

John 9:1-12 “Walking Through Darkness with Jesus”

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Go ahead and deal with something up front. My son said that I'm way too stripy today and my shirt is very ugly. So if it offends you, I'm just going to go ahead and apologize to everyone involved here.
- Amen. Thank you. Adriana, you always have an amen for me. I love you. So we get to pick up in John chapter 9 today.
- But one of the things that Will mentioned a few weeks ago was that one of the things he's most afraid of in the dark. Remember what he said? Remember what his greatest fear is in a dark room?
- Stepping on Legos. So after he said that, I came across this video and it was just, somebody made that into a game. It's just too good not to show. So I thought we could start there.
- [1 : 0 1] I think he gets it twice here.
- Yeah. Had to, right?
- Had to. So what I like about that is that in order to win the game, you have to avoid the pain. And I know it's pretty funny.
- It's pretty funny to watch that, right? But none of us like pain, right? This morning, like, I woke up, my back was seized up from stretching, I think.
- And I wasn't sure I was going to get out of bed. And I had AC help me up. But I would have done anything to avoid that pain. I wasn't even sure I was going to get my shoes on for a while today. And Bill assures me that this is the beginning.
- [2 : 1 3] He actually laughed when I told him that. He just started laughing out loud like a maniacal laugh. Just wait, Derek. Just wait. But we'll do anything to avoid pain.
- And one of the worst pains is the pain that we feel when we've lost somebody. And it's interesting. I read this article recently.
- And they are using AI technology now to help people cope with grief. And I don't know what I think about it, but it's coming. So here's some examples. There's one company called Hereafter AI.
- They use, people record answers to interview questions. And they upload photos while they're still alive. And then they leave behind a virtual version of themselves. Then there's StoryFile, which is pre-planned, but a user can record videos of themselves that are turned into AI-powered interactive conversations for loved ones.
- So it actually creates a version of you that you can interact with. And then some of these personas you actually text with. And people don't know what to do with it, especially some psychologists saying this actually might be counterproductive.

[3 : 27] But then YouOnlyVirtual is an AI communications platform. It says they let users create a persona that they can actually continue their relationships virtually after death. So we want to avoid pain.

And we will do anything we can to try to avoid it. And pain and suffering are some of the most common objections to the existence of God.

And, like, how can a good God exist if bad things happen? If God is love, then why is there suffering in the world? And these are serious questions.

And in this passage today, Jesus actually deals with that. It jumps right into that. So before we take a look at it, a little bit of background. Remember what's happened right before this.

We went through this last week. Jesus has just evaded being attacked or stoned to death in the temple. Because he had just said those words, before Abraham was, I am.

[4 : 28] This was considered blasphemy by the Jewish authorities. So they pick up stones to kill him. And he was claiming to be God. And so he escapes.

And he and his disciples are leaving the temple. And that's where this picks up. So they're on their way out. And they see a man born blind. And in history, if you were blind or you had an ailment during this time, you couldn't really make money unless you were begging.

And so most people with ailments or someone particularly blind in this passage from birth would be there asking for money for generous people coming out of the temple. So that's where this picks up.

So let's jump in and read this together. 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 was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.

[5 : 39] 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, made mud with the saliva.

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 he's like him. He kept saying, I am the man. So they said to him, Then how were your eyes opened?

He answered, The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, Go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed and received my sight.

They said to him, Where is he? He said, I do not know. So Jesus and his disciples leave the temple. And as they pass by this man who was born blind from birth, The disciples ask, Rabbi, who sinned?

[6 : 49] This man or his parents that he was born blind? So the first thing we look at here is this question. Okay? You see in verses 1 and 2. Why would they ask this question?

Doesn't that seem odd? A guy won't pass by someone and say, Well, whose fault is that that this person has this condition? Well, some rabbis of the time, And rabbi meant teacher, remember?

They actually taught that it was possible to sin before birth. So if you were born and you sinned before birth, Then you were born with a condition. So it would have been a very valid theological question For them to ask their rabbi, Jesus, their teacher.

And if you really think about it, We do a very similar thing today. In a little bit of a different way. Have you ever had a week, Hard week, Or situation In your life, And you thought to yourself, Have I done something to cause this?

Did I do something wrong? Is the universe against me? Let's put it into Christianese. Did I not read or pray enough this week? Is God mad at me?

[8 : 05] Because all of these things came out of nowhere. Am I under spiritual attack? Because I didn't do something? The Christian way? So this thought process runs really deep in our culture.

But if you think about the flip side of that, It's this. If things are going well, Then me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me. Right?

