

Homiletics Analysis: John 9:1–41

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

John 9 narrates the healing of a man born blind and its extended aftermath. The chapter opens with a theological question from the disciples about the cause of the man's blindness, which Jesus reframes entirely: this blindness exists not as punishment for past sin but as the occasion for displaying God's works. Jesus acts decisively — spitting, making mud, sending the man to wash — and the healing is reported with striking economy. The man simply goes, washes, and comes back seeing. What follows is far longer than the miracle itself: a multi-stage interrogation by the Pharisees, the parents' fearful evasion, the healed man's increasingly bold testimony, his expulsion from the synagogue, Jesus' return to him, and a final exchange in which Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man, the man worships, and Jesus delivers His verdict on the nature of true blindness. The chapter's literary architecture is deliberate — seven scenes that form a chiasm around the man's progressive confession and the religious leaders' progressive hardening.

This Text — Intent

God is using this chapter to confront every reader with an unavoidable binary: there are those who cannot see and know it (and therefore receive sight), and there are those who claim to see and are therefore blind. The chapter does not permit neutrality. The healed man moves from “the man called Jesus” (v. 11) to “a prophet” (v. 17) to “from God” (v. 33) to “Lord, I believe” with full worship (v. 38) — a progression that models genuine faith responding to grace. The Pharisees move in the exact opposite direction — from investigation to rejection to excommunication to spiritual verdict — modeling the blindness that comes from self-sufficient religious certainty. The intent is not primarily informational. God is pressing every reader to ask: *Which trajectory am I on?* The question is not whether the reader has religious knowledge but whether they have acknowledged their blindness and received sight from Jesus.

Subject Sentence: Jesus opens the eyes of the physically and spiritually blind — and judges those who claim they can see.

Primary Claim: The one who knows he cannot see receives sight from Jesus; the one who insists he can see remains in darkness — and this chapter forces every reader to declare which they are.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Disciples' Question and the Problem of Retributive Theology (vv. 1–5)

A common homiletical error is to treat Jesus' answer in verse 3 — “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents” — as a universal theological statement ruling out any connection between suffering and sin. Some traditions (particularly popular Evangelical preaching) use this verse as a blanket theodicy: “Suffering is never about past sin; it's always about God's glory.” This overreads the verse. Jesus is not laying down a universal principle; He is making a specific claim about *this man's* blindness. The Old Testament is clear that suffering can be a consequence of sin (Deuteronomy 28; John 5:14 — Jesus Himself tells the man at the pool, “Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you”). Reformed theology holds both truths in tension: suffering is not always retributive, but it is never outside God's sovereign purpose. The corrective is to let Jesus' answer be as specific as He made it — He is redirecting the disciples from a speculative causal question to a missional one. The point is not “sin never causes suffering” but “stop asking whose sin caused this and start asking what God intends to do through it.”

The Mud and the Sabbath — Sacramental and Legalistic Misreadings (vv. 6–16)

Roman Catholic and some Anglo-Catholic readings have occasionally read the mud and washing at Siloam sacramentally — as a sign pointing toward baptism. This reading should be acknowledged as capturing a genuine typological resonance (washing, water, sight, new life), but it should not be pressed into sacramental causation. The text nowhere implies that the *washing* healed him rather than the word and act of Jesus. The man goes, washes, and comes back seeing — the agency belongs to the one who sent him, not to the water. Reformed reading rightly locates the efficacy in Christ's word and will; the physical means are instruments, not causes. On the Pharisees' Sabbath objection, the text deliberately presents the conflict without resolving which specific Sabbath-law tradition they were invoking. The point is not which Halakhic ruling applies but that the religious leaders' system has become incapable of recognizing a work of God when they see it. The Sabbath question is a window into their blindness, not an invitation to adjudicate first-century Halakha.

