

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 12-4-11 AM NOTES
"LESSONS FROM A MAN BORN BLIND"
JOHN 9:1-7
#36 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through John"

John 8:58 (NKJV) "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

Exodus 3:14 (NKJV) "'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Deuteronomy 29:29 (ESV) "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Psalms 34:19a (NKJV) "Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous..."

Acts 14:22b (NKJV) "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Philippians 1:29 (NKJV) "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

1 Peter 4:12 (NKJV) "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you."

1 Peter 5:10 (NKJV) "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*."

1 Peter 4:19 (NKJV) "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator."

I. A Lesson about Salvation (vv. 1-7)

A. The Problem (vv. 1-2)

Genesis 2:17 (NKJV) "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

John 1:4 (NKJV) "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Ephesians 2:1 (NKJV) "And you *He made alive*, who were **dead** in trespasses and sins."

John 3:3b (NKJV) "...unless one is born again, **he cannot see** the kingdom of God."

Ephesians 4:18 (NKJV) "having their understanding **darkened**, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the **blindness** of their heart."

Genesis 1:28b (NKJV) "...fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Revelation 3:17 (NKJV) "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

Romans 3:11 (ESV) "no one understands; no one seeks for God."

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (ESV) "³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

“It takes more than light to save someone. It takes sight, and only God can make the spiritually blind see. It takes more than preaching or witnessing to get people saved. I can preach the truth, and you can share the truth, but only the Holy Spirit can *impart* truth. Those who witness must have the anointing of the Holy Spirit, because we are dependent upon God to open blinded eyes to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to understand that nobody can be argued or educated into the kingdom of heaven.”
—Adrian Rogers

B. The Solution (vv. 3-7)

Genesis 2:7a (NKJV) “And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground...”

II. A Lesson about Suffering (vv. 1-5)

A. The Problem (v. 1)

B. The Purpose (vv. 2-5)

Ephesians 1:11b (NKJV) “...who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

Exodus 4:11 (NKJV) “So the Lord said to him, ‘Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have not I, the Lord?*’”

1. Some Suffering Is Corrective

Hebrews 12:5-7 (NKJV) “⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “*My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;* ⁶ *For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.*” ⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?”

2. Some Suffering Is Constructive

“My particular affliction is divinely hand-tailored expressly for me.”

—Joni Eareckson Tada

“God uses suffering to purge sin from our lives, strengthen our commitment to Him, force us to depend on His grace, bind us together with other believers, produce discernment, foster sensitivity, discipline our minds, impart wisdom, stretch our hope, cause us to know Christ better, make us long for truth, lead us to repentance of sin, teach us to give thanks in times of sorrow, increase our faith, and strengthen our character. And once He accomplishes such great things, often we can see that our suffering has been worth it. God doesn't simply want us to *feel* good. He wants us to *be* good. And very often, the road to *being* good involves not *feeling* good.”

—Randy Alcorn

3. Some Suffering Is That the Grace of God Might be Displayed

2 Corinthians 12:9a (NKJV) “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’”

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Let me set the context for the verses we are going to examine today. Jesus had just made a claim about Himself that was impossible to misunderstand. He said in **John 8:58 (NKJV)** "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." There can be no doubt that He was saying that He was the God who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush in **Exodus 3:14 (NKJV)** “‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Certainly Jesus’ enemies understood that He was claiming deity. We know that from their response in **John 8:59a (NKJV)** “Then they took up stones to throw at Him...” The chapter divisions were not inspired by God – only the words. Let’s read what happened leaving out the chapter division. **John 8:59-9:1 (NKJV)** “⁵⁹ Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. ¹ Now as *Jesus* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.” What a wonderful insight that is into the heart of Christ! He supernaturally escapes a mob of angry men who desire to kill Him and He stops to heal a blind man. The compassionate Christ knew that His Father was in control and this was not His time to die.

