

Text: John 9:1-12

Title: “Why Suffering?”

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the service you'll be hearing more details about a couple of new Wednesday night studies we're offering. Dr. David Downey will teach a rich, verse-by-verse study in Ephesians. Karen Sanders, Chad Brantley and I will be leading a video driven series on *Sacred Parenting* by Gary Thomas. This is one of the most biblical and practical approaches to parenting I've ever seen. There's support with our Family Dinner and full age-graded programming for children on Wednesday nights. I encourage you take advantage of these opportunities for growth.

Open your Bibles to John 9. The most intense concentration of miraculous, supernatural activity in the history of the world came in the three years of Jesus' public ministry. It marked the entrance of the Kingdom of God in the person of the Messiah Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John records seven of these miracles that are called “miraculous signs” because they point to who Jesus is and what He came to do. The miracle we're looking at today takes up all of John 9, and rather than my reading the text this morning I want you to hear it from a scene from the movie “The Gospel of John,” that depicts John 9:1-12. Watch this.

Now let's just walk our way through what we've just heard from John 9.

John 9:1 - As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

So here is a man who was blind from birth. Apparently his parents could no longer take care of him and he couldn't support himself, so now he has to beg to feed himself. Everywhere Jesus went He encountered and engaged people like this because He the Messiah.

Now before I get to my main point, let me jump ahead a bit and talk about the unusual way that Jesus went about healing this man of his blindness.

John 9:6 - Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.

John 9:7 - “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

Maybe you're wondering why Jesus chose to heal the man's blindness in this way ... spitting on the ground, making some mud, smearing it on the man's eyes, then telling him to go wash it off in the Pool of Siloam. Of course, Jesus could have just spoken the word, or even just thought the thought, and the man would have been healed. So why does Jesus do it this way? Biblical scholars have all sorts of speculations on this, but the answer that makes the most sense to me in light of the context is this:

At this point in Jesus' 3-year ministry He is constantly in conflict with the Jewish leaders. They hated him because Jesus challenged their religious traditions. We learn down in v.14 that the day all

of this happened was the Sabbath, and these acts of stirring up some mud, smearing it on the man's eyes and sending him to the pool to wash all resemble acts which the Jewish leaders thought was a violation of the Sabbath. They had devised this very strict code for what people could and couldn't do on the Sabbath. So when the Jewish leaders learned what Jesus did they accused Him of being a sinner and Sabbath-breaker.

Here's the deal. Sometimes in the Gospels Jesus deliberately created a controversy with the religious leaders who were so hide-bound in their traditions that they couldn't see that God was doing a new thing in Jesus. And Jesus would sometimes do things like heal someone on the Sabbath to expose their unbelief. And when we see this happening we should be warned about our own legalism and hard-heartedness that hinders the true work of God.

And later in John when the Jewish leaders really press the man who was formerly blind he said...

John 9:25 - 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!"

But I want to come back to another very unusual part of this story that occurs at the very beginning of this incident. When Jesus encountered this blind man...

John 9:2 - His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Now that's a really big question ... one that we find ourselves asking even to this day when we see people suffer. Why suffering? The Bible doesn't shield us from the reality of suffering, like this man's blindness. On several occasions last week I walked through hospital corridors visiting church members and I guess the fact that I was studying this passage made me a little more sensitive to the scores of hurting people I saw in the hallways and the lobbies. They all have a story.

ILLUSTRATION – Whenever I go to have my eyes checked I know that the eye doctor will usually do a double take when he looks into my right eye. When you look into the colored part of my right eye it appears that I have a second pupil. It's actually a scar from something that happened when I was about ten years old. My cousin and I were playing out in a field with a BB gun when he pointed the gun at my feet and pulled the trigger. He may have been shooting at my feet, but the BB actually ricocheted off the ground and hit me in the eye. (That's why you can't have a BB gun for Christmas. You'll shoot your eye out.) I think I fell to the ground screaming thinking that I would never see out of that eye again. Thankfully that wasn't the case, but when I go to see an eye doctor, he will spend extra time examining my right eye. When the doctor examines the scar he's interested in what it looks like and what it did to my sight. But when I see that scar in the mirror I remember the story. I remember the fear that I would lose my eye. Behind every scar there's a story.

So what is the story behind the scar of this man's blindness? The disciples, like most Jews, really had only one possible explanation.

