

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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The Blind Can See!

Read John 9:1-17

Key verse: “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’” (John 9:2-3).

Naomi Belingg shared one of those funny things that happen every so often in church. “One Sunday morning,” Naomi remembers, “our pastor preached a powerful message, which his fervent young associate brought to a close with the following instructions: *Let us bow our heads, close our eyes, and sing ‘Open Our Eyes, Lord.’*” That humorous moment captures an unintentional truth that is expressed by the old saying: “There are none so blind as those who will not see.”

John 9:1-17 has a lot to say about sight and blindness, both physical and spiritual. Verses 1-3 also have a lot to say about the reasons for evil and suffering in our world. When Jesus and his disciples encountered the beggar, who had been blind from his birth, the disciples asked Jesus: “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”(v. 2). They were expressing a commonly held view in their day that suffering is always the direct result of someone’s sin.

Jesus plainly contradicted this misconception when He answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s work might be revealed in him” (v. 3). Then Jesus proceeded to reveal that work of God by healing the blind man.

The question of why people suffer is both ancient and as new as today’s headlines. When one looks for the Bible’s answer to this subject, it is important to look at *all* of Scripture, not just a few isolated verses. Seen from this perspective, we find in the Bible at least these four answers to the problem of suffering and evil:

1. Sometimes people suffer because of their own sin. The disciples had it partly right. All of God’s commands are given, not to imprison us, but to save us from harm and lead us into life at its best. But when we choose to reject God’s way—when we choose to sin—the results can be that we suffer because

of our own bad choices. Some examples might include sexually transmitted diseases; imprisonment for crimes committed; the loss of reputation and self-respect; anxiety; fear; etc. Sometimes people suffer because of their own sinful choices.

2. Sometimes people suffer because of the sins of others. It is nice to say about sin, as people often do, “what I’m doing won’t hurt anyone but myself.” But that is seldom true. Others are usually hurt by your sin, and often those closest to you.

3. Sometimes people suffer simply because we live in a fallen world. The world as we now know it is, to use Philip Yancey’s words, “a good thing bent.” The Bible teaches that, when sin came into God’s good creation, that sin brought with it sickness, sorrow, and death. When a person suffers, like the man born blind, it may not be the direct result of anyone’s sin. Rather, sometimes we suffer because we all live in a fallen world, a world broken and tainted by sin. The promise of God is that one day there will be a new heaven and a new earth in which there will be no more sin or sorrow or suffering!

4. Sometimes there is no obvious reason for one’s suffering. Sometimes we just have to say, “I don’t know why this is happening.”

Here is the good news about human suffering and the problem of evil: Whatever the reason for your suffering, God in Christ can redeem it—make something good from it. Jesus did not give a theological answer as to why the beggar had been born blind. Instead, Jesus saw the beggar’s condition as an opportunity for God to work in this man’s life. For the believer, that opportunity is always present!

Romans 8:28 promises: “In all things, God works for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose.” The Methodist evangelist and missionary E. Stanley Jones said this about suffering and the problem of evil: “Don’t bear trouble; use it....Take whatever happens—justice and injustice, pleasure and pain, compliment and criticism—take it up into the purpose of your life and make something out of it....Don’t explain evil; exploit it; make it serve you!”

So, Jesus heals the blind beggar. He does so, interestingly enough, by using a healing technique that would have been familiar to people in Jesus’ day. This technique used saliva and mud and washing at the pool of Siloam (vv. 6-7). But clearly it is the healing power of Jesus and the blind man’s response of faith that brings the miracle.

Before healing the blind man, however, Jesus said something about His mission and ministry that should speak to every Christ-follower today. Jesus said, “We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (v. 4). Jesus’ earthly life and ministry only

lasted 33 years. But if we should live to be 100, life is still fleeting. We all have limited time and opportunities with which to make a difference with our lives for God. So, we too “must work the works of Him” who sends us “while it is day.” Amy Carmichael, missionary to India, wrote: “We will have eternity to celebrate the victories, but only a few hours before sunset to win them.”

Before leaving this passage, let’s look at its meaning within the larger context of John’s gospel. Viewed this way, John 9:1-17 is ultimately a story about spiritual sight and spiritual blindness. The unbelieving response of the Pharisees is telling. Jesus prefaced the healing of the blind man by saying, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (v. 5). Yet, in their spiritual blindness, the Pharisees largely rejected both Jesus’ works and His message.

This is a recurring theme in John’s gospel, which begins by saying: “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him....Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:9-12, italics mine).

Thank God for “Yet”!

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