I must have done something really, really good to deserve this. Goes something like this. I work hard for this money, This house, This life, You fill in the blank, Therefore you should, Whatever.

Therefore I deserve, I deserve this. What's the problem with this? It can lead to a very, very self-righteous and prideful way of living.

Especially if we do that in the church. Ouch. What's that say about Jesus? We will take credit for the good things, But we want someone or something to blame for the bad things that don't go our way.

[9 : 13] So here's the other problem with that line of thinking. It's just not true. Okay? There are plenty of good people who live miserable lives. And plenty of people who do horrible things, Grow old, Live long lives, And die peacefully in their sleep.

So, What do we do then with suffering? Okay? Why suffering? That's what the disciples are asking here.

Why is suffering existing in this situation? And typical responses are anger or guilt. Sometimes it's a combination of the two.

So, You might get mad at someone or something, Because you need something to blame, To give you some credence for the situation you're in. But sometimes that can flip, And you say, Well, I'm the problem.

And I feel guilty about what I've done wrong. And you just blame yourself for all these things. And you end up in a spiral. But even though we may have a good theology, You may consider yourself one who has a good theology, And a strong faith.

[10 : 21] You know what? We're still tempted to believe lies. Like, Does God really love me? Or has he abandoned me? Or is that what causes all of these bad things in my life that go wrong?

And that can play out into how we talk to people who are in a hard situation. Where we could heap anger on them. Or we could gang up and say, Oh yeah, That is the problem. Or, Heap guilt upon them unknowingly.

But when we're just trying to help. You see this in Job's friends and scriptures, right? They just make it worse. But they really were trying to help. Tim Keller breaks it down into these two categories.

That when we deal with suffering and we don't know what to do, We typically say, I hate thee, Or I hate me. We get mad at God, Or we get mad at ourselves, And we hold it inside.

So, What does Jesus say in his answer here? In verses 3 through 5, Jesus answered, It was not that this man sinned, Or his parents, But that the works of God might be displayed in him.

[11 : 30] And then he almost paused there. So, What does he say there? It's a little bit mysterious one. And suffering itself is mysterious.

But one thing that we can say is said here, Is that Jesus is teaching that God is still at work in suffering. Okay? For his good, And for ours.

So, When we're suffering, God has, He hasn't turned his back on us. Okay? He's not forgotten us. And specifically, Jesus says here, That it's not the fault of the blind man, Or even the blind man's parents.

Now, There's another account in Luke chapter 13, At the very beginning, Where Jesus is asked a similar question. There's a tower, Ironically, In Siloam, That had fallen on some people, And killed them.

And, He's asked the question, Basically, Did they die, And not the people, Around there, Because they were worse sinners? Is that why those people died?

[12 : 32] Again, Very similar question. And Jesus levels the playing field there too. And He says, Apart from repenting, As Bill explained earlier, Right? Turning around, And turning to God.

Apart from that, And being saved by God's love, We all deserve a tower to fall on us. As far as our merit. And again, In Job, We learn that the suffering wasn't because of something he did, That he caused.

So, What does, Though, The Bible say about suffering? Because you bring in here different theologies, From wherever you come from. So, I'm just going to consider right now, Two ways that the Bible speaks about it.

So, Take it, Put it through your computer, However you process it, And do what you will with it. But I'm just going to look at it from that angle for a moment. And there's two possible ways of looking at suffering. There's more than that, But this morning we'll look at two.

There's general suffering, And there's specific suffering. Okay, General suffering, Here's what the scripture says about it. That the suffering clock started to tick, When death entered the world for the first time.

[13 : 34] And do you all remember where that took place? Anybody? Anybody? Just yell it out. Garden. The Garden of Eden in the creation account. Okay. Romans 5.12 Says that, Therefore, Just as sin came into the world through one man, Adam, And death through sin, That was the punishment for it.

So, Death spread to all men, Because all sinned. Okay. That's when the general suffering clock started to tick. In that sense, Everybody is born into a world of death, Brokenness, Darkness, Suffering.

Okay, So it's not that, You did worse than me, Or I did worse than you. We are all born into that in a general sense. This world is broken. If you haven't noticed it, Then, Then you probably will one day.

At one point in time, You will see the shalom shattered in your own life, As Dan Allender refers to it. Usually through an event, Or something hard that happens, And the world just kind of just doesn't make sense like it used to.

So, Here's the other side of it. God didn't originally, Create the world for suffering in it. The world actually started as a paradise. And that's what's still in us.