The Man Born Blind as a Model of Saving Faith

Both Wesleyan and Reformed traditions affirm that the man's progression models genuine faith, but they read its mechanics differently. Wesleyan-Arminian readings emphasize the man's own courageous response — he keeps confessing despite pressure, he reasons boldly, he refuses to recant. On this reading, his faith is substantially his own moral achievement under grace. Reformed reading sees the same progression differently: the man's boldness is the *fruit* of grace, not the *condition* of it. He is healed before he believes anything theologically adequate (he does not even know who Jesus is when he is healed, v. 12). His sight is given to him; his faith follows as the Spirit illumines. The Wesleyan reading

captures the genuine human drama of costly confession; the Reformed reading is more attentive to the narrative sequence — Jesus acts, the man receives, the man’s understanding grows. This is regeneration preceding and producing faith, not faith preceding regeneration. That said, the chapter does not turn the man into a passive recipient — his confession is costly and real, and the text honors his courage without making it the ground of his reception of grace.

Verse 39 and Double Predestination

Jesus’ statement — “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind” — has been read by some as a statement of double predestination (Calvin) and by others as a purely contingent statement about how the gospel functions (Arminian, Lutheran). The Reformed reading acknowledges both dimensions: there is a sovereign divine purpose in the division the gospel creates, and that division runs along the line of self-sufficiency versus acknowledged need. This does not require a mechanical reading of double predestination from this verse — the context is clearly about the *posture* of those who see versus those who do not. But the Reformed instinct to hear sovereign divine agency behind the division is more faithful to John’s overall theology (cf. John 6:37–44; 10:26–29) than a reading that makes the blindness entirely self-generated without divine governance. Both truths are present: the Pharisees harden themselves, and God’s purposes are not thereby frustrated.

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 35:5; 42:6–7** — The eschatological promise that God will open blind eyes is a covenant marker of the messianic age; Jesus’ act in John 9 is the fulfillment of these Isaiah texts, identifying Him as the promised Servant-Messiah.
- **Exodus 4:11** — “Who made him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?” — grounds Jesus’ reframing of the disciples’ question; disability is not outside God’s sovereign purpose, and the healer of the blind is always ultimately YHWH.
- **John 1:4–5, 9** — The prologue’s identification of Jesus as “the light of the world” and “the true light” is enacted in chapter 9; what was stated theologically is demonstrated concretely.
- **John 3:19–21** — The judgment-by-response-to-light motif introduced in chapter 3 is dramatized in chapter 9; the Pharisees are the paradigm case of those who love darkness because their deeds are evil.
- **2 Corinthians 4:4–6** — Paul’s identification of spiritual blindness as satanic work overcome by God’s creative word (“Let light shine out of darkness”) is the theological counterpart to John 9’s drama; both passages frame coming to sight as an act of divine creation, not human decision.

Aim: To lead the reader through John 9 in a way that forces honest self-examination of whether they are on the trajectory of the healed man (acknowledged blindness receiving sight) or the Pharisees (claimed sight deepening into blindness), and to show that the only movement from blindness to sight runs through Jesus.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
9:1	Jesus and disciples encounter a man blind from birth	“From birth” is significant — this is not acquired blindness; it establishes the impossibility of self-remedy
9:2	Disciples ask: who sinned, this man or his parents?	Reflects common first-century retributive theology; assumes suffering is punishment
9:3–5	Jesus reframes: neither sinned; this happened so God’s works might be displayed; “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day”	“We” — Jesus includes the disciples in the mission; v. 5: Jesus identifies Himself as “the light of the world”
9:6–7	Jesus makes mud, anoints the man’s eyes, sends him to wash in the Pool of Siloam	“Siloam” means “sent” — the narrator pauses to note this; the man is sent by the one who is Himself “sent” by the Father
9:7b	The man goes, washes, and comes back seeing	Narrated with complete economy — four verbs, no commentary
9:8–9	Neighbors and acquaintances debate whether this is the same man	The first of many attempts to deny or evade the reality of what has happened
9:10–12	They ask him how his eyes were opened; he recounts what happened; they ask where Jesus is; he does not know	First confession: “The man called Jesus” — minimal but honest; he knows what happened even if he doesn’t yet know who did it

