

Not Much Theology

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[0:00] I asked John to choose songs about grace for today, and I didn't know he was going to choose! that last one, but it's my wife's favorite song, one of her favorite songs.

And I don't know if you picked it because of this reason, but that was one of the songs we did in my retirement service. Thank you, John.

Would you turn your Bibles to John chapter 9? I mentioned on Wednesday that the last several days that I saw a pastor before he left, but he reminded me, and in fact, one of the times Peggy was there, and he reminded her as well, that he gave me two really good passages.

One of them was Psalm 23, and the other one was John chapter 9, verses 1 to 12, which is what we're going to look at this morning. Before we begin there, though, I would like to just kind of ask you to think about this.

How many of you are highlighters or underliners? You know what? Wow, most of you are highlighters. Highlighters or underliners, people who, when they read a book, they have to have something in their hand, some kind of marking device, so that they can underline or they can highlight or whatever it is.

[1:39] I'm a highlighter, but I highlight with particular rules. That's just the way I am. Some of you know that. That means that you can't have more than one highlight on a page, and only one, but there's no highlights in my Bible.

This week I got a new phone. I had to sync it with my account for my Bible program, and I got all of the highlights, 500 and some highlights, that my wife puts into our shared Bible account.

John was a highlighter, but John was a highlighter like I'm a highlighter. The apostle John told of only seven miracles in the whole book of John.

Only seven. Even though at the end of the book he says that if I had written everything that Jesus had done, the world itself could not have contained all of the records.

Let me just remind you of those. By the way, I should have mentioned this before I remind you of those. We have the vent fans, the circulation fans running, but the temperature outside is only 32, and you can't run air conditioning if the temperature outside is 32.

[3:15] So I apologize. I know it's a little warm. Some people are warmer than others. But we do have those circulating fans running. The miracles in John, first back in chapter 2, Jesus turning the water into wine.

In John chapter 4, the nobleman's son that Jesus said, just go home, he's well now. In John chapter 5, the healing of the lame man by the pool of Bethesda.

In John chapter 6, the multiplying of the loaves and the fishes. Later in 6, him walking on the water. Today's passage in John chapter 9 of him curing the man born blind.

And then the one yet to come, the raising of Lazarus. All of those put forth the concept, the idea of faith.

Have you ever borrowed a book from someone who was a highlighter or an underliner? Okay? It can be really interesting.

[4:21] I've borrowed books from Pastor Knoyer. Pastor Knoyer is beyond underlining. He is a write-down. He's written a whole text, okay, in the margin. You borrow a book from him, and you get just as much enjoyment out of reading the columns as you do reading the actual book.

Well, what we're going to try to do today is to figure out why did John put this particular miracle in his writing. We're going to see, I think, I hope, that it connects with John's overall purpose.

That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. So we're going to review this highlight and with the goal of seeing how does this help us to believe.

Two points that I'm going to give you that I hope you take away. So I'm going to tell them to you right up front. The first one is a better understanding of the connection between sin and suffering. And the second, the encouragement and example of faith that we see in the individual. Well, John chapter 9, verses 1 to 3.

[5 : 38] And he passed by, as he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, It is not this man that sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Now, first, let me set the context for you. What we do know is that this was a Sabbath. We'll see that later in the part that Pastor Knoyer will do next week or the week after.

We don't know exactly where it takes place, but it would make sense if it took place right outside the temple. After all, it was a great place to beg. People went there thinking about God, thinking about doing good things so God would see.

So handing someone, begging on the steps, money, maybe God would see that. He's right there in the temple. So it was a good place. There was also a lot of people going back and forth.

[6 : 39] So it was kind of like an off-ramp. Okay? You could depend upon seeing a lot of people so that it was a good place to beg. It's in this context, though, that we see Jesus and the disciples.

They see this man that the text says he was born blind. We don't know how they knew that. Okay? But it's in this context that the disciples turn from the man to a theological question.

We see a great difference between the response of the disciples and the response of Jesus. The interest of the disciples was prompted by theological curiosity rather than compassion.