Some time ago I saw a bumper sticker on a car that said something like, “Eliminate All Suffering in the World”. That’s a pretty big order! I wonder who it was addressed to. Suppose you had the ability to do that; would that be a good thing? I submit to you that it would not be a good thing. Let me tell you why I say that. God is the essence of good. We discern what is good by looking at God. God is all powerful and can do anything consistent with His character and perfections. God has the power to eliminate all suffering in the world and yet God doesn’t eliminate all suffering. Since all that God does is good and God is omnipotent, it follows that the elimination of all suffering would not be good. Why not? Some of the answer belongs to “the secret counsels of God”. **Deuteronomy 29:29 (ESV)** “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” I believe that some of the reasons that God allows suffering are revealed to us. We live on a fallen planet that has been cursed because of sin coming into the world. One of the functions of suffering is to remind us and teach us that something is wrong on planet earth. To live on a fallen, sin cursed planet with no suffering would be comparable to a disease of the nerves (Hanson’s Disease) that doesn’t allow a person to feel pain. Would it be a good thing if your body could not experience pain? No, it would be a horrible thing! Pain tells us something is wrong. A person with this disease could have a sickness that was treatable (such as appendicitis) and yet die because there was no pain to tell them that something was wrong. They could put their hand on a hot stove and not know that they were burning. They could break a bone in their leg or arm and do damage to their body by continuing to use the broken limb because there was no pain. Have you ever thought of suffering as a gift of God in a fallen world to help fallen man know that something is wrong? I believe that there is another reason that a good God allows suffering, and we will see it in this passage. Suffering becomes a means that we (God’s people) can use to give glory to God. We will look more closely at that as we get into the text.

Several years ago a Gallop Poll found that the # 1 problem people had was “Why do people suffer?” There are various answers to that floating around. The agnostics and atheists would say that it is because there is no God and Christians are responsible for much suffering in the world. The “Health, Wealth, and Prosperity preachers would say that it is because people lack enough faith in God. What does the Bible say? Is it ever God’s will that His people suffer? Listen to Scripture: **Psalms 34:19a (NKJV)** “Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous...” **Acts 14:22b (NKJV)** "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." **Philippians 1:29 (NKJV)** “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”. **1 Peter 4:12 (NKJV)** “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you”. **1 Peter**

5:10 (NKJV) “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*.” That’s just a small sampling of the verses in the New Testament that say that God’s people will suffer. We know that some of the world’s most mature and most committed Christians suffer. The Voice of the Martyrs tells us that the 20th century produced more Christian martyrs than the previous 19 centuries combined. We read of those who suffer according to the will of God in **1 Peter 4:19 (NKJV)** “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

In this passage we will look at a lesson about suffering, but first I want us to see a lesson about salvation in Jesus’ encounter with this blind man.

I. A Lesson about Salvation (V1-7)

A. The Problem (V1-2)

The Bible often uses physical blindness as a picture or illustration of spiritual blindness. This man could not see Jesus. That is the state of the lost today. Jesus is preached, but spiritually they cannot see Him. Jesus is worshipped in a service like this, but they sense nothing because they are spiritually blind and do not see Jesus. They wonder what people are so excited about and why all the emotions. They wonder why we would risk lives, give hard earned money and vacation time in taking the gospel to an unreached Muslim people group who already have their own religion. They are spiritually blind. How did that happen? We have to go all the way back to Adam, the first man, in the Garden of Eden when sin came into the world. What happened to Adam? When God created Adam, he was perfect. He was a temple in which God could live. God told Adam in **Genesis 2:17 (NKJV)** “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Adam did eat of the fruit of the tree. While he did not die physically that day, he did die spiritually. The spiritual life went out of Adam. We are told in **John 1:4 (NKJV)** “In Him [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men.” When the Lord separated Himself from Adam, the life went out. When the life went out, the light went out. The consequences of Adam’s sin was passed onto all of his descendents and so every descendent of Adam is born with the spiritual life and the light gone out. We easily see how this man who was blind from birth is an illustration of every person without Christ. When the life went out mankind became spiritually dead. When the light went out, mankind became spiritually darkened. All without Christ are dead. **Ephesians 2:1 (NKJV)** “And you *He made alive*, who were **dead** in trespasses and sins”. All without Christ are blind. **John 3:3b (NKJV)** “...unless one is born again, **he cannot see** the kingdom of God.” **Ephesians 4:18 (NKJV)** “having their understanding **darkened**, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the **blindness** of their heart”. There is a blindness of the physical eyes, but there is also a blindness of the heart and spirit. This man in our text was born physically blind just as every descendent of Adam is born spiritually blind

