

## THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel

Part thirty-nine - Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, 10 a.m.

Teaching #1710 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

### IF GOD IS GOOD, WHY WOULD A MAN BE *BORN* BLIND?

John 9:1-7 - "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. [2] And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" [3] Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. [4] We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." [6] Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud [7] and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing."

This is a very hard story to divide into smaller units for study. The reason is this story isn't really divisible. It stands all together as a unit. We're going to look at it by *issue* rather than *verse by verse*. Here are the subjects we will be considering from this wonderful account:

*First*, there is the difficult issue of *why a man would be born blind*. Unexplained suffering lies at the heart of this account and the disciples are seen groping for some explanation. Don't we all?

*Second*, there is the *strange way Jesus heals this man* ("Here's mud in your eye"?), and the *timing of the miracle on the Sabbath*. Surely Jesus knew this would cause problems. He faced the wrath of these same religious leaders before when He healed the *lame man* on the Sabbath in John 5. Is Jesus just a glutton for punishment?

*Third*, and perhaps most important, there is the *growing development of both belief and unbelief* as evidenced in the increasing *sight* (physical and spiritual) in the blind man and the progressive *blindness* of the religious leaders. John is true to his mission of analyzing the nature of authentic belief in Christ. This story is really a vivid account of the growing *agitation* and *conflict* between belief and unbelief. The Apostle John has already stated that the *"darkness hates the light"* (John 3:20). This account plays that hatred out vividly as a warning to all those who love Jesus Christ. It's going to be tough a road.

There are so many other truths to consider here, but we'll do well just to get through these three. We'll look at the first idea today and the last two in our next study:

#### 1) WHAT SHALL DISCIPLES DO WITH UNEXPLAINED SUFFERING?

John 9:1-5 - "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. [2] And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" [3] Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. [4] We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Before we look these verses, I think it's helpful to remind ourselves of the great blessing that is ours to live in the fullness of *post-New Testament revelation*. We often hear people wishing they could have walked the earth with the first disciples. But there are so many advantages *we* have for which *they* still awaited.

It's easy for us to forget that when the disciples asked this question they had no way of understanding the *full New Testament teaching on the nature and effects of the Fall on the whole of creation*. Paul easily throws much light on their confusion in his Holy Spirit inspired writings:

Romans 8:18-25 - "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

The disciples raise their question with the only information they have - the blind-from-birth beggar right in front of them. This is the problem raised by the **disciples**. No one else in this account seems overly troubled by this beggar's undeserved plight. The disciples can imagine only two sources for this man's suffering. This man is blind either because **he** sinned, or **his parents** sinned.

The first explanation makes little sense. It's hard to imagine (apart from a belief in reincarnation) how this man's blindness is due to his **own** sin when he had been blind **from birth** (9:1). When did he **commit** these sins? It's hard to imagine some dastardly deed done in his mother's womb. Surely that couldn't make his blindness a **just** punishment.

If the question of this man's guilt causing his plight seems ridiculous to us we should remember, in fairness, the disciples probably got that idea from Jesus Himself. Do you remember what Jesus said to the **lame man** He healed in **John 5**? Look at His closing words in **John 5:14** - "**Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.'**"

Those words are very easy to misread. When Jesus told this man to "**sin no more,**" He surely wasn't expecting that from that point on this man would be as sinless as Jesus was. Jesus was telling this man **repeated sin causes worse eternal damage to the heart than lameness causes to the body**. And John records those edgy words from Jesus because he knows most of us **don't fear sin** as much as we **fear lameness**. O how we need those words from our loving Lord!

The disciples' second possibility is more probing. Was this man's blindness due to the sin(s) of his parents? While we might be quick to brush this off, the disciples' question didn't just hatch out of thin air. They were probably wondering about some texts from their own Scriptures:

**Exodus 20:4-5** - "**You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. [5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me....**"

These words are almost repeated verbatim in several places:

**Exodus 34:5-7** - "**The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. [6] The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'**"

Those are pretty tough words. We simply must have some explanation for them. They are repeated in different forms in various places in the Old Testament. But one important factor remains the same in each instance. And it's almost always overlooked.

