
Faith And Blindness Exhibited In The Gospels

Jesus' ability to perform various miracles is prominent in both the Gospels of John and Matthew. As the creator, embodiment, and giver of light, Jesus wins worshippers through the use of supernatural powers given by God. One miraculous work in particular, the restoration of eyesight, validates the symbolic and religious foundation of Jesus as the Son of God. This powerful miracle treats a man's body and soul as separate entities. Restoring eyesight is not only a physical change but also provides spiritual enlightenment. The story about Jesus healing the blind in the Gospel of Matthew supplements the central story of a blind man in the Gospel of John. Whereas the Gospel Matthew mentions healing of the blind, the Gospel of John emphasizes that to see is to believe by devoting an entire chapter to the blind man's conversion to Christianity. The ability to heal blindness distinguishes Jesus from other messiahs in the history of Judaism, such as Moses and John the Baptist. Jesus secures his role on earth as the true messiah and as the light by bringing wisdom and salvation to sinners. In addition, by providing a new vision, Jesus converts ordinary people into faithful followers of God. Besides initiating followers into Christianity, the curing of blindness serves to substantiate Jesus' authority, to allow people to recognize their sins, and to redefine Christians' relationship with God.

Jesus, in the Gospel of John, claims himself as the sole mediator between God and man through his ability to heal the sick. The messiah, in the Jewish tradition, can perform various miracles. Isaiah describes the coming of the messiah as when "the eyes of the blind shall /be opened, /and the ears of the deaf unstopped" (Isaiah 35:5). Jesus satisfies this criterion for a divine prophet by stating, "The blind receive their sight" (Matthew 11:5). In our limited reading of the Hebrew Bible, we have not encountered a single account of giving sight to blind eyes. This difference makes Jesus, to some extent, more unique and authoritative than previous messiahs. The Gospel of John explicitly states that the power to cure blindness only comes from God. For example, the man who receives sight says, "Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from god, he could do nothing" (John 9:32-33). According to Craig Koester, "the reference to Jesus as 'the light of the world' in John 8:12 and 9:24 echoes this passage and make the opening of a blind man's eyes a sign that Jesus was God's messianic servant" (108). In summary, the Gospel of John, along with textual support from the Gospel of Matthew, exemplifies Jesus' authority by tracing his miraculous works to God and by distinguishing Jesus from other Hebrew prophets. Jesus' special talent, curing blindness, allows him to fulfill Jewish prophecies and to maintain his authority as a religious leader.

Besides establishing Jesus' role as the messiah, the story about healing blindness in the

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Gospel of John also focuses on the total transformation of individuals after recovering their eyesight. Jesus, by giving sight, separates his followers from nonbelievers. The Jews can see Jesus' miracles, but not all of them believe in him. Even in Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, people question his deeds and teachings (Matthew 13:54-58). Jesus warns, "You [Jews] will search for me, but you will not find me," which foreshadows the schism between the Jews and Christians (John 7:34). The blind man in the Gospel of John, an example of a believer, contradicts the Pharisees after Jesus cures him. The Pharisees expose their ignorance of Jesus' divine power by saying, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath" (John 9:16). They refuse to respect Jesus' miracles because the "Pharisees' metaphoric blindness result[s] from their lack of faith" (Fortna 163). "The former blind man," however, "is depicted at the end of the chapter as believing and therefore seeing" (163). Robert Fortna stresses that "it is spiritual vision that is meant here" (163). This spiritual vision allows the disciples to understand and appreciate Jesus' work. After Jesus enables the blind to see his relation to God, he essentially divides the observant Christian initiates from those who are oblivious of Jesus' connection to God.

Similarly, Jesus separates himself from the Jewish priesthood with his own interpretations of God's teachings. On the issue of curing blindness, Jesus and the Jewish authority have two conflicting views; each claims to have the correct understanding of God's commandments. Although the Pharisees specifically forbid work on the sabbath, Jesus continues to heal and ignores the rule by saying, "So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath" (Matthew 12:12). Another example of Jesus' reinterpretation of God's laws is when Jesus "declares that the man was born blind in order that he might by healing manifest the works of God," which contradicts the Jewish belief that a person's sins cause physical punishments (Goodspeed 382). As a result, he can "show his divine power in a striking and convincing way" (382). Immediately after this story about healing, the writer(s) of the Gospel of John present(s) an allegory that contrasts Jesus and the Pharisees. Here, the good shepherd represents Jesus, who "lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Contrarily, the "hired hand [Jewish authority] runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep" (10:13). Through healing and curing blindness, Jesus not only makes his followers distinct from ordinary people, but also rejects certain established Jewish practices.

By gaining eyesight, the blind man in the Gospel of John acquires true knowledge about Jesus' identity and exposes the Pharisees' foolishness. After Jesus heals him, the blind man acknowledges Jesus' divinity and stands in open defiance of the Jewish authority. In response to interrogation, he points out that "I do not know whether he [Jesus] is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). The Pharisees reply, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses" (9:28). Here, the Jews trace their lineage to Moses, whom God has chosen to form a covenant. Whereas Christians view Jesus as the messiah foreshadowed by Moses' words, the Pharisees interpret the prediction differently. The blind

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man is able to believe in Jesus by experiencing physical recovery. First, he says, "He [Jesus] is a prophet" (9:17). Then, he calls Jesus the Son of man and finally, he declares, "Lord, I believe" (John 9:38). This progressive revelation of Jesus' title, from prophet to Lord, contrasts with Pharisees' persistent denial, who says, "We know that this man is a sinner" (9:24, also in verses 16, 28-29). This specific example of curing a blind man equates Jesus to God and reveals the tension between early Christians and members of the Jewish priesthood.

