



The Gospel of John

Session 20: The Healing of the Blind Man and the Questions of the Pharisees

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

In this week's lesson, we'll explore the account of Jesus healing a man born blind. This narrative strikes at the heart of a common question: *Is my suffering, or the suffering of a loved one, a result of sin?*

As you discuss this topic, keep a few things in mind. (1) Everyone suffers because we live in a fallen world broken by sin. (2) While some suffering may be a direct result of sin, this is not always the case, as we see in today's story, or in the story of Job. (3) God uses suffering in the life of a believer for our sanctification, but also to bring about our ultimate (eternal) good.

As people share their own stories of suffering, look for ways to express care and compassion. The most important thing we can do is not answering the "why" of suffering, but pointing to Jesus, "*a man of suffering knew what sickness was*" (Isaiah 53:3).

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 9:1-41

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus gives sight, physically and spiritually. Those who acknowledge their spiritual blindness receive sight; those who don't remain in darkness.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can you recognize and confront an area of spiritual blindness in your own life by responding to Jesus in faith and worship?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 9:1-12 Jesus and the disciples encountered a man born blind. After explaining that the man's affliction was not the direct result of personal sin, Jesus applied mud to the man's eyes, sent him to wash, and he returned seeing. His neighbors were astonished and hardly believed he was the same man who used to sit begging. Jesus has power over suffering. While not all suffering can be attributed to sin, God does use it to bring about our sanctification and His ultimate good.

John 9:13-34 The Pharisees investigated the healing, and expressed anger that Jesus healed on the Sabbath. The man's testimony demonstrated increasing faith in Jesus. He testified first that a man healed him, then he said a prophet, and finally that He (Jesus) came from God. As faith increases, so does our understanding of Jesus's lordship and authority in our lives.

John 9:35-41 After the Pharisees kicked the man out of the sanctuary, Jesus returned to speak to Him. In response, the man expressed faith in Christ and bowed down and worshiped Him. The response to Christ's activity in our lives should always result in worship and obedience to God.



START HERE

What is the nature of suffering? Is suffering the result of sin? These questions are at the heart of every faith tradition in the world, and how we answer them speaks to what we believe about God. In today's text, Jesus was clear that this man's suffering was not the direct result of personal sin, but rather an opportunity for God to be glorified in his life. Jesus healed the man's blindness, but his saving faith in Christ—moving from death to eternal life—is the true miracle of the story.

DISCUSS

How has God used a time of suffering to increase your faith in Christ?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Recognizing spiritual blindness is the first step toward sight.

John 9:1-12: *As he was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him. We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

After he said these things he spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means "Sent"). So he left, washed, and came back seeing.

His neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit begging?" Some said, "He's the one." Others were saying, "No, but he looks like him."

He kept saying, "I'm the one."

So they asked him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So when I went and washed I received my sight."

"Where is he?" they asked.

"I don't know," he said.



Unpacking John 9:1-13

Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) was an American hymn writer, poet, and activist. She penned over 8,000 hymns in her career including “*Blessed Assurance*,” “*Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour*,” and “*To God Be the Glory*.” Her publishers made her write under more than one hundred pen names, for fear that her work would dominate the hymnal!

Aside from her enormous success as a lyricist, Crosby was blind from six weeks of age, when she lost her vision to a medical mistake. But God used her blindness as a means of grace, and in addition to her writing, Fanny Crosby taught in blind schools and advocated in Washington for provisions for the visually impaired. When asked if she wished she were not blind, she famously replied, “*If I had a choice, I would still choose to remain blind . . . for when I die, the first face I will ever see will be the face of my blessed Savior*.” For Crosby, blindness didn’t diminish faith but intensified it. What others saw as a tragedy became the soil for worship.

John chapter nine begins not with a question from the Pharisees, as has been our pattern, but with a question from the disciples: *As he was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* (John 9:1-2). In the ancient world, physical illness or disease was often attributed to a person’s sin. In the case of someone born with an illness, the blame was often shifted to the sins of the parents, or even the baby in utero.

Today, we have better medical advancements and can attribute many ailments to genetics, injury in the womb, or a misalignment in the chromosomes. While science may explain many of the reasons for a particular diagnosis, it is still common to internally question if some sin, behavior, or mistake led to a person’s condition. There is something within us that wants to discover the causes of suffering to, on some level, avoid it ourselves. In the same way, the disciples used the common understanding of the day to try and explain away the man’s condition. In their worldview, suffering was connected to sin—if they could find out which sins to avoid, possibly they could avoid the same suffering.