To the disciples, they look at this man and they think, ah, theological puzzle here. Now, it doesn't seem that their motives were entirely pure.

They may have had the same idea that children have when one child is going to be punished and the other children, hey, what did he do?

[7 : 53] Is he really going to get it this time? They may have had that kind of curiosity. Oh, there's some deep, dark sin in this man's life.

Let's ask Jesus what it is. Or maybe there's this deep, dark sin in his parents' life. Well, let's ask Jesus what it was.

Their question, Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents? That he would be born blind.

Assumed or accepted the popular doctrine of that day and quite frankly, all too often of our day. And that is that physical suffering of a person is always the direct result of personal sin. to Jesus. To look in this man's direction presented an opportunity for grace. His focus was on putting God's power on display.

[9 : 07] First of all, for this man's benefit and then also for ours. They wanted to know, so how did he get that way? And Jesus answered, what can we do for him?

That brings us to what I said was one of the things I wanted you to take away. And that is because this same question so infiltrates our day, I think it's important for us to understand what the biblical connection is between sin and suffering.

So, I'm going to begin with that first of all, stating it very simply. Suffering in general is ultimately the result of sin in general.

All the way back to the garden, Genesis chapter 2, what was God's instruction to Adam and Eve? In the day that you eat of it, that is in the day that you sin, you will die.

The presence of suffering, the presence of pain, the presence of disease, the presence of all bad things is the direct result of mankind's sin.

[10 : 29] Not only the first man, but every subsequent man after that with, of course, the exception of Jesus Christ. So, it is true that there is a general connection between sin and suffering.

It's also true that sometimes there is a specific connection between an illness and sin.

I'm going to give you a few biblical examples. first one I'll give you is Miriam. Miriam is Moses' big sister.

All right? And Miriam gets a little bit tired of her little brother being in charge, making all the rules.

He thinks he's the only one that walks with God. Not that any children would ever think that. And so, she says, so what do you think?

[11 : 35] You're the only one that knows God? And instantly, she gets leprosy. Instantly. Earlier, in the book of John, one of the other miracles that's displayed is the man who was lame by the pool of

Bethsaida.

And remember, Jesus said, do you want to be healed? And he said, well, I'd like to, but there's nobody to get me in the water. We are not told that that man was born lame. I don't know if he did something that caused his lameness or not.

I do know this, that after Jesus healed him, Jesus said, now, you've been healed. Go, don't sin anymore, because something worse might happen.

Number three, in the passage we use, every time we do communion, we see, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we see Paul writing to them and him saying, you guys have got it all wrong, you're doing this really incorrectly, and the result of your sin is that there's a lot of you sick and some of you have even died.

Finally, biblical examples, Ananias and Sapphira. They simply told the wrong amount that they sold their property for.

[13:16] Now, it seems that they did that so that they could get the acclaim of men in the house of God. But the result, both of them died.

Those are biggies. Let's take a smaller, easier to connect example. Let's say that I have a tremendous anger problem. I just get overwhelmingly mad.

And so, I get, for some reason, something happens, and I just become overwhelmingly angry. And I run back there to that brick wall, and I just start pounding it with my fist.

What will happen? I will get at least a bloody fist, maybe a broken fist. Is that the direct result, direct consequence of my sin?

Yes, it is. So, there is, in general, a connection, sometimes even a specific connection.

[14:25] In addition, third thing, sometimes, there are several passages in the Old Testament, especially, some in the New, but mostly in the Old Testament, that suggest that an individual receives punishment for the sins of their parents.

text. Perhaps you've seen, read one of those texts. Perhaps you've even struggled with it. How can this be? That's not the God that the rest of the Bible talks about.

We want to look at one of those, and then just think about why is it that it says that? Turn with me back to Exodus chapter 20. Little hint, if I'm going to Exodus chapter 20, what am I going to look at? Ten commandments, very good. It's one of those passages that ought to just be right on the tip of your tongue. If I'm going to Exodus 20, it's something to do with the Ten Commandments, with the law.