John 9:2 - His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The only possible explanation, at least in the minds of the disciples, was that it was somebody's fault ... someone sinned. Was it the man or his parents? That was the typical Jewish explanation for suffering ... somebody sinned. Just read the Book of Job and you'll hear Job's three friends trying to get Job to believe that all the suffering he endured was due to his sin, even though the Bible says he was a righteous man.

Now, generally speaking, all suffering in this earth *is* due to sin. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, the Bible says that all of creation was cursed with suffering and death. We live in a fallen world where really bad things happen. And we are all part of that fallen world. But it is a mistake to think that when you suffer you sinned. Yes, if you drink and drive and kill someone in a car accident, that's a direct result of your sin. But when you get sick, or your child gets sick, it's not necessarily because you sinned or they sinned. Specific sins in the past do not always result in specific suffering in the present.

So when the disciples asked the question, here's how Jesus explained it:

John 9:3 - "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

So the man's blindness cannot be traced to his sin (impossible because he was born blind) or his parent's sin. The explanation is not found in something that people did in the past, but in something God plans to do in the future. And that's what Jesus means when He says, "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

When it comes to our suffering it is futile and unproductive for us to spend all of our time asking the "why" question in the past tense. Whose fault is it? Instead we need to ask the "why" question in the future tense. How will God use this suffering in the future for His good and glorious purposes in my life?

We have a God who is that powerful ... who can take the very worst that life throws at us and shape it into something that perfectly fits His good and glorious purposes for our lives.

So the purpose of this man's blindness ... and of your illness or your job loss or the death of your mate ... is that the work of God might be displayed through it. That's where the meaning is. And God's work is going to be put on display as Jesus miraculously heals the man of his blindness.

Jesus goes on to explain more of what this "work" is.

John 9:4 - As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

John 9:5 - While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

So this work of God that will be displayed through this man's blindness is that he will be healed through the power of Jesus.

But there's a sense of urgency because Jesus said that night, a time of darkness, is coming. What does He mean? He's talking about the darkness that is coming in His own suffering and death upon the Cross of His crucifixion. Jesus is about to endure a darkness that is far worse than the darkness this blind man had experienced. In His death Jesus would be plunged into the black cave of God's judgment against our sin. He will endure the darkness of Hell for us, so that when we put our trust in Him we will be saved from sin and death.

So even this dark suffering Jesus will endure will happen so that the powerful work of God in salvation might be displayed on the Cross. As bad and black as His crucifixion was, Jesus endured it knowing that the Father would display His power and might through the Cross by raising Jesus from the dead and bringing millions and millions of people into the light through Jesus.

And that's one of the reasons the event is in our Bibles is to show us this glorious truth. So this man's physical eyes were opened. But the greater thing is that at the end of John 9 the man believes in Jesus and his spiritual eyes are opened. Praise God for His life-changing work through Jesus.

But there's another reason this passage is included in our Bibles. It is included to help us make sense of our own suffering, whatever it might be. There are three things I want you to take away from this:

1. **EXPECT SUFFERING IN LIFE**

Don't be surprised that you go through hardships and sufferings in life. This world has sold us a lie in telling us that the goal in life is to be pain-free, stress-free and worry-free. Everything that happens to us in life is intended to display God's might work through us, even our suffering.

John 16:33 – “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

There's the very real presence of suffering, but also the very real possibility of peace in the midst of our sufferings.

2. **EMBRACE SUFFERING IN FAITH**

Suffering is not something for us to escape in alcohol or drugs. It is not to be escaped by some pleasure or possession that momentarily helps us forget the pain. Suffering is not to be escaped ... it is to be embraced in faith. By faith embrace it as a friend whom God has sent to minister to you by challenging you to trust in Him. Paul talking about some of his sufferings as a minister of the Gospel said...

2 Corinthians 1:9 - Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

You'd never see the life transforming power of God if you didn't have to go through something where God had to lift you up like raising a dead person.

3. ENDURE SUFFERING BY GRACE

There was a time when the Apostle Paul endured great suffering through what he called a thorn in his flesh. He prayed over and over again that God would remove that suffering. But God said to Paul, “My work will not be displayed in your life by removing the suffering, but by giving you power to live with it.”

2 Corinthians 12:9 - But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

Sometimes God puts His powerful work on display by eliminating the suffering. At other times God puts His powerful work on display by giving us grace to endure our suffering. PRAY.

We’re going to worship with a song that begins with the words, “Let no one caught in sin remain inside the lie of inward shame, but fix our eyes upon the cross...” That’s a powerful message for us today.