Not only was this man blind, he was a beggar. We are told that in John 9:8. This is what sin has done. Look what God created man to do in **Genesis 1:28b (NKJV)** “...fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Man and woman were created to be the King and Queen of the earth and now because of sin, man is not only blind, but also a beggar. Someone may say, “I may not have any spiritual inclinations or understandings, but I am not a beggar. I’ve done quite well for myself, I’ll have you know.” You need to understand the kind of poverty I’m talking about. The lost church at Laodicea had the problem of thinking they were rich when in reality they were poor. Jesus said to them in **Revelation 3:17 (NKJV)** “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”. What a picture we have of lost mankind in this man born blind.

Here is another problem of those who are spiritually blind. Because they are blind, they cannot seek Jesus. How can a blind person seek after something or someone they cannot see? **Romans 3:11 (ESV)** “no one understands; no one seeks for God.” The spiritually blind person cannot see the light. That is why it is not enough to just shine the light of the gospel on the lost. **2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (ESV)** “³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has

blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” No one is saved apart from hearing the gospel, but it takes more to save someone than just proclaiming the gospel to them. Adrian Rogers put it this way, “It takes more than light to save someone. It takes sight, and only God can make the spiritually blind see. It takes more than preaching or witnessing to get people saved. I can preach the truth, and you can share the truth, but only the Holy Spirit can *impart* truth. Those who witness must have the anointing of the Holy Spirit, because we are dependent upon God to open blinded eyes to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to understand that nobody can be argued or educated into the kingdom of heaven” [Adrian Rogers, *Believe in Miracles but Trust in Jesus*, Page 147].

B. The Solution (V3-7)

Why didn't Jesus just command him to see? Why did He use saliva and clay and rub it over the blind man's eyes. I don't think that we know the complete reason, but there are at least two reasons that Jesus did it this way. First, as we will see in the coming verses, this miracle was done on the Sabbath and Jesus used it as He did with the lame man in chapter 5 to expose the Jewish leaders' perversion of the Sabbath. Secondly, the clay (mud in some translations) symbolizes humanity and our inability. **Genesis 2:7a (NKJV)** “And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground...” We are called in 2 Corinthians 4:7 “earthen vessels”. When Jesus put the clay on the man's eyes, the clay sealed out the light even further. This putting the clay on his eyes symbolized what was wrong with him – his inability to do anything about his condition. Then Jesus told him to go to a pool that had a name that meant “sent”. The Holy Spirit put this in the text for a reason. Perhaps the reason that the pool was named “sent” was because the water was sent to the pool from a distant spring. In verse 4 Jesus refers to Himself as one sent from the Father. He calls Himself the “living water” in John 4:10-11. This pool represented Jesus – the One sent from the Father to give light in the darkness and sight in blindness. When the blind man obeyed he had physical sight and as we will see in the verses following, he also gained spiritual sight.

Do you see the picture here? We are weak vessels of clay and we are spiritually blind. Jesus comes to us as the One sent from the Father. He opens our blinded eyes – something that we could never do and then we believe on Him and are saved.

II. A Lesson about Suffering (V1-5)

I am so glad that the Bible deals with the most difficult issues of life and sweeps nothing under the rug. I think that one of the most difficult issues that we have to deal with is the suffering of little children. This passage deals not only with suffering in general, but also with the suffering of a man who as a child was born blind.