What gets "**visited**" on the children and grandchildren of **idolatrous people** is the "**iniquity**" of the fathers (parents). This text isn't about the **judgment** of God on children for their parents' sins. It's simply stating the obvious truth that the same kind of **idolatry** children observe in their fathers and mothers will be **imitated and practiced** through that family long after those careless parents are off the scene. That same "**iniquity**" keeps "**visiting**" down through that family tree.

Again, this is God's word to busy, distracted people who don't think of the **eternal consequences** arising from their **temporary deviations** from loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. We usually gravitate toward **immediate opportunities** at the expense of our own - and our **children's** - eternal destiny.

And **that's** why those seemingly **harsh** words quoted from Exodus are actually **loving** words of warning and grace. And this quick study of these texts should be a teaching point for all of us. God's Word has to be handled **carefully**. We need to **study** God's Word with a certain **seriousness**. Like any good map, it's true, but it has to be read properly.

## 2) **JESUS PLACES A DIVINE TIME LIMIT ON HOW WE PLAN TO SHOW OUR LOVE FOR HIM IN DEVOTION AND SERVICE**

Look at Jesus' wonderful response to His disciples' question - **John 9:3-5** - "**Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. [4] We must work the works of him who**

**sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”**

You can't help but notice the shift in perspective. The disciples' questions both look *backward*. Jesus' response looks decidedly *forward*. The disciples are looking for *bad causes*. Jesus is talking about *good purposes*. God wants to *work* in the darkness and brokenness of this world. Jesus is probing for some measure of *faith* and *expectancy*.

Let's be clear. It wasn't that Jesus ever taught that all our problems would disappear when we followed Him. He said quite the opposite on many occasions. Following Jesus - as we'll see even in this account of the blind man who gets *“cast out”* of the synagogue (34) - is a very costly venture. Unbelief is *extremely intolerant* of belief. So Jesus wasn't promising any of His disciples a rose garden.

But He *was* telling them - and in His following words *telling us* - that we are a people *in mission*. We are called to *work* in the middle of a world we can't always *explain*. God can usually do *more than we think* if we will venture out and risk all following Him.

This is surely what Jesus means in these words to His church - **John 9:4-5 - “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”**

Let's be clear. Jesus is *still* in this world. He's not here *physically*, as He was when He spoke these words, but He's here *through His body, the church*. Or, in the words of **verse 4**, *“He”* is still here and at work through the *“we”* of His faithful, diligent followers.

You can feel Jesus trying to light a fire under His disciples. It's *day*, but it won't be for long. *Night* is falling fast. And Jesus knows every disciple who has ever followed Him thought he or she had lots of time for planning *future* spirituality and ministry. Jesus knew most of us would come to the end of our time on earth with a list of *missed opportunities, unfinished ministry* and *stock-piled, unspent resources*.

We don't *punch any time clocks* in our walk with Jesus. We can get very *selective* in the amount of time and effort we set aside for the kingdom of God. There's no one *forcing* us to do much of anything in terms of *ministry* and *cost*. We usually feel God is pretty lucky to get what we busy people are willing to give Him because it *all* feels like sacrifice to *us*.

Feel the weight of those words. *“Night is coming!”*(4). Time can't be turned around. It's usually a mistake to take too long just saving up strength and resources for another time down the road. It's getting darker while we wait for a better chance.

**“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4).** Don't miss Jesus' play on words. He chooses them with great precision - **“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.”**

The point being, Jesus was *uniquely* sent, to be sure. But He wasn't the *only* one sent. **“We** must work the works of him who **sent me** while it is day.” And I'm immediately probed by Jesus to consider all the moments of my days I live thinking I get to choose how I will fill my day. Jesus pressed the idea of being *sent* into this world each Monday morning - each dull and dreary February week - *sent* into each annoying meeting - *sent* to His work into every class and office.

Our unspectacular lives can easily be lived *off-mission*. Daylight can be squandered on a blindness to anything but the greed of the moment. And all the while there are *spiritually blind people out there*. And remember, they have to be reached before nightfall.