

The Gospel of John

Part 10

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The Book of Signs

- The Book of Signs (John 2-11) include these stories
 - The turning of water into wine in Cana of Galilee (first sign, John 2)
 - The story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus and being told he must be “born again” (John 3)
 - The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4)
 - Healing the Gentile official’s son (second sign, John 4)
 - The man crippled for 38 years (third sign, John 5)
 - Andrew and Philip (John 6)
 - The feeding of the multitude (fourth sign, John 6)
 - Jesus walks on the water (fifth sign, John 6)
 - His brothers, arguments over who he is (John 7)
 - Adulterous woman, Abraham arguments (John 8)
 - The man born blind (sixth sign, John 9)
 - Lazarus is raised from the dead (seventh sign, John 11)

The Man Born Blind (John 9)

- The Gospel of Mark has a story of a man born blind, but it is a bit different from the story in John's gospel
- In Mark (chapter 8), the blind man is from Bethsaida and Jesus puts spittle on his eyes twice before he gains his sight
- In Mark, the blind man is symbolic of the disciple Peter; Peter is from Bethsaida, so Mark says the blind man is from there; Peter takes a while to realize that Jesus is the messiah, so Mark portrays two attempts to cure the man's blindness before he can see; Mark's story also is placed shortly before Peter's confession of Jesus as the messiah when he was in Caesarea Philippi, further linking the story to Peter
- Spong says that it is possible that John's having Jesus tell the blind man to wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam may be a midrashic reference to the story of Elisha curing Naaman of leprosy by having him wash in the Jordan River (II Kings 5)
 - Midrashic interpretations indicate two things: that the story being told is not literal; instead it indicates that the author is following the Jewish tradition of seeing God working in new ways that are echos of what God has done in the past
- Following the restoration of sight, a debate erupted as to the identity of the blind man: Was he really blind, or did he just look like the blind man people had seen? he clearly states he was born blind; his parents are even asked the question and they confirm he was, but do not say who healed him "*for fear*" of the religious leaders; the gospel author is inserting into his story of what happens in Jesus' time, the same fear of religious persecution that members of the Johanne community have decades later

The Man Born Blind (John 9)

- The man born blind is the sixth sign
- The man born blind is not a real person, but is a *symbol* of those members of John's community *who came to see Jesus as the messiah*, embraced the new found freedom this represents, and *realized that they had been blind before* they grasped this new understanding
- Spong discusses the reaction various characters in the signs stories have to the transformation Jesus calls for; there are *two stages: (1) the initial realization of new freedom, and (2) the question of whether a person can summon the courage to stay transformed, or shrink back to the safety from which they came*
 - “the mother of the Lord” in the Cana wedding story, Jesus’ brothers, and Nicodemus do not make the first step
 - The crippled man made the first step, but fails the second
 - The man born blind makes both steps
- Spong on the man born blind: “He stands for the members of the Johannine community, who saw themselves as having once lived in the darkness of not seeing, but having been changed when “the light of the world” permeated their darkness. This in turn increased their anxiety, making it necessary for them to choose whether they would embrace the light or deny it. Would they simply stave off the threat and then seek to rebuild their security walls and settle into the routines of their past, or would they step into the light and walk with courage into the unknown, exposing themselves to the new realities that living in the light always brings.”

The Man Born Blind (John 9)

- Spong says that the story of the man born blind was never intended to be read as a literal story. It was a description of what members of his community endured when they had been excommunicated from the synagogue and thus could no longer live in the faith system that they had had for their entire lives.
- Shortly earlier, in John 8:59, as Jesus exited the Temple (the ultimate symbol of Judaism) to escape those who would kill him, he was leaving behind the limitations that bound the faith of the Jews to the past
- Jesus is “the light”, the new understanding, that is to replace the old, flawed understanding: the function of the Temple was to be replaced by the life of Jesus; hence the quotation from Jesus in John 2:13-22 “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up.”
- The function of the Temple is now taken over by Jesus; the defenders of the religious past had crucified Jesus, but God had raised Jesus up in glory; this is the backdrop of the story of the man born blind
- “Jesus, the fully human one, offers the only pathway to God because the pathway into divinity can be found only through the expansion and the transcendence of the limits of the human.” This requires a new, greater human consciousness, a new understanding of God, a new vision of what human life can be. Jesus brings this new consciousness, and it clashes with the old Israel (Judaism), portrayed by the man born blind, and this represents the situation in John’s day. In John 9:34, the blind man is cast out of the synagogue. Jesus finds him, and the man worships Jesus, because God is present in the life of Jesus.
- John is claiming that the deniers of Jesus are the ones who are really blind, in that they claim to understand God, yet do not recognize Jesus as the light of the world

The Man Born Blind (John 9)

Now as *Jesus* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. ⁴ I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. ⁷ And He said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. ⁸ Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, “Is not this he who sat and begged?”

⁹ Some said, “This is he.” Others *said*, “He is like him.” He said, “I am *he*.” ¹⁰ Therefore they said to him, “How were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered and said, “A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed, and I received sight.” ¹² Then they said to him, “Where is He?” He said, “I do not know.”

The Pharisees Excommunicate the Healed Man

¹³ They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.”