A. The Problem (V1)

This man's problem was congenital, that is, it existed from birth. There was a common belief among many of the Jewish Rabbis that all handicaps, all physical problems had as their cause a specific sin of the person with the disability. There was a problem with a congenital disability. Some of the Rabbis said that the disability was because of sin in the womb by the child. For instance, if a pregnant woman worshipped an idol, the child in her womb was guilty of idolatry and any disability was the result of their sin. Others said, “No, a congenital disability was the result of the parent's sin.” We know that this is sometimes true. An example that is all too common is the problem of “drug babies” – babies born to Mothers addicted to drugs and the baby actually being born with the problems of addiction. The specific sin of the parent is not always the cause of the disability of the child. This direct connection of all suffering to a specific sin of the sufferer was the mistake that Job's friends made. For a child of God, it is certainly true that God can choose to discipline His children through sending suffering (1 Corinthians 11:30), but we would make the same error that Job's friends made and were rebuked for by God if we said that was true of all suffering.

B. The Purpose (V2-5)

It seems that Jesus' disciples had accepted the teaching that any disability in a child was because of the disabled person's sin or their parent's sin. Jesus shoots down their false view of suffering and turns their

focus away from the **cause** of blindness to the **purpose** of this blindness. They ask the cause, and He gives them the purpose. Jesus says that the purpose of this man's suffering (and we can assume that this is the purpose of all suffering) is that the works of God be revealed in him. The ESV says "displayed in him". What I am about to share is hard teaching, but it is true and it is comforting when you grasp it and accept it. The Bible tells us in **Ephesians 1:11 (NKJV)** that God "works all things according to the counsel of His will". We read in **Exodus 4:11 (NKJV)** "So the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the Lord?'" Here is what this means: God allowed this man to be born blind so that at this particular moment in his earthly life Jesus might cure him and God might receive the glory. While we cannot know the details of the "why" of suffering, we can know the "what", the purpose of suffering. It is that the works of God be worked in us by Jesus Christ (V5). In these works, the glory of God is put on display.

Let's see if we can take that general "the glory of God" and bring it down into some more specific categories. Let me give you three purposes that especially Christians suffer [concepts taken from James M. Boice, "The Gospel of John, Volume III", Pages 690-692]. First, some sufferings are corrective. Sometimes God allows suffering to bring us back on the path He has chosen for us. The concept of spanking a disobedient child fits here. We are God's children and He spans His children. We see that principle in Hebrews 12:5-7, 11. This ought to be a part of our self-examination when we are going through tough times. If we stray from His ways and there is no painful discipline, Hebrews 12:8 tells us that it proves that we are not His child. Second, God sends His children some sufferings that are constructive. In other words, he allows pain and suffering in our lives to conform us to the image of Christ. Joni Eareckson Tada who is now in her sixties has lived as a Quadriplegic since a diving accident in her late teen years. Here is what she said about suffering. "My particular affliction is divinely hand-tailored expressly for me" [Quoted in Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good*, Page 396]. Randy Alcorn in his excellent book on suffering, entitled *If God Is Good* said, "God uses suffering to purge sin from our lives, strengthen our commitment to Him, force us to depend on His grace, bind us together with other believers, produce discernment, foster sensitivity, discipline our minds, impart wisdom, stretch our hope, cause us to know Christ better, make us long for truth, lead us to repentance of sin, teach us to give thanks in times of sorrow, increase our faith, and strengthen our character. And once He accomplishes such great things, often we can see that our suffering has been worth it. God doesn't simply want us to *feel* good. He wants us to *be* good. And very often, the road to *being* good involves not *feeling* good" [Page 396]. For the Christian, some suffering is corrective, some suffering is constructive, and third, some suffering is that the grace of God might be displayed in our life. That grace will be revealed in one of two ways. It will be revealed in the gracious display of His power to heal or otherwise remove the suffering supernaturally or through natural means such as doctors and medicine. Sometimes His grace is revealed in giving us His sustaining grace in continued suffering and still having His joy. **2 Corinthians 12:9a (NKJV)** "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" What ever our suffering, its purpose is to display the works of God that He might receive the glory that is due his name. We are vessels created with the express purpose of revealing the glory of God. God is the one who chooses how that will be done.

CONCLUSION

God has a design for every disability. God is not a responder; He is a planner. It is all about God, but when God is glorified, it results in our eternal benefit. Whatever glorifies Him is good for us. Why? It is because in glorifying Him we experience the unspeakable joy and pleasure of fulfilling our purpose for existing and deepening in a love relationship with the One who created us for Himself. (3383)