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
9:13–15	The man is brought to the Pharisees; they interrogate him; he repeats his account	The detail that Jesus made mud and opened his eyes on the Sabbath is introduced here as the flashpoint
9:16	Division among the Pharisees: “This man is not from God” (Sabbath violation) vs. “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?”	The miracle itself creates the crisis; the Pharisees cannot assimilate what they cannot control
9:17	Pharisees ask the man his opinion; he says, “He is a prophet”	Second confession: escalation — the man moves from “the man called Jesus” to “a prophet”
9:18–23	Pharisees summon the parents; parents confirm the identity and the fact of blindness from birth but deflect on the “how”; they fear expulsion from the synagogue	The threat of excommunication is established as the social coercion behind the evasion
9:24	Pharisees summon the man again; tell him to “give glory to God” — a formal charge to confess wrongdoing; “We know that this man is a sinner”	“Give glory to God” in Jewish idiom = confess the truth, as in Joshua 7:19; they are demanding he recant his claim about Jesus
9:25	The man’s reply: “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I see.”	The epistemological pivot of the chapter; he stakes everything on undeniable personal experience
9:26–27	Pharisees ask again how it was done; man asks why they want to hear it again — “Do you also want to become his disciples?”	Irony and courage; the man is now interrogating his interrogators
9:28–29	Pharisees revile him: “You are his disciple; we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this	The claim of Mosaic authority versus acknowledged ignorance about Jesus — the irony is that Moses wrote of Jesus

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	man, we do not know where he comes from.”	(5:46)
9:30–33	The man’s extended argument: it is remarkable that they don’t know where He comes from, given that He opened a blind man’s eyes; God doesn’t listen to sinners; “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”	Third and fullest confession before his expulsion; he has now out-argued the trained religious authorities
9:34	Pharisees expel him from the synagogue: “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?”	They use his blindness as a weapon — the very thing Jesus refused to do in v. 3
9:35	Jesus hears of his expulsion and finds him; asks: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”	Jesus seeks him out — initiative belongs to Jesus, not to the man’s completed faith
9:36	The man: “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”	Genuine openness; the question is not skeptical but seeking
9:37	Jesus: “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”	The revelation is direct and personal — the moment of full disclosure
9:38	The man: “Lord, I believe” — and he worships Jesus	Fourth and final confession: complete faith and full worship; “Lord” (κύριε) here carries full weight
9:39	Jesus: “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”	The chapter’s theological verdict; the miracle is a parable of the gospel’s double effect
9:40–41	Pharisees ask if they are blind; Jesus: “If you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”	The closing verdict: claimed sight is the condition of culpable blindness; acknowledged blindness is the condition of receiving sight

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	9:1–5	The Question Reframed: Whose Sin? No — Whose Glory?
2	9:6–7	The Sign: Mud, Water, and Sight
3	9:8–12	First Interrogation: Neighbors Ask
4	9:13–17	Second Interrogation: Pharisees Ask (Round One)
5	9:18–23	Third Interrogation: Parents Deflect
6	9:24–34	Fourth Interrogation: Pharisees Ask (Round Two) — and Expel
7	9:35–41	The Son of Man Finds the Man — and Judges the Pharisees

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Jesus opens the eyes of the physically and spiritually blind — and judges those who claim they can see.

Primary Claim: The one who knows he cannot see receives sight from Jesus; the one who insists he can see remains in darkness — and this chapter forces every reader to declare which they are.

