

## John 9:1-41

We are continuing this morning with our study of the Gospel of John, picking up at verse 1 of chapter 9, and working through to the end of that chapter. Broadly speaking, we are in that larger section of John's Gospel that runs from about verse 19 of chapter 1 all the way to the end of chapter 12 .

The purpose of this larger section of John's Gospel is to clearly reveal who Jesus was and, at the same time, to record the effect of this self-revelation on those around him. In particular, John wants us to see the growing antagonism toward Jesus that started slowly and then steadily increased and which ultimately - by the time you get to the end of chapter 12 - reaches a point of no return, resulting in Jesus' death - and all according to the purposes of God.

From chapter 13-17, after showing us how it came to be that Jesus was rejected by his own people, John will then take us into a privileged and intimate account of Jesus' final words with his disciples. Jesus knows that his ministry here is almost over. He knows that his time is short and so chapters 13-17, in particular, will prove to be some of the most precious in all of Scripture and they form what is commonly known as Jesus' "farewell discourse".

Following that, from chapter 18 to the end, you get the account of Jesus death, resurrection and exaltation - the place where Jesus most clearly revealed who he was and why he came. And it is only then - after the self-revelation in chapters 1-12 and after his final words to his disciples in 13-17, and after the account of his death and resurrection - that John *finally* tells us what the purpose of his gospel is: namely, so that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they might have life in his name.

So that's where this whole thing is going. The words before us this morning are found within that first major section dealing with Jesus' self-revelation and are concerned with the well known account of Jesus healing a man who had been blind from birth. What that said about Jesus, and what that means for you and me will be the focus of our time this morning. Before we look at that, let's pray together....

(Pray)

**The first thing that I want us to do this morning, is to look at what actually happened, this occasion of healing that John records...**

(Read John 9:1-7)

Jesus, sometime after his escape from an intended stoning by the Jewish authorities, was walking through Jerusalem, and sees a man who was blind from birth. How Jesus knows he was blind from birth we are not told. THAT Jesus knows this is not at all surprising, of course. His disciples, on cue, immediately want to know why this has happened to this man. Was it because of his own sin, or was it because of the sin of his parents?

Now, there are a couple possible rabbit trails here. For one thing, it is interesting to see that these disciples clearly have a concept of original sin - i.e., that people can be sinful, even from birth, that they can be born in sin. Another potential rabbit trail is the whole matter of the connection between sin and suffering. That there is a *general* connection between sin and suffering is, biblically speaking, undeniable. Look at the fall in Genesis 3, and everything that has happened since then. And that connection is certainly what lies behind the disciples' question here.

However, the Bible also gives examples of connections between particular sins of particular people and suffering that comes as a direct consequence of those sins. Witness 1 Corinthians 11, for example. We could go down that trail for a while, but we won't this morning because we don't have time and, more importantly, because Jesus' words here render such a journey un-necessary, at least in this instance.

Because, in response to his disciples' questions, and their underlying assumptions, Jesus says that this man's blindness was not a consequence of particular sin, either on his part or on the part of his parents indicating, among other things, that there is not always a direct correlation between sin and suffering in an individual's life. Sometimes the suffering is there for other reasons.

And at least one of those other reasons is seen here. Jesus says that this man was born blind *so that the works of God might be displayed in him*. Before all eternity, God ordained that this man would be born blind and that his blindness, and the taking away of it, would be one of the means by which he revealed who his Son was, and what he came to do to a world that was clothed in darkness.

Now, I know that raises all kinds of questions about the relationship between suffering and the sovereignty of God. And we have looked at some of those things in the past, in some detail, in the aftermath of the great tsunami that took place a number of years ago, and after 9/11 and after Katrina. So, I won't rehearse all of that with you this morning. What I WILL do is draw your attention to the fact that, as many questions as it raises, it does at least provide one *answer* to one particular question. Namely this: Is suffering, in the end, always meaningless, or can it actually be purposeful and meaningful?