[14 : 50] That's what we want. When the human race turned against God, Though in the Garden of Eden, Started believing lies about who he was, His authority, Questioning his truth, That's when it started to break.

And that's when death entered, And that's when suffering was born. And we shouldn't think that we're not going to be tempted to believe lies about suffering either. Especially when we're in it.

Or lies about God. So, In general, Sin in general, Causes suffering in general. But Jesus goes deeper here. He takes it into a specific area.

He doesn't link, Let's go back to what he said. He doesn't link an individual suffering here, To their individual sins, Or even their parents' individual sins.

You see, In Luke 13, Where the tower fell, God rejects it there. At the end of Job, God rejects that notion. And Jesus, Again here, Rejects that notion, That it is your fault right now, Everything that happens to you that's bad.

[15 : 52] Generally, It's the fault of sin. But specifically, Put your name on it. Did you do something to make God mad today, And now he's punishing you? That's not what the Bible teaches, According to Jesus in this verse.

So, We don't, Here's the other thing. We don't know all the ins and outs about suffering. I won't even begin to act like I do. And I've had a lot of it in our life.

And I know you have too. So, If you're in it right now, I'm not trying to like make your pain go away. I'm trying to let, Hopefully, Offer a little bit of comfort. That though, Though there's a mysterious component to suffering, God has not forgotten you.

Okay? There is a mystery in it. But, According to the words of Jesus, God is actually working it for good. Okay? A better good for you, And a glorifying good for him.

Showing that he is the place, And the solution, For all suffering. And I hope that that frees you a little bit where you are. In some way. Because it's not going to take away the hurt, I know.

[17 : 00] But I hope that it does comfort you in some way. Because his reply means that we don't have to find somebody to blame for our suffering. We don't have to be mad at somebody. We don't have to know every single answer about it.

We don't have to feel guilty. We don't have to pin it on somebody else as a way to cope. We can rest in a greater mystery. And trust that God holds that mystery.

And we can acknowledge the mystery that God is present in our pain. And we don't have to have the rest of the answers. And from our perspective, He's in the process of working beauty out of this broken thing.

But from his perspective, which is eternal, He's actually working death in reverse. For those who are in Christ. Alright?

He's making all things new. So we don't have to say, I hate thee, Or I hate me. In fact, Jesus is pointing us to, Well, that's foolish because neither one of those are the answer.

[18 : 03] So general sin causes general suffering. But particular sin doesn't necessarily cause particular suffering. And then let's look at verses 4 and 5 here. We must work the works of Him who sent me while it's day.

Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I'm in the world, I am the light of the world. So the disciples, Can you imagine the look on their face? They're asking their teacher, Who sinned?

They want a theological answer. Okay? Well, whose fault was it on this one? And Jesus is like, Neither. He looks at them, Neither. I'm the light of the world. Let's go do the works of the Father. And can you see them like, Well, what do I write on the test though, Jesus?

Like, And he just, He gives them a classic Jesus juke after he Jesus juke out of the temple. And he says, I'm the light of the world. And what does that mean?

That's the second of his, Jesus' metaphorical I am statements. And as the light of the world, It means he's the one that's shining life into this world of brokenness and darkness.

[19 : 08] That he's actually the only true light. And that light is the knowledge of the glory of God as seen in the face of Christ Jesus, as the scriptures say. And then the word day is used there.

And that's to refer to Jesus' time on earth, his earthly ministry. Which means that night then is foreshadowing his future suffering, which would be his death on the cross.

And until then, he's saying, he and his disciples are supposed to fulfill everything that God has given them to do. The climax of which would be his death on the cross.

Followed then by the resurrection from the dead, his ascension back to heaven, after which he sends the Holy Spirit here. And that's how he's present with us now in our suffering and in our pain.

And then, we get to look at the miracle in verses 6 and 7. Having said these things, he spit on the ground and he made mud with saliva and then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and he said to him, go wash in the pool of Siloam, which means sent.

[20 : 17] So he went and he washed and came back seeing. This echoes creation account. You hear it in there. The Lord God formed the man dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature.

Notice he says, he anointed the man's eyes. Much like, you remember anointing, they would, they didn't have shampoo so they would like put perfume on people, you remember back then, to smell good and let it run down their beard.

God's grace runs over here. Right? It overflows first to this man who's born blind and then from there it would overflow to others even to us right now as we talk about it.

So Jesus here, he's pushed pause on the decay, the death cycle, left by sin in this world of suffering. And then you see him supernaturally reverse that curse of death and decay just for a moment.

and then he gives us a glimpse right now into what the kingdom of heaven actually is like. Where there's always light, where there's always true knowledge and sight of him, where there is no death, where there is no suffering.