Exodus chapter 20 and verse 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 fourth generation of those who hate me.

[15:50] Wow, that sounds like God punishes people to the third and fourth generation for a person's sin. Let me make three points about that to help, about this and texts like it in the Old Testament.

first, it is true that when Israel went into captivity in Babylon, did the children have to go also? Yes, they did.

So were they impacted? Yes, they were. And in the same way today, if dad or mom is the primary breadwinner and they are not working hard and they lose their job, will the children suffer?

The answer is yes. Yes, they do. It's also true that when the people went into captivity in Babylon and the children turned back to God, what did he do?

He had brought them right back out and put them right back into the land of plenty that he had given to their forefathers. Second thing I'd like you to think about there is that Old Testament passages must often be understood in a societal or national sense.

[17:25] In other words, it's what one generation teaches to the next. MacArthur says it this way, the point is that the corrupting effect of a wicked generation seeps into subsequent generations.

I would say it a little differently than that. I would say every once in a while, not very often, but every once in a while, I see some of my old nature, not just in me, in my children, and now, only once in a while, in my grandchildren.

The same things that I struggled with, the same sense, it must be genetic. Whatever it is, I think that's also the thing that is speaking of here.

third, this idea must be balanced by many passages, I'm only going to name three of them for you, Deuteronomy 24 verse 16, Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 29 and 30, and Ezekiel chapter 18 verse

20, all of those, and many, many others, say clearly, a person suffers only for their own sins and not for the sins of their parents.

So while we simply cannot say that the sin and affliction are never linked, once we move beyond that general statement to a connection between sin and individual suffering, we've gone beyond the biblical evidence.

[19:12] And in this case, the disciples, back in John chapter 9, in this case, the disciples have claimed a very direct connection between suffering of blindness by this man and some specific individual sin.

And since, in this case, the man was born blind, what does that tell you? It tells you that either it was his parents, or he must have somehow sinned in the womb.

I don't know. Maybe he kicked his mom too hard or something. I don't know. Something must have happened. Let me say it clearly.

Here's the point. There is not always a direct link between suffering and personal sin. I could review the book of Job here, but I thought it would be better to look at a couple of other New Testament passages.

I'm going to have you actually turn to one of them. I wasn't going to do this, but it's all right. Turn to Luke chapter 13. Luke chapter 13.

[20:29] I'm going to read to you verses 1 through 5. There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

And he answered them, do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Of those 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than the others who lived in Jerusalem? No. What color are those words in your Bible? In mine, they're red. In other words, it's the direct teaching of Christ. And the direct teaching of Christ says there's not always a direct link between suffering and personal sin.

I'll give you two other examples. In Acts chapter 28 verse 4, we have at the end of the book of Acts, Paul is being transported for trial back to Rome.

[21:48] And he undergoes shipwreck. And so he's lost in this shipwreck, but he miraculously, by the work of God, him and everyone on that boat is saved.

So now, he is on the island, he's collecting sticks to start a fire, and what happens? A snake jumps out, bites him on the hand, and the people standing around say, oh, boy, he must be a really bad sinner.

I wish we knew what he did. Because he escaped the shipwreck, but he got bitten by the snake. And the result?

Nothing. Not only is there nothing as a result, but every one of those people that are standing around begins to think, he must be the God.

So they start trying to worship him. Eventually, they take him to other people in the village that are sick, so that they can just look at Paul, and maybe Paul will pray for them, and maybe they'll be may well.

[22:55] Third, of course, the best illustration is clearly Jesus. Jesus' suffering did occur because of sin. It did not occur because of his sin. There was no sin in the life of Christ.

The Bible gives us lots of reasons, other than sin, that God allows suffering to come into our lives. So while Jesus did not deny the general connection, he refuted the idea that personal acts of sin were always the direct cause of suffering.

So on one hand, there's the overarching relationship between sin, between the reality of sin in this world and the reality of pain. On the other hand, we err when we reduce that to a one-to-one relationship in individuals' lives.