You know, if we could, only for a moment, be transported *right now* to heaven. Just for a moment. And if we could go and find *this man*, this blind man who was healed and who embraced the Lord Jesus and who waits in glory for the consummation of all things when Jesus returns - If we could talk to this man and ask him whether his suffering was purposeful, or whether it was worth it - I promise you that this man, through tears of joy, would say yes, yes, yes - a thousand times *yes!* This man would look upon his time here and his struggle and blindness, and he would remember that glorious day when Jesus opened his eyes and he would thank God, again and again and again, for the *privilege* of being born blind and for being the one through whom God chose to reveal his Son, the Lord Jesus, *truly* as the one who is light of the world and who delivers people from darkness to light.

So Jesus assures his disciples that this man's blindness is not just a sad consequence of his sin, or that of his parents. Nor is it some meaningless tragedy that has occurred in a fallen world. Jesus makes it very clear that this event - as with every other event in his life - was part of the plan, was part of God's purposes - it was all in the script. Every last bit of it.

And so, after saying this and after reminding them of the urgency of these works being done as an outworking of his coming into the world to be the light, Jesus then does something very interesting. He bends down, spits into the dust, makes a paste of mud, and spreads it on the man's eyes, and then tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

Why does Jesus do this? Why not just pronounce him healed and be done with it? Well, John doesn't tell us definitively. But it seems to me that he likely does this to *deliberately* invite comparisons between himself and his Father. He has already reminded them of his close connection with the Father. He has already told them that he is the light of the world. And now he takes dust - just as his Father once did - and performs a creative act of his own - creating sight where it did not exist before, bringing light into the darkness.

Even further, Jesus *invited* more scrutiny precisely because *this* healing - this particular sort of miracle - was more than *just* a healing - it was a sign, a picture, a paradigm - something that carried special significance with regard to Jesus' identity. It was, in short, *his calling card*. Listen to the words of Isaiah....

*Isaiah 42:1-7 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. <sup>2</sup> He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; <sup>3</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. <sup>4</sup> He will not grow faint or be discouraged<sup>1</sup> till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. <sup>5</sup> Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: <sup>6</sup> "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, <sup>7</sup> **to open the eyes that are blind**, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

Healing the blind - delivering people from darkness to light - was the thing that God's Servant - his chosen, suffering servant - was uniquely given to do. It was one of the distinctive things about Jesus' ministry that marked him out as the Messiah that God was going to send. Indeed, it is more than coincidental that the place Jesus tells this man to go and wash is the Pool of Siloam which, as the text points out means "sent". Why? Because even this detail was a sign itself - the one who "sent" him to this pool was the one whom God "sent" into the world, to open the eyes of the blind.

And so this event like others before (the feeding of the 5 thousand) and ones yet to come (raising Lazarus from the dead) was more than just amazing, it was *revealing*. It carried the signature of God. It was a flashing neon sign that said, "Pay attention. God is in your midst."

**The second thing I want us to look at this morning, after looking at the healing itself, are some of the responses to this amazing miracle that Jesus performed...**

(Read John 9:8-34)

The first responders to this miracle are those who are said to be his neighbors - the people that had seen him around, begging for some form of subsistence. And, not surprisingly given the pattern we have seen all along, their response is mixed. Some immediately recognized this blind man for who he was, and were amazed. Others who perhaps didn't know him that well, or who had perhaps never paid *that* much attention to him, were so blown away by what has happened that they simply refuse to accept it and would rather believe that it is someone who looked a lot like the beggar they knew - than admit that it was actually him!

At any rate, the locals who know this man, who realize this is the same blind man they have seen on many occasions before - they ask how all this has happened. And so this man describes things to them in a very matter-of-fact sort of way, telling them what he knows about how it happened - which isn't much. In response they take him to the Pharisees.

Now there was nothing malicious about this. It was simply the natural thing for them to do. Clearly what has happened has some sort of religious significance and so they go and consult with the local religious authorities to get their take on the whole thing.

Well the Pharisees, as the neighbors did, ask how this man has been made to see, and he again relates the story he has just told. The Pharisees, at least some of them, without hesitation, upon learning that the healing took place on the Sabbath, declare that Jesus could not be from God since no one who came from God would dare violate the Sabbath in such a way.