Once the stories of healing establish Jesus' place and status on earth, the restoration of eyesight becomes an initiation process into Christianity. Curing blindness not only provides physical improvement, but more importantly, grants spiritual fulfillment. Blind people, during Jesus' healing process, experience both internal and external conversions. Unable to see anything, they do not have preconceptions from visual temptations in the external world, including idolatry. Their spiritual purity coincides with their external blindness. Internally, they acquire faith in God and in Jesus' teachings. Jesus says, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind" (9:39). This assertion shows that the restoration of eyesight symbolizes a reversal of status and conversion, which transforms the society's outcasts into devout Christians.

Giving sight allows believers to interiorize Christianity and to concentrate on the development of inner faith. Jesus criticizes those who do not believe in him "for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God" (John 12:43). The shift of focus from public display of piety to internalization of faith sharply contrasts Christianity with Judaism's priestly tradition. For example, Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them...do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues" (Matthew 6:1-5). This inner metamorphosis, brought about by renewed sight, demonstrates that Christians can engage in personal worship, rather than ritualistic practices led by Jewish priests. In conclusion, the blind represent unpolluted minds that are open to true knowledge about Jesus and God. By restoring their eyesight, Jesus gives his adherents more opportunities for introspection than for showing off their devotion.

In addition to conversion and initiation, Jesus manifests his redemptive power in eliminating blindness. Ordinary men who can see are prone to sin because they do not truly believe in Jesus. Blindness functions as a protection against sin. The ability to see, however, exposes Jesus' followers to corruptions and evils in the world. Jesus says, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains" (John 9:41). The opportunity to sin allows Jesus to act as a savior by binding his followers closer to his commandments and teachings. Jesus chooses the blind as his disciples because Jesus first saves them from darkness, and then rescues them again from mankind's impending doom. Other examples of healing display Jesus' forgiveness toward those who truly believe in him and in God. For instance, he tells the paralyzed man that the "Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"

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(Matthew 9:6). Moreover, Jesus' healing power becomes an eye-opening experience for non-believers. After a royal official pleads for his dying son, Jesus responds, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (Matthew 4:48). His miracles convince non-believers by demonstrating that he is indeed working for God. In conclusion, Jesus' restoration of eyesight persuades people to obey him and offers hope to those formerly blind by leading them to a path of salvation.

Jesus, by healing, as specifically through curing blindness, refigures his disciples' relationship with God. He reinstates the covenant with God for each individual who is first willing to believe in him. He says, "You did not choose me but I chose you" (John 15:16). For those who receive sight from Jesus, Jesus bridges the gap between humans and God. Belief in Jesus becomes a requirement for the worship of God because Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). He is an encompassing being who represents God on earth. Before someone can sincerely follow God, one has to have faith in Jesus. Because "[n]o one comes to the Father except through me," the worship of Jesus is critical for anyone who wants access to God and his blessings. Jesus carries out all the deeds, such as restoring eyesight, for God's sake. Unlike God's indirect influence, however, Jesus has a direct and significant impact on people's lives by opening their eyes and improving their health. In addition, in promising deliverance, Jesus demands the same amount of, if not more than, the worship paid to God. Consequently, the miracles of giving sight change men's relationship with God by making the worship of Jesus a critical step for keeping a covenant with God.

Through the removal of blindness, Jesus defends himself as the light of the world by bringing both physical light and light of knowledge to his followers. A central theme in the account of Jesus' healing of the blind is the dichotomy between the Jewish priests' denial and the cured man's wisdom. The priests repeatedly fail to recognize Jesus as the incarnation of God because "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing that light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4). This reinforces the idea that healing blindness is not simply a bodily improvement, but it establishes Jesus as the source of light, who illuminates his disciples with the knowledge that Jesus is the savior of humanity. Paul wrote in his letter, "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6). John, too, repeatedly quotes Jesus saying, "I have come as a light into the world" (John 12:46). By restoring their eyesight, Jesus physically brings people out of the darkness and spiritually enlightens them. Because "those who can see the light of the world have faith as a source of light within themselves," the divine light resides in each believer (Koester 163). Jesus' disciples can pursue private worship for salvation because the "ability or inability to see depend[s] not only on a person's external circumstances but on one's internal condition—one's belief or unbelief" (163). Therefore, Jesus serves as the conduit of redemption by giving sight along with light to his believers.

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Jesus' miracles, especially curing blindness, emphasize corporeal and religious transformations. The Gospels' writers use the story about the blind man as a part of a larger rhetorical device to put the readers into the blind man's shoes in order for the readers to witness the gradual unfolding of Jesus' identity firsthand. Those who truly see are those who can identify Jesus as the Son of God. He restores eyesight to gain followers, to allow initiates perceive their sins, and to highlight that the worship of Jesus is fundamental for salvation. It establishes Jesus' divinity that eventually leads to his persecution from the Jewish and Roman authorities. The glorification of Jesus, parallel to God, intensifies the animosity between the Christian and Jewish communities. The Jews refuse to respect Jesus' deeds whereas the Christians can connect to God through Jesus by renewed eyesight. Gentiles who were deprived of social status welcomed Jesus, not only as a savior from their moral sins but also as a spiritual leader. This form of resistance, flourishing during the demise of the Roman Empire, offers people a chance to escape from an apocalyptic world into a heaven full of promises.

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