So how do we tell the difference? How do we know when it's one and when it's the other? Let me give you some guiding principles. First of all, in your own life, in your own life, remember that what God is doing is for your good and for his glory.

If what God is doing is for your good and for his glory, then when you find yourself in the midst of some kind of suffering, there's two questions you can ask yourself.

[24:31] The first one is, has God been speaking to me over a long period of time of a personal sin that I've refused to deal with?

God used to speak to me. He's used other people to challenge me and to help me and I haven't listened to them.

He's used the teaching of his word, whether that's through a sermon, whether that's through our own personal devotions, whether that's through a song that we hear, something, a message that we hear on the radio.

Has God used some direct teaching to try to teach me that? Finally, have I already endured some smaller consequences, some smaller pain and suffering that has now seemed to just continue? I've ignored it. I knew God was talking to me. I knew God wanted me to change this, but I refuse to do it and I'm simply not going to change. Secondly, second question.

[25:40] Is there a direct teachable connection? Remember that God wants our good and his glory. So what he wants is not our punishment, but for us to learn the lesson.

Let's go back to the example that I gave earlier about personal sin and its direct outcome of pain and suffering. If I have a huge anger problem and I run to the back of the church and I start beating it with my fist, that brick wall, I will first notice that my hand starts to bleed, perhaps starts to hurt. Little things. You might try to stop me. What are you doing, you idiot? You might try to hold me back. Okay? So I've got other people I'm ignoring.

I've got the small issue, the small consequence of my blood. If I continue to do it, I can expect my hand to be more mangled.

Right? There's the little steps that God takes in our life. First, he does not, if I run back there, hit the wall with my fist, he does not give me brain cancer.

[26:57] So I'm sitting there thinking, hmm, I wonder why I have brain cancer. Maybe it's because of my anger problem. God wants to teach us and so he uses things that we can make the direct connection on.

If the answer to those two questions is yes, then I need to pray. And I need to do.

I need to work to walk closer to Christ to say, I give, I'm not going to continue in this. If the answer is no, then don't obsess over the lesson.

I hear people all the time, well, I'm going through this terrible trial and I just hope God teaches me the lesson quickly. Maybe God just wants you to glorify him even in the midst of suffering.

And he's not going to take it away. Jesus said here that the works of God might be displayed in him.

[28:04] That's in my own life. What about in the lives of others? I see someone going through tremendous pain and suffering. What do I say to them?

I do not know if their suffering is a consequence of a sin or not. I don't know that.

So I don't ask them. I don't suggest it. Rather, I work to have the mercy of Christ rather than the judgmental curiosity of the disciples.

It may give me opportunity for testimony to the person. It may be the opportunity to just point them to the goodness and grace and mercy of Christ.

God's sake. What about the man in this story? Did God cause his blindness of this man for his whole life just so God could demonstrate his own glory?

[29:16] Paul would have said, may it never be. God sovereignly chose to use this man's affliction that he already had for his own glory.

The reward to the man. He saw the face of his healer and his savior. The reward to others.

People through the ages and perhaps even here today. Read this and believe that Jesus is the Christ as was John's goal and purpose for writing this in the first place.

And receive eternal life. Verses 4 through 12. We must work 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.

Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva.

[30:32] Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, go wash in the pool of Siloam, which means scent. So he went and washed and came back seeing the neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, is this not the man who used to sit and beg?

Some said, it is he. Others said, no, but it is like him. He kept saying, I am the one. So they said to them, then how are your eyes opened?

He answered, the man called Jesus made mud, anointed my eyes and said to me, go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed and received my sight. And they said to him, where is he?

He said, I don't know. Remember God, John's purpose. John's purpose was that we believe. We believe not just in the miracles, but we believe in Christ.

Not just the works, but the person. So the first thing we notice here is Jesus declaring that he is the light of the world. And then proceeding to illustrate that by giving a light to this man who had been born blind.

[31 : 51] The act is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of what the Messiah would do. In Isaiah chapter 42, verse 6 and 7, I am the Lord. I have called you in righteousness.