Now let me just say a couple things about this response of the Pharisees. Firstly, the view that Jesus was not from God was not unanimous. Some of the Pharisees, apparently, DID believe that he was from God, or at least that he might be - violations of the Sabbath notwithstanding.

Secondly, the Pharisees that were upset with Jesus over violating the Sabbath were, as we have seen before, acting and speaking according to their consciences on this matter. In other words, they weren't just making stuff up, they *really did think* that Jesus had violated the Sabbath prohibitions against "not working". So, these are serious people. They were sincere.

Nevertheless, they were also sincerely wrong. They had taken a good thing - God's moral law regarding the Sabbath - and turned it from something that was meant to be *for* men and women, and for their good, and for their enjoyment of God - they had turned it from *that* to a day of overly-scrupulous, even ridiculous rules and distinctions which were man-made, which *added* to the Scriptures, and which made the Sabbath a burden, instead of a delight.

Jesus, in contrast to this, comes along and rightly understands and rightly *uses* the Sabbath as a day for mercy, for deliverance from bondage, for leading people into the refreshing goodness and blessing of the Lord.

But the Pharisees just couldn't see it. All they could see was that he had, in their view, violated the Sabbath. And of course the ridiculous thing in all this is that, in taking this stance they were completely ignoring what had actually happened - a thing that had not been seen throughout the whole of the OT period. A thing that, as we have seen, their own prophets had spoken of as one of the calling cards and distinctive signs of God's Messiah.

Tellingly we hear not a word on this subject from the accusing Pharisees. And you have to conclude that they either are NOT aware of it - which would be hard to believe - or that they are deliberately ignoring it because their minds are already made up and their agenda is already set. And no amount of truth - even biblical truth - will dislodge them from their sinful intentions.

Well, the Pharisees who are intent on doing Jesus in are unwilling to just accept all of this so they set about trying to discredit what has happened. They go to the former blind man's parents with a view to showing that he, in fact, has not been blind from birth. To their dismay, the parents confirm that it was not a fake, he was blind at birth. However, while they are willing to affirm that, they are unwilling to say any more, for fear of the potential consequences for them.

But they haven't given up yet. Still not willing to accept even the parents' testimony - they go to the former blind man a second time and, essentially, charge him, before God, to stop lying and tell the truth about what really happened to him, thinking that perhaps with a little intimidation he might be made to change his story.

To this man's credit, he sees right through all of this, blows off their attempts at intimidation and calls them out on it. They are clearly unwilling to admit or accept what is plain and obvious. And so, their pride badly bruised, they go on the attack and cast the man out - which probably means he was cast out of the temple, i.e., excommunicated.

**The third thing I want to look at, briefly, is what you might call Jesus' "follow up" response to the man he has healed. After he has been healed, and after being given the third degree by the Pharisees over the whole thing, Jesus comes to the man a second time, to take the man one step further....**

( Read John 9:35-41)

Word gets back to Jesus of what has happened to this man, and so he seeks him out. When he finds him, he confronts him with the question, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" which is to ask, essentially, do you believe in the *Messiah*? Do you believe that there is this One - that you have no doubt heard about - and that God is going to send who will save his people and deliver them?

To this question, the man responds with a question of his own, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" And Jesus says, basically, "it's me". And the man *immediately* responds, "Lord, I believe." At which point the Greek says he "worshiped" him, meaning, he prostrated himself before him. And so what John portrays for us here is this man being delivered from a second darkness - a *spiritual* darkness.

In response to this Jesus offers his own brief summary, talking about how he came into this world for judgment - not THE judgment that will come later on, mind you, but for the sort of judgment that - as we saw last week - inevitably happens whenever light is shown and truth is preached. Jesus says that this thing that was happening - even as he was speaking - was what he came into the world for - this judgement, this distinction, this separation, this division between those who are blind, and know it - and are given sight - and those that *claim* to see and who are then shown to actually be blind.

