



## The Book of Signs - Week 6: Rejection

### Week 6, Day 1- The Messiah Can't be from Galilee

#### John 7:40-52

*<sup>40</sup> When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." <sup>41</sup> Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? <sup>42</sup> Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" <sup>43</sup> So there was a division in the crowd because of him. <sup>44</sup> Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.*

*<sup>45</sup> Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?" <sup>46</sup> The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" <sup>47</sup> Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? <sup>48</sup> Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? <sup>49</sup> But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed." <sup>50</sup> Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, <sup>51</sup> "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" <sup>52</sup> They replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee."*

#### Understanding the Passage:

The religious leaders dismiss as impossible the claim that the Messiah could come from Galilee. You and I know that there's a difference than being from a place (born) and growing up in a place. They turn to the trifecta of ancient interpretive methods – Scripture, law, and tradition. If the authorities are right, if Scripture says that the Messiah cannot come from Galilee, and if Jesus does come from Galilee, then can Jesus actually be the Messiah? One might identify with this sentiment. Jesus is too good to be true! I hate to say it, but I'd ask a lot of questions too. Hopefully not questions with nefarious intent, but all the same, I'd have questions.

Many of us are quick to turn to Scripture to prove a point we're making to a relative that "needs more Jesus" or a "friend" on Facebook. So we do well to not distance ourselves from the religious leaders. We can't fully say we'd believe right away.

John starts this section by taking the arguments against Jesus and addressing them each in turn. He suggests that it's beside the point whether Jesus comes from Galilee, Gilead, Greece, Gomorrah, etc. Jesus' true origin is from God, and his true identity is of God. Indeed, way back in the very first chapter, John communicates that Jesus exists beyond the bounds of time and space. John locates Jesus in God, not in Galilee or any other earthly region.

John writes that Jesus stands firmly in the tradition. After all, Jesus participates in the great harvest festival of Sukkot. By recalling the rabbinic tradition that water from the pool of Siloam was carried each year to the temple during Sukkot, Jesus himself inhabits, invokes, and fulfills the Scripture.

Also, Jesus is more familiar with Scripture than these religious folks. His words call on the story of water from the rock in the desert (Num. 20:2-13) and to the prophetic hope of deliverance (Isa. 12:3). Jesus understands and appreciates the festival more and better than anyone else. Why? Because Jesus is that living water. He is the well of salvation.

John's Jesus shows the wonderful relationship between Messiah and believer. The verses just before this section have Jesus saying, "out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (v. 38). Love and courage, mercy and sacrifice, prayer and praise flow from the hearts and through the deeds of both Jesus and those who follow Jesus. Meanwhile, John hints that there is precious little evidence of such living waters trickling, let alone flowing, from those who are entangled in the minutia of the law.

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Why do you think the religious leaders resist Jesus so much? What are some ways you'd be apt to resist also?
2. What questions do you have about being a Christian? Have you ever talked to a pastor or a trusted Christian friend about them? Reflect.
3. Do you get caught up in the minutia of life, struggling to trust yourself to follow Jesus the "right way?" Where can you receive the living water Christ offers and move forward trusting Christ to guide your steps?

#### **Week 6, Day 2**

##### **John 8:21-30 -- Jesus foretells his death**

*<sup>21</sup> Again he said to them, "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." <sup>22</sup> Then the Jews said, "Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" <sup>23</sup> He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup> I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." <sup>25</sup> They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all? <sup>26</sup> I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." <sup>27</sup> They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. <sup>28</sup> So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. <sup>29</sup> And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." <sup>30</sup> As he was saying these things, many believed in him.*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

In this Gospel, Jesus often speaks in the first-person singular subject pronoun, I, pointing to himself rather than to the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, as he does in the Synoptic Gospels. In these verses, Jesus refers to himself six times: "I am going away." (v. 21), "I am from above.... I am not of this world." (v. 23), "I am he" (vv. 24, 28). What are we to make of this?

Unlike the immediately preceding "I am" statement regarding his being the light of the world (8:12), in verses 24 and 28 "I am" is not referring to how his presence provides for humankind or how he helps to meet some physical need. Rather, the use of these "I am" statements is more in line with revealing where he came from and where he is going. He is not like other prophets or teachers who have come before him. What he has to offer and do are "from above" (v. 23) and beyond the human realm. As a matter of fact, to comprehend Jesus, one must realize that he is "not of this world" (v. 23).

The usage of the "I am" usage highlights the historical ties with the author's present community and their ancestors, who were the offspring of Abraham and remnants of those who followed Moses. Members of the audience first hearing John's Gospel are the descendants of a people who have a long history with I AM. If I AM has sent Jesus, they know then that they must accept the message of Jesus. In verse 30 John writes that many do. The very use of "I am" in this way takes two little words and communicates layers and layers of cultural and historical connotations.