Scripture does not teach that all suffering is tied to an individual person’s sin. After the fall, sin entered the world, and with it suffering and death (Romans 8:22). The effect of sin on the world means all people struggle not only with sin, but also with living in a world broken by sin. But we can trust that God can use suffering to bring about our sanctification (1 Peter 1:7), increase our joy (James 1:2), help us identify with Christ—a “*a man of suffering*” (Isaiah 53:3)—and ultimately, God’s good purposes (Romans 8:28).

There are other times when a person’s suffering *is* the direct consequence of their own sinful choices (Galatians 6:7). For example, after healing the man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5, Jesus said to the man, “*See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn’t happen to you*” (John 5:14). We could think of a myriad of situations where someone’s sin might cause their own suffering (driving while intoxicated, starting a physical altercation, or engaging in an extramarital affair). Even in these difficult circumstances, God desires to use that suffering



to bring about repentance (Romans 2:4). It is important to note that only God can judge the reasons and the redemption of someone's journey through suffering.

This brings us back to the disciples' question, "*Rabbi, who sinned . . . ?*" Jesus answered them in this way, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned [. . .] *This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him*" (v. 3). Notice three important truths Jesus gave about the man: (1) His disability was not because of sin; (2) God would use the man's disability for good; (3) God would use his disability for *the man's own good*. This blindness wasn't a cautionary tale or inspirational anecdote for others to learn from. God's good plans included displaying His power through the man's blindness. When we experience heart-wrenching suffering, we can be confident God will use it—not just for the good of the church or the good of others—but *for our own good*. He is trustworthy in our suffering.

"*We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world*" (vv. 4-5). In the next breath, Jesus reminded the disciples of His ultimate mission—the redeeming work of God.

Jesus would not, in His earthly ministry, heal every sick person. As Jesus began the slow march toward the cross in the months leading up to His arrest, He reminded them they must be about urgent, strategic work. With these words, He reminded them of His teaching from John 8:12, "*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'*" Jesus was interested in more than restoring a man's sight—He wanted the man to see the Light of the world.

In verses 6-7, Jesus made mud from His own saliva, applied it to the man's eyes, and directed him to walk a considerable distance to the pool of Siloam to wash. Jesus was not only able to heal, He also chose the mechanism by which He would do so. Further, Jesus involved the man in his own healing. He had to go, by faith, to a specific place to wash.

The text recounts what happened next with simplicity: "*So he left, washed, and came back seeing*" (v. 7). His blindness cured, the man returned to his town and family. Jesus did more than restore the man's sight; He fulfilled messianic promise (Luke 4:18-19).

When he returned, seeing, the astonished townspeople couldn't believe their eyes. Some thought he was the blind man they used to sit and beg, yet others were not convinced. For the first time in the story, the man spoke: "*The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So when I went and washed I received my sight*" (v. 11). Notice the simplicity of his testimony. He did not reference Old Testament prophecy or share other theological insight. His story began with testimony before theology: *This is what Jesus did for me*.

Timothy Keller wrote, "*Suffering is actually at the heart of the Christian story.*" Jesus did not avoid the man's suffering; He redeemed it. Blindness became the doorway to glory for this man. The healed man saw, but the religious leaders, who claimed spiritual clarity, began to reveal something else.



DISCUSS

- *How did Jesus answer the disciples' assumption about suffering in verses 2-3?*
- *Where have you been tempted to interpret suffering through blame rather than through God's glory?*
- *Like the man, if you were to give a one-sentence testimony about what Jesus has done for you, what would you say? What simple testimony could you give, even if you don't have all the theological answers?*

2. Spiritual sight exposes spiritual blindness.

John 9:13-34: They brought the man who used to be blind to the Pharisees. The day that Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes was a Sabbath. Then the Pharisees asked him again how he received his sight.

"He put mud on my eyes," he told them. "I washed and I can see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he doesn't keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a sinful man perform such signs?" And there was a division among them.

Again they asked the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he opened your eyes?"

"He's a prophet," he said.

The Jews did not believe this about him—that he was blind and received sight—until they summoned the parents of the one who had received his sight.

They asked them, "Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

"We know this is our son and that he was born blind," his parents answered. "But we don't know how he now sees, and we don't know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he's of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said these things because they were afraid of the Jews, since the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed him as the Messiah, he would be banned from the synagogue. This is why his parents said, "He's of age; ask him."

So a second time they summoned the man who had been blind and told him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner."