Applications (Five)

1. Stop explaining your suffering and start watching for God’s work in it. (*Mind/Belief*)

The disciples’ question — “Who sinned?” — is the question every sufferer is tempted to ask first: What did I do to deserve this? What did my parents do? Jesus does not answer the question He is asked because it is the wrong question. He reframes it entirely: the operative question is not “why did this happen?” but “what is God intending to display through this?” This is not a denial that suffering is painful or that causes matter. It is a

refusal to let the backward-looking guilt question consume the energy that belongs to the forward-looking faith question. The congregation needs to hear that when they are in a season of unexplained suffering, the first move is not retrospective self-audit but forward-looking attention: *Where is God at work in this, and can I have eyes to see it?*

2. Examine whether your religious certainty has become the very thing preventing you from seeing Jesus. (Mind/Belief)

The Pharisees are not villains by temperament; they are experts by training. They know Moses. They know the law. They are the custodians of the tradition. And precisely because they know so much, they cannot assimilate what does not fit their categories: “We know this man is a sinner.” “We know God spoke to Moses.” Their certainty is not false — it is incomplete. And their incompleteness, unacknowledged, hardens into the blindness Jesus diagnoses. The contemporary application is uncomfortably close: the person who has been in church for decades, who knows the right answers, who can argue the right positions, is in exactly the position where religious certainty can calcify into the inability to see. The question to press is not “Do you know the right things?” but “Has your knowing made you humble or self-sufficient?”

3. Let what you undeniably know about Jesus be enough to stand on, even when you cannot answer every objection. (Affections/Worship)

“One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I see.” The healed man cannot answer the Pharisees’ Halakhic questions about the Sabbath. He cannot answer their theological objections. He cannot produce the epistemological foundations they demand. But he knows what happened to him, and he refuses to surrender it. This is not anti-intellectualism — it is the proper relationship between experienced grace and unresolved questions. The application is to the believer who is being pressed by objections — intellectual, cultural, relational — to recant or qualify what they know Christ has done. The man’s model is not “argue better” but “hold onto what is undeniably true in your own history with God, and let that be the ground you stand on while you continue to learn.”

4. Feel the weight of what it costs to confess Jesus when it puts your belonging at risk — and worship the one who seeks you out when you are expelled. (Affections/Worship)

The man loses his community. The synagogue was not merely a religious institution — it was the organizing center of social, economic, and familial life. Expulsion meant isolation. And he did not choose the fight; he simply told the truth about what happened to him. The pastoral application is to those in the congregation who have paid a real social price for their confession of Christ — family relationships fractured, professional doors closed, community belonging lost. They need to hear not only that the cost was worth it but that Jesus specifically comes looking for those who have been cast out for His name. “Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him...” — the initiative is entirely Jesus’. He does not wait for the man to find Him; He finds the man. That is the pastoral word for the expulsion experience.

5. Confess specifically and honestly what you do not yet see or understand about Jesus, and bring those confessions to Him directly. (*Will/Behavior*)

The man's progression — “the man called Jesus” → “a prophet” → “from God” → “Lord, I believe” — is not a failure of faith at earlier stages; it is faith operating with the light available at each moment, growing as more light is given. The man never overstates what he knows. He says “I do not know” multiple times. He does not manufacture certainty he does not possess. The application is a call to honesty in prayer and conversation with Jesus: name what you do not yet see, what you cannot yet say, where your understanding is genuinely incomplete — and bring that incompleteness to the one who seeks you out. Growing faith is not faith that has arrived; it is faith that keeps confessing truthfully at each stage.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: John 9 displays the sovereign freedom of God to work through unexpected instruments (mud, water, a word of command) and to accomplish purposes that transcend human categories of cause and blame. It establishes that physical sight and spiritual sight are analogically related — both are divine gifts, not human achievements, and both can be withheld or given according to God's sovereign purpose. The chapter grounds Jesus' messianic identity in the fulfillment of Isaianic promise (the opening of blind eyes as an eschatological sign) while simultaneously displaying His divine authority over creation — He is the one who made eyes (cf. Exodus 4:11), and He now remakes them. The chapter also teaches that the gospel creates a genuine and irreversible division: those who receive it with acknowledged need are illumined; those who approach it with established self-sufficiency are judged. This is not a failure of the gospel but its designed double effect.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: John 9 is a paradigm case of Reformed soteriology in narrative form. The man is healed before he understands who Jesus is — he does not believe his way into sight; he receives sight and then believes. This is the *ordo salutis* displayed in story: regeneration (the gift of sight) precedes and produces faith (his progressive confession and final worship). The entire chapter resists any reading that makes the reception of grace contingent on prior human quality or decision — the man contributes nothing to his healing and does not even fully understand it until Jesus completes the revelation. Equally significant is the chapter's treatment of the means of grace: Jesus uses physical means (mud, water, a pool) to accomplish a spiritual and physical work — affirming that God works through ordinary instruments without being constrained by them. The Pharisees' trajectory simultaneously displays the Reformed doctrine of judicial hardening: their continued rejection of Christ is not merely their own