This passage is particularly sharp. "You will die in your sin" is a statement that today would be aggressively rude of someone to say to another, but in that time this statement was about as rude as one could get with a religious person like the Pharisees. Many want to claim that the only time Christ exhibited anger was when he turned over tables in the Temple. But in studying the Gospel of John, one will see just how intolerant Jesus is of stubborn, self-assured, religious piety. In reading this verse one might notice the tendency to restrain one's judgement of Jesus – "how very rude indeed, Jesus. You certainly won't win many over with that tone of voice." However, Jesus is simply stating the facts, which is often difficult to stomach.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflect on a time in your life someone that cared about you told you the truth. How did it feel? What was your response?
2. Has there been a time a message you needed to hear came to you in an undesirable way? Maybe someone exhibited anger, or their tone of voice was rude, or they even used vocabulary you don't respond well to. Were you able to receive the message? Reflect.
3. Does the truth need to come to you in a way that is perfectly packaged? Or can you hear the truth spoken from even an enemy?

### **Week 6, Day 3**

#### **John 9:1-12 -- Sins of the father... or not**

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup> When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, <sup>7</sup> saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which*

means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup> The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" <sup>9</sup> Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." <sup>10</sup> But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" <sup>11</sup> 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." <sup>12</sup> They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

### **Understanding the Passage:**

At the center of John's Gospel full of light and dark, truth and lies, blindness and sight is a story of a man blind from birth. This is a man who has only ever known darkness. Of the many healings Christ does it is no wonder that John holds this one up as a meaningful sign. John is always pointing us to the Light of the World, Jesus. Jesus sees a man even though the man cannot see him. And the disciples see "a man who has sinned." Jesus is not concerned with this man's sin or his father's sin, but instead wants to bring sight to him and ultimately the world.

The thing is that sight is an important thing. Sight is one way God designed us to see what is true and real. There are folks whose sight is impaired and it's magnificent how God designed the body to find other ways of "seeing." Hearing perks up, smells become more detectable, vibrations from the earth or sounds – all of these things help us literally identify what is true. Jesus knows that in the ancient world the loss of sight is something that will isolate an individual. They would be cast out and shamed. And more importantly they would be blamed for their own condition – "why is he blind Jesus? Did he sin or did his father sin?" the disciples inquire.

Jesus sets them straight. It is not sin that caused this, but he will experience the glory of God in a way that makes ripples throughout history. It's easy for us to get in the camp of the disciples always asking why something happened. But Jesus is not interested in answering the whys and neither is John as he recounts this story. Jesus and John are intent on giving more and more evidence that this man, right here, is the Son of God, the Messiah who will bring salvation.

Jesus is interested in revealing the truth, showing the way, and being the light. A person who once lived in darkness, cast out from the community begging to get by, now lives in the light. His sight is restored and for the first time in his life he sees, really sees. But whether or not we can see Jesus, he will always see us. His work will happen in and among us and our eyes will be opened in new ways. His love will leave its mark on us and it will be a sign for others.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflect on areas of your life that need more light shone on them. Are there places you need to see more clearly? Are there people who need you to see, really see them? Ask Jesus to awaken you to the things you can't see and then ask him to restore your sight.
2. The name of the pool where the man washed was named Siloam, meaning "sent" in an apostolic kind of way. Why is this detail named by John? Once the man is healed, what does he do?
3. What "why" questions have you been asking God? How might your prayers shift away from "why?"

## Week 6, Day 4

### John 9:13-41 -- Pharisees and spiritual blindness

*<sup>13</sup> They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup> Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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."*

*<sup>18</sup> 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 <sup>19</sup> and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" <sup>20</sup> His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup> 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." <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." <sup>26</sup> They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" <sup>27</sup> 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?" <sup>28</sup> Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup> We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." <sup>30</sup> The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. <sup>32</sup> Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." <sup>34</sup> They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.*

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" <sup>36</sup> He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." <sup>38</sup> He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. <sup>39</sup> 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." <sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."*

### Understanding the Passage:

The theme of blindness and sight continues. Sometimes sight is a blessing and sometimes it causes more trouble than we anticipate. For example, speaking the truth about a culture of misconduct in the workplace. Everyone knowingly or unknowingly participates and that system or environment's survival depends on not being "seen" or had a light shone upon it. Those who "see" the need for change might fear speaking up because those who don't "see" will push back. This man just regained his sight. It's not his fault, he didn't ask for it, but he is moved to believe and become a disciple/follower of Christ, eventually citing that God only listens to those who worship and obey. The Pharisees run around town interrogating the man, then his parents, then the man again – gathering evidence to disprove what has happened. When light shines on a system that isn't of God there will be pushback.

The Pharisees dug their heels in further and pushed back. They bring up Moses attempting to exhibit their piety, yet Jesus still sees their blindness. That's how spiritual blindness works. We can see life abundant that Christ came to bring and not recognize it as such, even rejecting it. This is tricky in our world today where many have tied themselves to various experts, teachers, information sources, etc. Like the Pharisees bring up their allegiance to Moses how quickly we can fly our flags of allegiance high. And in doing so our blindness can keep us from seeing the healing, love, and freedom that Christ is bringing to others.