He answered, "Whether or not he's a sinner, I don't know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!"

Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"



"I already told you," he said, "and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don't want to become his disciples too, do you?"

They ridiculed him: "You're that man's disciple, but we're Moses's disciples. We know that God has spoken to Moses. But this man—we don't know where he's from."

"This is an amazing thing!" the man told them. "You don't know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does his will, he listens to him. Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything."

"You were born entirely in sin," they replied, "and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.

Unpacking John 9:13-34

John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace*, once profited from the slave trade. After years of debaucherous living and working on trade ships, a near death experience on a voyage caused him to rethink his life. When Newton returned to England safely after the harrowing trip, he made his way to the nearest church and surrendered his life to Christ. At first, John Newton continued working on slave ships while trying to follow Jesus. Eventually, overcome with conviction, he left that work completely, and dedicated the next forty-three years of his life to serving as an Anglican priest in Olney England. Years after leaving the slave trade, as a testimony to the redeeming work of Christ, he penned this hymn: *"Amazing grace (how sweet the sound) that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."* The story of the blind man in John 9, as you might imagine, inspired Newton's words.

It did not take long for the Pharisees to catch wind of Jesus's miraculous healing of the blind man. Verse 13 says the townspeople *"brought the man who used to be blind to the Pharisees."* Although we are not told the exact motivation for doing so, verse 14 gives us a clue: *"The day that Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes was a Sabbath."* In response, the Pharisees immediately began to question this man. As we work through this section of the text, notice the three testimony statements the man gives compared to the statements of the Pharisees. The man expressed increasing faith, while the Pharisees expressed increasing agitation and disbelief.

"He put mud on my eyes," he told them. "I washed and I can see" (v. 15b). The man's first testimony to the Pharisees was a simple recounting of events. *"This happened; then this happened, now I can see."* He did not spiritualize or preach—he simply stated the result of his encounter with Jesus. The first part of one's testimony is sharing what happened when encountering Jesus. Some people hesitate to share their story, thinking it lacks a dramatic or compelling encounter like the one in John 9. But every story of a person who encounters Jesus—is redeemed, set free, and made a child of God for eternity—is a miracle. Moving from



death to life is the most powerful testimony any person can share, regardless of the circumstances surrounding it.

The Pharisees, however, were more focused on the law than the miracle. *“This man is not from God, because he doesn’t keep the Sabbath”* (v. 16). The Pharisees judgment of Jesus rather than rejoicing in the miracle revealed their hardened hearts. As R.C. Sproul wrote, *“We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.”* No amount of religious training or spiritual knowledge will overshadow our need for a savior. When we encounter Christ, we either open our hearts to the truth of the gospel or harden it. Many Pharisees stubbornly chose judgment and disbelief, even though the proof of Christ’s power stood right in front of them.

Still, others were divided. *“How can a sinful man perform such signs?”* (v. 16). Their question was similar to Nicodemus’s in John 3: *“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him.”* To stamp out the division, the Pharisees questioned the man a second time. *“He’s a prophet,” he said* (v. 17). Upon further consideration, the man could no longer assume his healer was simply *“the man called Jesus”* (v. 11). His encounter with Christ moved him from recipient of grace to simple faith in one who was sent by God.

Not receiving the answer they wanted, the Pharisees tried a different approach. They threw out the miracle entirely, assuming that the man was lying or confused about having been blind. They summoned his parents to identify the suspect. *“Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”* The stunned parents would answer the first two questions, but fear of the Jewish leaders and threat of losing their place in the synagogue prevented them from answering the third.

“We know this is our son and that he was born blind,” his parents answered. “But we don’t know how he now sees, and we don’t know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he’s of age. He will speak for himself” (vv. 20-21). There is inherent risk in identifying with Jesus. The man’s parents sensed a real threat to their way of life and place in the community and were unwilling to make an affirmative declaration about Christ. There is a cost of following Jesus, personally, relationally, and otherwise. The parents of the young man, in effort to reduce the potential cost for themselves, passed the judgment along to him.

Verse 24 tells us that the Pharisees called the man back to testify a second time. *“Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner”* (v. 24). The man’s reply indeed gave glory to God. *“Whether or not he’s a sinner, I don’t know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!”* His testimony pointed to the one who healed. Unsatisfied, they pressed the man again, and in his frustration, he answered them: *“I already told you,” he said, “and you didn’t listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don’t want to become his disciples too, do you?”* His words, which enraged the Pharisees, give a glimpse into the man’s emerging faith. He did not ask if they wanted to become disciples, he asked if they wanted to become disciples *also*.