[21 : 37] And until we are there, he says, let's go do that now. Because until he comes back, he sends us to be that to others. We are no condemnation people.

We now serve righteousness. We serve Christ and we do it in his spirit. But the healing isn't complete. Right? He says, you've got to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash, which he does.

And probably, the Pool of Siloam is what actually provided the water for the water ritual we talked about a few weeks ago. And this would still probably have been the last day of that festival, the Feast of Booths.

So, if we're in him though, remember, he's flowing to you and then through you to others. So, what's the response then? Well, 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, is he? Others said, no, but he's like him. He kept saying, I am the man. So, they said to him, then how are your eyes opened? And he answered, the man called Jesus, made mud, he anointed my eyes, he said to me, go to the Pool of Siloam and wash.

[22 : 44] So, I went and watched, received my sight. They said to him, where is he? He said, I don't know. Do you see them? I want answers right now. And, Will will pick up with the rest of this next week, but I'll tell you, this causes a lot of controversy.

It gets him thrown out of the temple, it gets his parents in trouble, and then eventually he just leaves, and Jesus comes and finds him. He's like, hey, I'm the guy who healed you, and then he worships him. What I love about this, though, is Jesus has just escaped attack because they're so mad him claiming to be God, so he sends him a little thank you note in the form of a man born blind, walks in, healed.

Imagine how mad they were. They first didn't kill Jesus, and then he sends back someone he healed because they're wrong. He is who he says he is, and he sends that to them. Hold on, I've got to get a drink real quick.

Sorry. Today's sermon is brought to you by Agua. All right. So, where are we? Wouldn't you love for Jesus to walk up to you and tell you where you could go to be healed of your deepest wound?

What would that be? Just yell it out. I'm just kidding. The blind man is teaching us of an important lesson here. There's only one place to truly find ultimate healing, and it's the place he did, and he didn't find it because of anything he did.

[24 : 08] Right? But that's Jesus. Consider that lesson. So, I'm going to do an experiment. Henry Fenton, would you join me on the stage, please, sir?

I love this guy. Okay. Object lesson here. I also need you to take your shoes off, Henry. There's some broken glass here.

We probably need more broken glass, though. You can keep your socks on if you want. It'll suck up the blood. Okay.

So, let's try to get this. There we go. There we go. There we go. There we go. There we go.

All right. Is that glass? That's glass. Broken glass. All right. You stand over there, my friend. Well, first, first, can you walk around the glass?

[25 : 13] Can you walk to me without stepping on the broken glass? Right now? Yeah, just do it. Just prove it. I don't believe you. Wow, you got really close there. Yeah. Yeah.

Okay, let's go back. A piece of glass? Yeah, I tried to keep it. No kids on the stage after this. Okay. So, go back over there now. Will you put this blindfold on?

This decorative designer blindfold? Okay. Would you trust me to lead you? I'm going to get this all squared away for you.

All right. That's good. That's good. Would you trust me to lead you? Okay. Take one step forward. One step forward.

No, no, no, no, no, no. Stop. Right. Right. One step right. Right. Forward. Don't put your foot down. Forward.

[26 : 17] Straight. Keep walking. Open those eyes. Good job, the glasses over there. You're all okay, and I love you. You can go back to your seat, and you can keep this blind flesh.

Actually, it's Angela, so if she'll let you keep it. Okay. So, when his eyes, when he wasn't looking at what was going on, what did he have to do?

He had to listen, yeah? So, we don't lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day, for this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison while we look not at the things that are seen, but the things that are unseen are not seen.

The things that are seen are transient or temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal. So, sometimes, suffering is when we hear God's voice the loudest, because we have to.

But I want you to remember this. Here's why this matters. Nothing in our story is wasted. I had lunch with someone this week. They reminded me of this.

[27 : 29] They were born with a condition, and they read this passage, and they said, what gives me encouragement is I know that nothing in my story is wasted, and they've seen God use their story now to help other people.

But they have to trust Him. They have to listen. And Jesus meets us in our suffering, too. Okay? And He can open our eyes of faith, because we walk by faith, not by sight, as the Scriptures say.

So, when your circumstances are dark, that's when you've got to use your eyes of faith the most, but only Jesus can open those eyes of faith. So, you may be here today, and you're searching and you're just not sure where to find healing, or you just doubt everything.

You're not sure. Well, today, consider maybe God sent a blind man born from birth who was healed to tell you where the end of your search begins. And maybe it starts with worship, like it did for Him.

