

II. ACT V : THE SHEPHERD-MESSIAH John 9:1 - 10:42



In the celebrations of the festival of Booths much use is made of water and light. In chapters seven and eight John has portrayed Jesus as the source of 'living water' (7:38) and of 'the light of life' (8:12). He now selects a scene from Jesus' ministry and shapes it in such a way as to illustrate these themes. The focus is on Jesus as 'the light of the world' (9:5) giving sight to one who has never seen before. The image of water, too, is present, for the man comes to see only when he washes in the waters of Siloam.

Through the sacrament of Baptism we are enlightened by Jesus, purified and consecrated to God, and built into God's new temple. In Jesus God is bringing about a new creation. Having illustrated these themes, John then moves to a new image, the central image of this section, Jesus the Shepherd seeking the lost sheep and ready to lay down his life for them.

Scene 1 : Jesus gives sight to a blind man (9:1-7)

9:1-7

As he walked along, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. **We** must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world (8:12).’ When Jesus had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread (χρίειν) the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means **Sent**). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

Everything is graced. We are wrong to think of everything that happens as being God’s will. We are never wrong to believe that God is offering us grace in every situation.



Healing of the Blind Beggar Bartimaeus, Jesus Film Project, [bible.com](https://www.bible.com)

Paul writes: ‘It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts’ (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). John is inviting us to have the ‘eyes of our hearts enlightened’ (Ephesians 1:18) through the sacrament of baptism (see Hebrews 6:4; 10:32).

John 9:8-13

The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.” They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

John 9:14-17

Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

John 9:18-23

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue (compare Luke 6:22). Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

John 9:24-29

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

John 9:30-38

The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 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.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshipped him.

John 9:39-41

Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

We are witnessing an illustration of Jesus’ earlier proclamation: ‘This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God’ (John 3:19-21).

Scene 3 : Jesus, the Good Shepherd (10:1-22)

John 10:1-6

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying.

Jacob speaks of 'the God who has been my shepherd all my life' (Genesis 48:15). The Psalmist is confident: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want' (Psalm 23:1). 'He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand' (Psalm 95:7).

John 10:7-10

Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am (ἐγώ εἰμι) the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am (ἐγώ εἰμι) the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

Knowing the compassionate heart of Jesus who wept over the failure of his contemporaries to receive God’s offer of peace (Luke 19:41-45), we know that the purpose of such harsh criticisms was to shock into repentance those to whom they were addressed.

John 10:10

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life’ (John 3:16).

To Nicodemus, Jesus said: ‘Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life’ (3:36). He promised the Samaritan woman: ‘The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life’ (4:14). In the debate that followed his healing of the paralysed man, Jesus said: ‘Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life’ (5:24).

In the synagogue at Capharnaum, he repeats his earlier assertion: ‘Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life’ (6:47) and he declares that the life which he is offering consists in communion with him, and therefore with the Father: ‘Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me’ (6:57-58). All of this provides the background to his statement here: ‘**I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly**’ (10:10).

John 10:11-15

I am (ἐγώ εἰμι) the good (καλός) shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am (ἐγώ εἰμι) the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

This focus on Jesus' self-giving love and on Jesus' warning about the wolves that will attack the flock is found also in Paul's exhortation to the elders of the Ephesian church: 'Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock' (Acts 20:28-29).

John 10:16

I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

‘Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered’ (Isaiah 56:8).

‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’ (Isaiah 56:7; quoted by Jesus in Mark 11:17).

Indeed, ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life’ (3:16).

John 10:17-21

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father. Again the Jews were divided because of these words. Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?" Others were saying, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

The power that makes possible the victory of life over death is the power of love which, like everything else, Jesus has from the Father. 'For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself' (5:26).

Scene 4 : During the Festival of Dedication (10:22-42)

John 10:22-25

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe.

Jesus was introduced as Jesus the Messiah in the Prologue (1:17), and John will later declare that he is writing so that we might ‘come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah’ (20:31).

Scene 4 : During the Festival of Dedication (10:22-42)

John 10:25-28

The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.

John 10:28-30

No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. **The Father and I are one.**”

John 10:31-33

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are **making yourself God.**”

See the commentary on 5:18 where Jesus was accused of ‘making himself equal to God.’

John 10:34-36

Jesus answered, ‘Is it not written in your law, “I said, you are gods” [Psalm 82]’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ – and the scripture cannot be annulled – can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?

Jesus’ argument is this: If according to the Scripture it is proper, because of the divine power which they exercise, to call ‘gods’ those who are called on to communicate God’s word, all the more so is it proper for him not to ‘make himself God’, as they are claiming, but to be ‘God’s Son’.

John 10:37-38

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

Jesus is doing his Father's will and carrying out the mission given him. If they would only free themselves from their prejudices and open their minds and hearts to see what he is doing and to listen to his word they would ‘know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father’ (10:38).

Jesus is not ‘making himself God’. His claim is to be ‘God’s Son’.

‘It is the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made God known’ (1:18).

‘God so loves the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life’ (3:16).

‘Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life’ (3:36).

‘This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life’ (6:40).

‘If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’ (8:36).

Jesus claims to be God's Son and to have been sanctified by the Father and sent into the world, and to be doing what his Father sent him to do.

'The Spirit remained on him' (1:32).

'The one who comes from heaven testifies to what he has seen and heard' (3:31-32).

'He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure' (3:34).

'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work' (4:34).

'The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing' (5:19-20).

‘Just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself’ (5:26).

‘I can do nothing on my own ... I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me’ (5:30).

‘It is on the Son of Man that God the Father has set his seal’ (6:27).

‘I have come down from heaven to do the will of him who sent me’ (6:38).

‘The one who is from God has seen the Father’ (6:46).

‘The living Father has sent me and I live because of the Father’ (6:57).

‘I know him because I am from him and he sent me’ (7:29).

‘If you knew me you would know my Father also’ (8:19).

‘I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him’ (8:28-29).

‘I know him and I keep his word’ (8:55).

‘The Father knows me and I know the Father ... The Father loves me’ (10:15,17).

The claim to have been sanctified takes on a special significance when we recall that the festival of Dedication was celebrating the re-consecration of the temple. Jesus, ‘the Holy One of God’ (6:69) is claiming to be the new tabernacle (1:18), the new temple (2:21).

John 10:39-42

Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, “John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” And many believed in him there.

For many chapters now we have been watching the light shining in the darkness. The darkness has shown that it is ‘unable to welcome the light’ (John 1:5). However, many are following in the footsteps of the blind man (John 9). They are being enlightened by the One whom God has sent into the world to save the world by sharing with all who are willing the intimacy of love which he enjoys as the ‘only Son who is in the bosom of the Father’ (1:18).

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