decision but the revealed direction of a divine verdict. “Your guilt remains” (v. 41) is not a warning that can still be reversed within the narrative — it is a sentence.

Main Takeaway

You are already on one of two trajectories in this chapter: the man who says “I was blind, and now I see,” or the Pharisee who says “We see” and remains in darkness. The difference is not religious knowledge — the Pharisees had more of that than the blind man ever would. The difference is this: one man knew he could not fix himself and received what Jesus gave him; the others were certain they already had what they needed and refused what Jesus offered. Come with your blindness. Jesus finds the people who have been cast out.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating verse 3 as a universal theodicy.** “This man’s blindness is not about his sin, therefore suffering is never about sin” is a category error. Jesus is making a specific claim about this specific man. A sermon that uses verse 3 to dismiss any connection between sin and consequences will misread both John 9 and the broader canonical testimony. The corrective is to honor Jesus’ specificity: He is redirecting, not universalizing.
- **Making the healed man’s courage the main point rather than Jesus’ initiative.** The man’s boldness is real and moving, but it is the *fruit* of grace, not its *ground*. A sermon that primarily calls the congregation to “be brave like the healed man” has slipped into moralism. The man is bold because he was healed — the healing is primary, the boldness is derivative. Preach the healer before preaching the healed man’s response.
- **Resolving the Sabbath question rather than using it.** Some expositors get drawn into a historical discussion of which Sabbath-law tradition the Pharisees are invoking and whether Jesus technically violated it. This is exegetically interesting but homiletically disastrous. The text does not resolve the question; it uses the question to reveal the Pharisees’ condition. The sermon should do the same: the Sabbath dispute is a diagnostic window into what happens when a religious system becomes incapable of recognizing God at work.
- **Using verse 25 as a cheap anti-intellectual slogan.** “I was blind, and now I see” is one of Scripture’s most powerful lines, but it is sometimes preached as though it licenses the abandonment of theological reflection — “I don’t need to know doctrine; I just know what Jesus did for me.” The man in the text is not anti-intellectual; he argues carefully and well. His appeal to experience is not instead of

reasoning — it is the unmovable foundation from which he reasons. Preach experience as the ground of faith's reasoning, not as its substitute.

- **Preaching the Pharisees as safely distant villains.** The Pharisees are the easiest characters in this chapter to condemn and the most important characters for the congregation to identify with. Their religious competence, their institutional loyalty, their certainty that they are on the right side — these are live temptations for every serious churchgoer. A sermon that allows the congregation to comfortably despise the Pharisees has failed. The preacher must make the Pharisees' trajectory uncomfortably recognizable before the healed man's trajectory becomes genuinely attractive.
- **Underpreaching the expulsion scene (vv. 34–35).** The detail that “Jesus heard that they had cast him out” and then “found him” is one of the most tender moments in the Fourth Gospel and one of the most consistently overlooked in preaching. For those in the congregation who have experienced real social cost for their confession of Christ — or who are afraid of it — this is the pastoral word they most need: the one who is cast out is the one Jesus specifically comes looking for.