Many of you may be in the room, you know, Derek, I know all that. I'm already a Christian, but I still feel lost. I am barely even making it to church. If I can just survive the week without getting mad and yelling at someone, I consider it a success.

[28 : 42] Or maybe it's a chronic condition that you have, or a broken relationship, or an illness, or depression, or anxiety. You just don't know where to go, and you feel stuck in it, and you feel far from Jesus, and the church thing ain't working for you.

The blind man's teaching you something too today, that Jesus is here with you. Maybe even when you don't feel like it. He's here.

And how is He here? Well, He enters into our suffering, the unseen reality. Jesus is the unseen reality that's seen the unseen, that's seen the eternal, right?

He enters into it first by dying on the cross and taking all of our potential future suffering, allowing Him now to enter into it with us here by the power of His Holy Spirit so that we can know that we will rest forever.

And that means that our suffering is temporary right now with the eyes of faith, but it's building up to something so much greater, eternal, a rest forever. And He enters into it now with you by His Spirit.

[29 : 47] So, do you notice Jesus entered the space of the blind man? Okay? And from that space comes this incredible story of a miraculous healing.

Maybe you've been feeling angry, maybe you've been feeling guilty, maybe you've been blaming, believing lies, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, maybe that's you.

Okay? About God, about His people, one of the ways we do is really at His church. We start to just get mad at each other in here.

That really helps people. But in your space of darkness or suffering, whatever it is, you know what it is. Just yell it out. Just kidding. What might it look like for you to place yourself in front of Jesus and ask Him to enter your space?

And if you don't know Him, here's what that means. You could go to Him and you can say, Jesus, would you enter my space? I don't even know what that means, but would you enter it and teach me and show me?

[30 : 51] And would you give me eyes of faith? Will you open mine? And He promises this, inward renewal. He promises forgiveness of that sin of death, which is the consequence, and then giving eternal life instead.

Resurrected body one day that you will be in forever that will never worry if you can get out of bed. I'm not even sure you'll sleep, right? Because you're just going to be so amped up all the time with Jesus. But it's death in reverse.

And Southwood, what could it mean for us to put ourselves in the spaces where there's darkness in our city? And what might it mean for us to tell our neighbors where we've been healed from our spiritual blindness?

What could it mean for us to hold space for people? Not just in our Sunday spaces, but our everywhere, everyday spaces.

What could that mean? What could that mean? Just think about that. Jesus will show you. We know here it could mean someone gaining sight.

[31 : 59] It could mean someone passing from life, from death to life. And what if it all, what if all of that boils down to one common, lowest common denominator, and it's this. Do you have time and space to be with Jesus?

To let him show you where you're blind? To heal you and to show you then, like you did to this blind man, where he sends you. So here's the challenge.

Would you try to find 20 minutes this week? I'm not talking about having a quiet time to use the Christianese language. I'm talking about something a little different. I'm talking about unfiltered, unscripted, uninterrupted time with Jesus where you go and like Bill said earlier, you just, you breathe.

And you breathe for Jesus and see what happens. You can take your Bible if you want. Whatever makes you feel closer to Jesus. I'll tell you, it'll be magnified if you can do it somewhere in nature.

You will feel something different there. Can you find 20 minutes? If you can't find 20, can you find 15? If you can't find 15, can you find 10? If you can't find 10, can you find 5? If you can't find 5, can you find 1?

[33 : 12] If you can't find 1, can you call me to go to lunch and I will eat and you go pray? So, amen. The comfort the gospel offers us in suffering is that God's not distant from us, okay?

But rather, he's there. Okay, but do you have the time to go be with him? See, Christ redeemed us and redeemed means to buy back out of slavery, to pay ransom to the kidnapper and only through Christ's suffering on the cross could we be bought back from that curse of death.

So, he died so we didn't have to. So, he gives us righteousness, his righteousness and he gives us his presence and everything now until we're with him there forever. So, who paid our ransom then?

Jesus. Where? On the cross. And who's with us in the darkness? Jesus. And who took our darkness on the cross? Jesus. And who gives us his light? Jesus.

And who promises to make all things brand new? Jesus. That's why we can say even through our walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil for you are with me.

[34 : 20] Nothing in your store matters. God, would you please be with us today, right now as we breathe.

Make us the non-anxious presences that we can be only because we can rest in you. Enter our pain, enter our dark space and bring us your light. Show us where we need healing.

Open our eyes of faith and send us to watch you work. Maybe even just loving people and listening to them is what that means. Show us.

Thank you, Jesus. It's in your holy name that we pray. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.