This story is one of healing and it points us to the Messiah who came to save. It's also a story of caution for those of us in the church who can believe ourselves to be good Christian women and men of God when Jesus is trying to get our attention. In our hearts we must, like the Pharisees, ask ourselves "surely, we aren't blind, right?" But unlike the Pharisees we must really ask that question, let it pierce us, soften our hearts toward others, and always remain teachable. In verse 41 Jesus calls out their surety of being right and knowing the right way to worship and live. But Jesus says that it's their certainty that is blinding them. Like the modern proverb states, "doubt is not the opposite of faith, certainty is."

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflect on a time in which you dug in your heels (maybe even innocently attempting to be rooted in truth) and it eventually hurt you or someone else? Did it bruise or break a relationship? Perhaps it caused more isolation and division. Did it halt your spiritual growth in ways you may not be able to name? Do you trust God enough to guide your steps even into areas that are new and uncertain?
2. What does Spiritual blindness mean to you? Where might you be spiritually blind? Ask God to reveal this to you over the next weeks and months. Remain in constant contact with God about this.
3. If we can't have 100% certainty about the action items of our faith what then actually matters? (Hint: the disciples asked a similar question. See Matthew 22:36-40)

#### **Week 6, Day 5**

##### **John 10:22-42 -- Jesus is rejected by the Jews**

*<sup>22</sup> At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one."*

*<sup>31</sup> The Jews took up stones again to stone him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" <sup>33</sup> 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." <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? <sup>35</sup> If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled— <sup>36</sup> 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'? <sup>37</sup> If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not*

*believe me. <sup>38</sup> 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.” <sup>39</sup> Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.*

*<sup>40</sup> He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. <sup>41</sup> Many came to him, and they were saying, “John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” <sup>42</sup> And many believed in him there.*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

This passage immediately follows Jesus’ “I AM the good shepherd” statement so one notes that the shepherd language is continued somewhat in this passage. It is the same conversation with the same folks. It seems like Christ keeps having the same conversations over and over in the Gospel of John, but this is intentional in John’s layout of this Gospel. Christ may not have spent all of his time walking around telling people and showing people that he was the Son of God, but John sure makes it seem like this was 98% of his life. However, we must remember that John’s overarching theme in the first half of his Gospel is to point to Christ as the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. So here Jesus is again, having the same conversation about how he is indeed the Son of God. But this one gets a little more heated than the others.

Things have escalated and the Jewish leaders have decided lethal violence is appropriate for so great a threat. This is the final straw for the Jewish leaders. They attempt to stone him and arrest him. And if you were a good, law-abiding, moral practicing Jew you would find no issue with this violence because he finally crossed the line and there was no doubt that he had gone too far. They couldn’t really get him for doing his normal, run-of-the-mill good deeds. They finally get Jesus to say the thing that they’ve wanted him to say – the thing that will allow them to do away with him once and for all. Look to verse 30: “The Father and I are one” and also to verse 38 “...the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” You can hear them sharpening their pitchforks and piling up their stones.

There’s no question that they did not believe his words and certainly would not proclaim him the Messiah. However, there were others who believed. This is also a continued theme for John. Some will believe and some will not. All will be given the choice regardless of their station in life and some can recognize the voice of their Shepherd when he stands before them, and others will not. As modern-day Christians who are participating in their church’s Scripture+Shared curriculum, we might place ourselves in the “ones who would believe” category. However, we do well to take pause and scan our heart and posture in life. Are there messages that Christ is trying to get across to us even today that we have ignored, hardened our hearts to, or even flat-out rejected? Are there social norms that Christ is calling us to lay down in order to follow his commandments to love others and thus spread the Good News? What if we actually fall closer on the spectrum with the Pharisees? After all, we are good, Christian people. We pray, study the Bible, do all the things...just as the Pharisees did.

The truth is that we can try our hardest and put all our efforts into one goal or direction without day-by-day checking in with the Holy Spirit and reflecting on our motivations. Our intentions can be the best, but it turns out intentions don’t matter much at all because we can still have a heart posture that ultimately leads to our faith not moving past our minds to our hearts and into our actions. Our faith has actions. Belief in Christ is reflected in actions, but not actions for our own sake or the sake of our immediate family and friends – actions toward those who have been beat down by the religious and cast out by the so-called God-fearers who have it all figured out but cannot love. Do we recognize our Shepherd’s voice today? May the answer show up in our actions?

**Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. How might we become more intentional about recognizing the voice of our Shepherd?
2. How are you like the ones who believed? How are you like the Pharisees?
3. Take an inventory of your time from yesterday. What actions reflected the tenants of your faith? Be kind and gentle as you assess. There's always an opportunity to move forward in new ways, praying for opportunities.

**Video Questions:**

1. Why are the religious leaders rejecting Jesus?
2. Why do the leaders concern themselves with where Christ is from? Where is Christ really from?
3. Why does Christ explicitly say that the Pharisees cannot go to where he is going?
4. Discuss what it means for Jesus to be lifted up.
5. Why do the disciples concern themselves with the blind man's sin?
6. Why is the healing of the blind man significant in this narrative as it relates to Christ's authority?
7. Discuss asking questions of the faith. How do these questions lead to us deeper in our faith? What are some of your specific questions?

**Prayer requests and other notes.**