

Gospel of John #16

A Three-Act Play

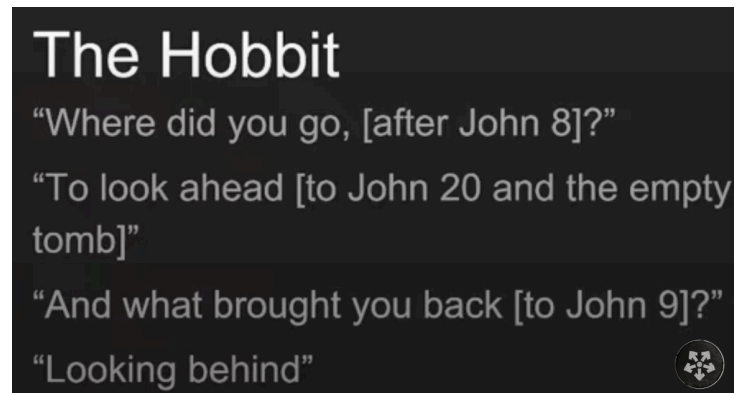
John 9:1-20

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Blindness is a good warning for all of us, especially for watching the Total Eclipse tomorrow.

The Hobbit and the Book of John:

Bilbo the Hobbit is a prequel to Lord of the Rings. Early in their adventures, Gandalf leaves Bilbo et al. and they meet evil trolls and lose track of time. The night gives into dawn and the trolls turn to stone with help from Gandalf. Thorin, the dwarf leader, says:



This is a great answer! I couldn't get this out of my head this week. Last week we were in John 20 for Easter and the empty tomb and previously in John 8. Now we are “behind” in John 9 in terms of the resurrection. But we read everything in light of the resurrection of Jesus: We ARE Easter people. During Eastertide and always, we celebrate the resurrection.

Also, we are in a sequence of stories about light. In the Hobbit, the path of righteousness is seen at the first gleam of dawn: the trolls are stone. Last week, the light broke at the resurrection. Jesus is the light of the world and today we read about the healing of a man born blind:

Act 1: The Healing

John 9

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

The 2003 movie, "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," is about 19th century literary figures who are turned into superhumans in a barebones way. For example, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde become the Hulk. Dorian Gray (from the Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde) is invulnerable. In the book, Gray is very vain and has a portrait made of himself. He then sells his soul to remain young; he remains young yet the portrait gets older. Eventually, he becomes overwhelmed by his sin and he slashes the painting. When his servants find him, the painting is young and he is old. This is sometimes our understanding of sin, going back two millennia. We believe that the things we do impact the way we look. We think that if someone looks like a sinner, they must be a sinner and if someone looks young and healthy, they must not be a sinner.

This goes to the John 9 story: someone must have sinned to make this man born blind.

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4** As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. **5** While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. **7** "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

This is a little "EWW!" Also, Jesus says night is coming; the disciples could not see things in view of the resurrection. They are in a state of hiding because they don't know what will happen. But Jesus knows; he is the light of the world.

8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?"

9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

There is a theme of mistrust that the man was healed. Imagine if Russ Lewis didn't have a beard any longer: if we saw him, we might think he is a different person! The blind man in this story must have looked and behaved differently so questioning that he isn't the same person is understandable.

Act II: The Trial

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. **14** Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. **15** Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

17 Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."

When the Pharisees find out the man was healed on the Sabbath, they have issues. The work of a doctor to heal someone on the Sabbath is still work. Therefore, Jesus must be a sinner because he is violating their laws about what you can and cannot do on the Sabbath. Yet, they wondered how could Jesus possibly give someone sight and yet be a sinner? They argue this back and forth.

18 They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. **19** "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. **21** But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age;

(Perhaps an unintentional funny moment in this story)

he will speak for himself.” **22** His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. **23** That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

It’s funny yet at the same time, the parents are throwing their son under the bus because they don’t want to be kicked out of the synagogue. Anyone who says Jesus is the Christ will be kicked out. It wasn’t like today where there were many other churches to choose from: The synagogue was THE center of community and life, your family and your story, and where you find God and truth. To be kicked out, was to lose your identity entirely. So really, they are worried about losing their entire identity with significant consequences.

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

25 He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

If you have time this week, read about John Newton who wrote Amazing Grace. It’s a good story that uses this line, “I was blind but now I see.”

26 Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

27 He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

There is a genuineness to this story: it feels earnest, not snarky.

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! **29** We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

30 The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. **31** We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.

Keep in mind this man, a beggar for his entire life, is talking to the learned men.

32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. **33** If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

34 To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

Steeped in sin at birth: this is the same question the disciples asked. They are concerned about the man’s condition at birth. Jesus' work is all about His Kingdom and everything reflects back to the scriptures and prophecy. When he heals a man born blind, if you know the scriptures, you see the kingdom of God breaking through in the works of Jesus.

Isa 35: 3-6:

3 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;

4 say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”

5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

When the kingdom of God comes, the eyes of the blind will be opened, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap! ***This is the kingdom breaking through!*** They say they don't even know where he comes from yet the man thinks it's remarkable that they have read the scriptures and don't know where Jesus is from. He is thrown out of the synagogues and the thing his parents feared happens to him (although perhaps it's not a loss to the man because he has never been allowed into the synagogue up to this point in his life because of his disability).

Act II: The Verdict

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

36 “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

I assume that if Jesus can sneak away in crowds, he can also find people in crowds. But if we read the full picture, Jesus is talking to the man **IN FRONT** of the Pharisees. Let's reread vs. 35-41 in light of WHO is present!

The picture of a crowd around Jesus listening to this conversation is remarkable: The healed man worships and believes right in front of the people who could throw him out. Yet, Jesus handed his verdict in front of them as well: ***They can see the blind being healed and yet DON'T see, they aren't walking in the light.*** They are so caught up in the rules they made about the sabbath which defined work on the sabbath and yet they missed the purpose of worshiping God on the Sabbath.

Mark 3:4-5

4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. **5** He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored

Here again, they are missing what is important and what is happening right in front of them. This is IRONIC!

Applications

Step into The Light

I want to go back to the idea of sin's impact and look at the picture of Dorian Gray. Let's turn this into YOUR picture: when you look at your picture, the enemy wants you to see the impact of your sin and feel SHAME and brokenness: he tells you that you cannot bring this into the light. The truth is that if you are a child of God, you are walking in the light. The picture does not accurately reflect who you are. Sin does impact on others around us but when you look at your picture, it's not the same despicable character in the picture. God has put HIS robe around us and offered us a feast. The reality of who I am is not the picture in the dark of shame and sin. It's the picture in the light. We walk into this when we confess Jesus as the Christ.

Confess Jesus as the Christ

Notice the Juxtaposition of the Pharisees who see yet don't believe. Thomas doesn't believe in John 20, Jesus reappears and lets Thomas touch his wounds. Because you have seen me and believed; blessed are those who haven't seen and yet believe. John 9 invites us to confession and belief. We can join this in the middle of those who don't believe.