The Pharisees sputtered and ridiculed, then circled back to the tired argument of Jesus's paternity (John 8:19,41; 9:29). But the blind man redirected the conversation back to the matter at hand—Jesus of Nazareth had healed him!

“This is an amazing thing!” the man told them. “You don’t know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does his will, he listens to him. Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind” (vv. 30-32). With the man’s bold declaration, he gave a third testimony about Christ: *“If this man were not from God, he wouldn’t be able to do anything”* (v. 33). While the previously blind man’s faith increased as he reflected on his experience, the Pharisees hearts hardened further.

In response, they carried out the very thing the man’s parents sought to avoid. *“You were born entirely in sin,” they replied, “and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out”* (v. 44). Notice the difference between the Jesus’s answer to the disciples’ question in verse 3, and the Pharisees’ response in verse 24. Jesus said the man’s blindness was not directly connected to personal sin but so that God would be glorified in his life. The Pharisees saw the glory of God on display in the man’s life but still blamed he and his parents of wrongdoing.

The reality is both are true. We are sinners from birth (Psalm 51:5), and through Christ we are set free from our sin. Hymn writer and pastor John Newton understood what it meant to have the glory of God made manifest in his life, and to reconcile his salvation with his prior way of living. In his final recorded words Newton wrote, *“My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior.”*

DISCUSS

- *How did the man’s understanding and faith grow throughout this section?*
- *How might religious knowledge mask spiritual blindness?*
- *When have you had to stand firm in your testimony despite opposition from others? What makes this challenging?*

3. Spiritual sight leads to belief and worship.

John 9:35-41: *Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, and when he found him, he asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*

“Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?” he asked.

Jesus answered, “You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”



"I believe, Lord!" he said, and he worshiped him.

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind."

Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things and asked him, "We aren't blind too, are we?"

"If you were blind," Jesus told them, "you wouldn't have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Unpacking John 9:35-41

Helen Keller (1880-1968) was a deafblind American author, advocate, and lecturer, known for her relationship with her lifelong teacher and friend, Anne Sullivan. Through Anne's tireless efforts, Keller, who became blind in infancy from meningitis, learned to read, write, and speak. Helen Keller attended both Radcliff and Harvard University and became the first deafblind person in the United States to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. Keller, who went on to author fourteen books, including *The Story of My Life*, wrote, *"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."*

"Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, and when he found him, he asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (John 9:35). Jesus's compassionate care extends to those who have been disenfranchised by religion. God cares about those who have been forced out of a faith community for doing the right thing.

Jesus gave the man born blind an opportunity to clarify his faith. When presented with Jesus's question, he responded with enthusiasm to better understand God's ways. *"Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?"* We do not get to define God. He is the transcendent Creator and Sustainer of all things. In Isaiah 40:25 God declares, *"To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal?" asks the Holy One.* Jesus did not ask the man who he thought the Son of Man should be—He asked if He believed in the Son of Man, who already was. The man's response demonstrated the openness and urgency he felt in response to the work Jesus had done in his life.

Jesus answered, "You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you" (v. 37). The man immediately declared his faith in Christ. "I believe, Lord!" he said, and he worshiped him (v. 38). John Piper wrote, "Saving faith is the kind of faith that sees Christ as more precious than anything else." The proper response to the revelation of Jesus Christ is a person's life is belief and worship.

By contrast, Jesus said the Pharisees, who observed the healed man and had extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, remained blind. *"Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind" (v. 39).*



Claimed sight was the barrier for the Pharisees. They believed they had perfect knowledge, yet their pride blinded them from the truth. Because of their claim to have perfect insight into the ways of God, Jesus told them they would remain in their sins (v. 41). By contrast, the man, when he gained his sight, received vision for God's work and activity through Christ, and with it, eternal life. The healed man not only saw Jesus—he treasured Him.

DISCUSS

- *Why is it significant that Jesus returned when He heard the man had been put out of the temple?*
- *What is the difference between sight and vision? How might we face becoming satisfied with less than God wants us to do and experience in His kingdom?*
- *How can you keep your heart soft and open to God's activity around you this week?*

DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *Where might you be assuming spiritual clarity instead of humbly asking for sight?*
- *How is your knowledge of Jesus moving you toward worship?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- *How has suffering shaped your understanding of Jesus?*
- *What testimony of transformation can you share with someone this week?*

APPLY

What would it look like to pray daily, "Lord, show me where I am blind?"



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