¹⁶ Therefore some of the Pharisees said, “This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them.

The Man Born Blind (John 9)

17 They said to the blind man again, “What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.” 18 But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. 19 And they asked them, saying, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”

20 His parents answered them and said, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself.” 22 His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that* He *was* Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

24 So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, “Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner.” 25 He answered and said, “Whether He is a sinner *or not* I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.” 26 Then they said to him again, “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes? 27 He answered them, “I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear *it* again? Do you also want to become His disciples?”

28 Then they reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. 29 We know that God spoke to Moses; *as for* this *fellow*, we do not know where He is from.” 30 The man answered and said to them, “Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! 31 Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. 32 Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. 33 If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.” 34 They answered and said to him, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” And they cast him out.

The Man Born Blind (John 9)

True Vision and True Blindness

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?”

36 He answered and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”

37 And Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.”

38 Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped Him.

39 And Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.”

40 Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, “Are we blind also?”

41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.

John 10

- Spong does not discuss John 10, but I find it interesting and I think we should read it for completeness
- In what seems to me to be a continuation of the dichotomy between those in the light who follow Jesus and those who continue to live in darkness, this chapter portrays a similar division except the followers of Jesus are referred to as sheep; these sheep know their master, recognize his voice, and are not led astray by a stranger whose voice they do not recognize, where it is plausible to me to think of “voice” as symbolic of “message”; Jesus refers to himself as the good shepherd
- As in the story of the man born blind, where Jesus accuses his detractors as being blind, in this story of the sheep, John states that the people Jesus is talking to did not understand what he was saying to them
- Jesus says that he is leading his sheep so that they may live life more abundantly; he goes on to say that he is willing to give his life for the sake of his sheep, which sounds a lot like a willingness to be crucified, but without any hint of his being a sacrifice for human sin to save people from the wrath of God
- Also, Jesus mentions having other sheep, not *“of this fold”*, which I find very interesting. This does not strike me as referring to people other than the Jews, though it might. Could it refer to people living on other planets?

John 10

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

7 Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who *ever* came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

John 10

17 “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

19 Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. 20 And many of them said, “He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?” 21 Others said, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

22 Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. 23 And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch. 24 Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly. 25 Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”

31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” 33 The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.” 34 Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods” ’? 35 If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), 36 do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? 37 If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 38 but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him.” 39 Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

40 And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. 41 Then many came to Him and said, “John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.” 42 And many believed in Him there.

Lazarus (John 11)

- Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, the seventh sign
- ***This*** Lazarus has never been mentioned in any Christian writings until the Gospel of John, and clearly such a dramatic story could thus not be a literal event: how could a literal story like this be neglected by the first three gospels?
 - Also, he is said to be the brother of Mary and Martha, yet earlier Synoptic accounts of Mary and Martha never mention them having a brother
 - Clearly, this is a concocted story, ***but it can still have meaning***
- The ***name*** Lazarus perhaps comes from a man named Lazarus in Luke 16; this Lazarus is a poor man who begs at the home of a rich man named Dives, and Dives ignores him; both die; Dives goes to a place of torment and Lazarus goes to a place of peace; in Luke's story, Dives asks Abraham to send Lazarus to him to help him, but Abraham says no; Dives then asks that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers, and again Abraham says no; Abraham says ***“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should arise from the dead.”*** In the story of the man born blind, those who reject Jesus as messiah claim to obey the law of Moses, and Jesus says that they are blind because they claim to see, but cannot. This quote says they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead; so, almost certainly based on this fictional story, John concocts a story in which Lazarus rises from the dead; John is saying that the Jews who reject Jesus claim to have Moses, but they do not hear Moses and the prophets, and neither will they be convinced if someone should arise from the dead (Spong page 158-9)

Lazarus (John 11)

- John uses exaggerated descriptions in his signs stories, which is consistent with their non-literal character:
 - Jesus did not turn water into a glass or two of wine, but 150 gallons
 - He did not just heal a crippled man, but one who had been crippled 38 years
 - He did not just heal a blind man, but one who had been born blind
 - And here, in raising Lazarus, not just a dead man, but one who had been dead four days and whose body was already decaying (“already he stinketh” in the words of the King James Version)
 - Contrary to earlier stories of Jesus raising people from the dead where there were hints that perhaps they were not really dead (Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5, Matthew 9, and Luke 8) and the widow’s son in Nain (Luke 7), John makes it clear that in his story, Lazarus was definitely dead

John 11

Now a certain *man* was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. **2** It was *that* Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. **3** Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” **4** When Jesus heard *that*, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6** So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. **7** Then after this He said to *the* disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” **8** *The* disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?”

9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. **10** But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” **11** These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”

12 Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” **13** However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. **15** And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. **18** Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. **19** And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. **21** Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. **22** But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

John 11

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? 27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." 29 As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly and came to Him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. 31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there."

32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. 34 And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" 37 And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days."

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" 41 Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" 44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

John 11

45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. 48 If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.”

49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” 51 Now this he did not say on his own *authority*; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.

53 Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. 54 Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples.

55 And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. 56 Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, “What do you think—that He will not come to the feast?” 57 Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report *it*, that they might seize Him.