Speaking of Christ, I take you by the hand and keep you. I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations to open the eyes that are blind.

Several other reasons. There are several other cases in the New Testament where Jesus heals blind people. But this miracle is unique because it's the only one where the man is said to have been born blind.

In other words, congenital blindness. This man has never seen. And so it raises the bar of what this miracle really says.

This connection in this context to light points back to the deity of Christ. The picture of Jesus being the light appears over and over in the book of John.

[33 : 02] Beginning, right at the beginning, John chapter 1. I'm going to read just a couple of the verses out of the passage that's overall 1 through 14. Verse 4, And him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Verse 9, The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world.

The world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.

The idea of his being the light comes up again in John chapter 8, the previous chapter. We said, I am the light of the world. And here, he says exactly the same thing.

But this time he does it with an illustration. The healing of the blind man shows that Christ not only took the theory, not only took the theology, not only took the teaching, but he applied it individually in people's lives.

[34 : 15] I don't have time to talk about the means. Let me just tell you, I looked in six different commentaries. Six different people had different ideas.

Okay? If you go to six different doctors, they all tell you something different that's wrong with you. They don't know. All right? So no one knows why Jesus chose, in this case, to do it as he did.

But I want you to think with me about this man, this poor blind man. He's still blind when Jesus sends him. It isn't until he washes that he becomes seeing.

So this pool is on the other end. If this took place at the temple, this pool is on the other end of Jerusalem from where he is.

He's still blind. The trip that this man must have made simply because Jesus told him to. Okay?

[35 : 17] He is an example of faith because he had no promises. Jesus didn't say, go wash and you're going to be able to see. Jesus put mud on his eyes and said, go wash.

There were no commitments that God made to him. But the man obeyed. And he came back seeing. This man didn't have all of his theology laid out.

This man didn't understand all the details. This individual had said, go and wash. And he went and he washed. And he sees.

Jesus opened the physical eyes of this blind man. But more importantly, he opened the spiritual eyes of this man. He was physically seeing things for the first time in his life.

This man was born blind. He had always been blind. He had never seen a sunset. He had never seen the face of his mother or any of his other family members.

[36 : 25] He had never seen anything. But when he saw, there was one that he wanted to see above all others.

Jesus. The account of the healing of the blind man by Jesus beautifully illustrates the salvation process.

Not physically, but spiritually, all we were sinners. All we were blind.

Jesus sought us out. He revealed himself to us. He showed us mercy. He showed us mercy. Just like that in salvation.

And in the life of this blind man. Just as the blind man was healed, only when he obeyed Jesus' command and washed in the pool.

[37:38] So we are only saved when we humbly and obediently embrace the truth of the gospel. And what is the truth of the gospel?

That all men are sinners. Each and every one of us was lost in our sin. Each and every one of us was blind just as much as that man.

But God sent his son who had the power over creation that could even make a man born blind to see.

And he touched us. And because of that, we have salvation. The man born blind is a picture that helps us to understand the connection between suffering and sin.

But more importantly, it gives us a pointer to the one who was the answer for that sin. Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Great God and Father, creator of the universe, who have not only provided healing, solution to our sufferings, but more importantly, you have provided us with your son, Jesus Christ, in the answer to our sin.

[39:24] Lord, I don't know where people are today. I don't know if there's anyone here that has not come to the place of having a personal relationship with you, a relationship that provides the answer for their sin.

but you do. Father, I trust that you will work in that person's life to bring them to the place of accepting you.

Father, there may be some here today that are suffering. Maybe some that we know, perhaps some that we don't know. And Lord, the encouragement that suffering is not always the direct connection to sin.

but that you are always the answer for that suffering. It gives us hope. It gives us comfort. So I pray, Lord, that those individuals that are suffering would be encouraged, but also would be dependent upon you.

Father, I thank you for your word and the truth that it provides. In Christ's name. Amen. Would you stand, please? Amen. keep it. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. DR. UNA lip.

[40:37] lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. ...