And then, as soon as he says this, *some* of the Pharisees - right on cue - step into the picture again, asking “Are we also blind”? And the key to understanding this last little bit is, I think, that word “some”. As one commentator has helpfully suggested, it is likely that the Pharisees mentioned *here* are those who, earlier on, took the view that Jesus *was* from God or that he might be from God. In short, these are Pharisees who are *sympathizers* to Jesus but who, apparently, are still not prepared to go the whole way with him, still not prepared to say that he is more than just “from God”, still not prepared to abandon their privileged position among the Pharisees, still, as it were, “riding the fence”.

It is *this* group who now ask, “Are we also blind?” And with this question, what they are really wanting to know from Jesus is whether they - if they were blind as he was suggesting - were *culpable*, whether they could therefore not be blamed for not fully embracing Jesus. In response, Jesus points out that they cannot claim a position of ignorance or innocence since they - by their own admission - have already “seen” something of Jesus self-revelation; enough to know that he was from God - and yet they still have not signed on with him wholeheartedly. Thus, their guilt remains.

### Implications

And so the chapter comes to an end, leaving us with all sorts of things to ponder and prayerfully reflect on, and respond to with humble obedience.....Let me just highlight a few...

1) Notice that this healing of a blind man is *indeed* a model, a paradigm of the very thing that Jesus came to do and which he, in fact, *continues to do* today. Jesus is still, up to this very moment, in the business of opening blind eyes that they might see. He is still all about delivering people from the domain of darkness to his kingdom of light. That very thing is going on, all around us, all the time, even today.

People that I have talked to over the years, who became a Christian in their adult years - as I did - have often told me that their own conversion experience was very much a kind of “eye-opening”, dark to light, confusion to understanding, sort of thing. Their conversion, they will tell you, involved their coming to see things they had *not* seen before, *understand* things that made no sense before, *grasp* realities that had always been there - but which they had been completely oblivious too. It was like they were blind. And then they could see. Why? Because Jesus really is the light and life of humankind, he really is the one who came into this world so that those who do not see may see.

2) And this work, which *Jesus* was given to do - that remains *his* work. This work of delivering people from darkness to light, from blindness to sight - that remains a miraculous work. And, as such, it is a work that you and I are simply incapable of doing, on our own.

Nevertheless, even though Jesus is still the effective agent in this work, he has chosen to work with and through us and so has brought us into a partnership with him in continuing this work, until he comes back. Which is why Jesus says to his disciples “We must work the works of him who sent me...”. What’s the key word here? WE. Jesus and his followers. You and Jesus. Me and Jesus. Us and Jesus.

Which, I gotta tell you, is a relief. It means we’re not responsible for making blind people see. Jesus has not abdicated that responsibility. All we can do, and all he has asked us to do, is take blind people TO and tell blind people ABOUT Jesus as the one who *can* deliver them from the darkness and dominion of sin. And if God has “opened the eyes of their heart”, so to speak, then, when we point them to Jesus they will eagerly and quickly respond to him and worship him - just as the blind man did in this story.

That’s the pattern here you see: a blind man is given the capacity to see.....Jesus is then set before him.....He falls down in worship. That’s basically it, in a nutshell.

3) talk about healing the blind that know they are blind - know they are in the dark - no real deliverance without it - no one comes to Jesus - truly - without first acknowledging their true condition. Thus any evangelism that avoids this subject is doomed from the start to gather spurious believers.

4) God is not interested in people who are sympathetic toward him. He desires worshipers and worshipers ONLY. Anything less than that will not do. Talk about the position of these pharisees - not enough to allow that Jesus was from God, or even to say he was a prophet. You either worship him, or you don’t. Anything less than that will leave you as one upon whom “the guilt remains”.

5) talk about the paradigm of response and persecution that we see here - the picture that this is for all of us.....– hardship as serving God’ purpose - bear our wounds nobly and hopefully - this man had a double dose - hardship before, and then hardship afterward...but what a picture that those who follow Christ will suffer as he suffered (find the verse that says this)