story progresses. Is this a clue to the way the Gospel understands the growth of faith?

And notice how the judgment that Jesus pronounces at the end is judgment for here and now, not just for the future.

Questions for reading:

“Blindness,” like thirst and hunger, can have metaphorical senses. What is the major thrust of the use of the motif here?

How does the story progress? What does the man born blind know at the end of the story that he doesn’t get during the story?

Questions for discussion:

Do the references to tensions between the healed man and his community reflect elements in the history of the Johannine community? In any religious community?

What does Jesus tell about the nature of sin and suffering in his response to the disciples question about “who sinned?” (Jn 9: 2-3) How does that relate to the opponents claim about Jesus that he is not from God and the blind man’s defense that Jesus is no sinner (Jn. 9:16-17).

For further study:

Basic:

John Painter, "John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28 (1986) 31–61.

More challenging:

J. Louis Martyn, "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community," in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (3rd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003) 145-167.