

John 9:1-3

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 would be born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

We are all probably familiar with this famous story and we know that Jesus heals this man. A man born blind suddenly able to see is an unfathomable miracle. The healing itself, however, should not surprise us as this healing is just one in many examples of the power of God which Jesus exerted. But what should surprise us is that this story is not really about the miracle of Jesus restoring sight to this man; the healing is just the vehicle for Jesus to communicate something to us which is far more intense. In these first 3-verses Jesus communicates a truth that is life changing; a truth that if we can really wrap our heads around will help all of us to live in the freedom that Jesus promised would be ours. Yes, the truth will set us free even from all the pain and damage that has happened to us in our lives.

In the opening scene of this Chapter Jesus and His disciples are walking around town and they come across this blind man. The disciples naturally assume that his affliction is a result of someone's sin—his or his parents. Through this question, the disciples revealed something to us about their religious worldview, which we will discover is drenched in wrong belief. The wrong belief, however, is not about the cause and effect of sin in terms of this man's physical affliction; it is a wrong belief regarding their own sinful condition and that of all mankind.

This question reveals an underlying belief system that physical consequences in this life are essentially deserved. If you are good, then good things will happen to

you and if you are bad, then bad things will happen to you. And if your sin (or your parent's sin) is egregious enough, then really bad things might happen to you, like being born blind.

If you think about it, this is a great system for explaining away the difficulties of life and for answering the question: why there is suffering in this world. I have always said that what we believe determines how we live and this is a perfect example. This belief system lays the terrible events of one's life squarely on their own back (as "sinners deserving of their fate") and in so doing condones the lack of compassion by those who are better off. It helps us sleep better at night. For example, we will find out later on in this story that this man was left to beg in order to make it through life for no one was providing for the disabled. And that should not surprise us; in fact, it makes total sense. Why help someone who caused their own troubles? This explains the "sucks being you" and "it must be your karma" type of attitude that we have toward those less fortunate than us.

[Chart 1] This wrong belief actually stems from another wrong belief which we touched on last week. The wrong belief that one side of reality there is God on the other side there is evil and in between there is this huge category of people who are essentially good or who are considered by most to be morally good enough to not to have anything real bad happen to them. It's as if the closer a person gets to the right—closer to evil—the more likely it will be that bad things will happen in their lives. This was essentially the philosophy that Job's friends preached. They wanted Job to understand that there is no way he was as good and as holy as he thought for such horrible things only happen to those who have committed serious sins. But this belief system is not supported by the Bible. I understand that a lot of the language in the Bible seems to communicate this—so there is a reason that this wrong belief has found its place in our religion. However, the wrong belief comes

as a result of our inability to discern the difference between promises that apply to our life, promises that apply to the nation of Israel, promises that will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to the earth, promises that will be fulfilled when we get to heaven, or even promises that are experienced in the New Creation (which is only applicable to those who have accepted Jesus into their hearts to be their Lord and Savior). In addition, we tend to filter the Word of God through our personal framework or religious worldview and that always bias our understanding and ability to discern the truth.

The other explanation for this worldview is that the moral conscience of the religious man has fundamentally needed an explanation for the bad and the evil in this world. Is it God's fault? Could God do something about it? Why won't God do anything about it? How could a God of love allow bad things to happen to good people? Is He really in control or is there some limit to His power and involvement in the affairs of man? These are hard questions which have never really been answered in a way that settles well in our soul. There has always been this tug-of-war within the soul of the religious man between the sovereignty of God and the love of God. For if God is truly God and He is in control of all things, then we cannot escape the reality that He has a hand in all things good and bad and that fundamentally conflicts with our concept of love. God involved with evil makes the religious man extremely uncomfortable. After all, the religious man is trying to convince others to trust in God by telling them that God is love.

Let's get back to the *lie* that there is a moral middle. This *lie* that says this poor blind man must somehow be deserving of his fate while the disciples on the other hand must by definition have been more holy, more worthy, and less evil than this man or his parents. The Bible, however, makes it clear that all of creation has been corrupted by sin—every man, woman, and child. Now, it is true that some people's

sinful nature is expressed in excessive behavior that we would categorize as raw evil; but nevertheless, we have all been corrupted by sin and the Biblical reality is that we all have evil dwelling within us (*Romans 7:14-25*).

The notion of a middle ground is simply not true: never has been and never will be. I know this is troubling. No one wants to consider themselves in the same category as those who really do carry out evil deeds. Besides, we want God to take note of our restraint, our self discipline, the moral principles to which we adhere, our good deeds, and all our acts of love and altruism. We want Him to make a differentiation between those of us who have not just full-on indulged our desires and those who have. We want God to look down on “them” and bring affliction into “their” lives and bring blessing on all of us who are just not as evil as “they.” This mindset is seriously deluded; it is how we want God to view us, but unfortunately it is not how God sees us. Here is our problem.

Matthew 5:48

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

God is perfect and there is simply no darkness in Him (*1 John 1:5*); thus, His requirement for us is perfection! Too often when we read the Bible we brush over these kinds of statements because we don’t know what to do with them; they don’t fit within our religious framework. However, we must not treat the Word of God with such laxness; we have to let it always be authoritative over our lives even if we don’t like what it says. Yes, the standard to be in relationship with God is perfection. Do you now understand why we have a serious problem? I don’t know about you but I know I am not perfect. I have sinned by nature and by choice

which means that I am not God and can never be like God; in fact, at the core of my being is all that is not God, all that is not perfect, and I am darkened with every manner of evil.

One of the reasons why most people (believers and non-believers alike) have a hard time accepting this truth, and living as if it is true, is because of the words that we use to describe our problem. For example, take the word evil. It is a very powerful word. I doubt any of us would describe ourselves that way; we associate that word with established norms of what is or is not evil behavior, as those norms shift over time. But looking at the true nature of our spiritual condition through human constructs and human definitions will always lead us to wrong belief. To be Biblically accurate, we need to take this word and redefine it to encompass all that does not derive from the divine, including anything or anyone that is not perfect. Biblically, evil is not the “spiritual” antonym to what we consider to be good; rather, it is the antonym to all that is not of God.

[Chart 2] Do you get it? We have to drag this notion of “evil” from the far side of this chart all the way over this so called middle ground of “good” and buttress it right up to this line of perfection. So we have to view our life and our spiritual condition in this binary light. It is either light or darkness; perfect or not perfect; of God or not of God. There is no middle ground. It is our distorted view of God, good, and evil that explains why so few Christians live as if they desperately need God for everything. We talk about it, we muse on it, we pray about it; but we don’t really live as if whatever does not originate from God is evil.

When Jesus says in *John 15:5* that without Him we can do nothing, He was serious. If what we do is a result of Christ living through us and doing His work in and through our lives, then it will have the mark of perfection and will be something that will follow us into eternity. However, if what we do is simply from

us, then it is worthless (regardless of its religious nature). This is why Jesus said in *Matthew 7:21-23* that not everyone who says Lord, Lord is truly a believer. He will turn to those who cast out demons, performed miracles, and prophesied in His name and tell them to depart from His presence. He will declare that He does not know them for they practice lawlessness. In other words, their works, although powerful and beneficial in the lives of those who were the recipients, were not His appointed works. They were not in the will of the Father; thus, they were not perfect but evil. In the Greek, the Word that we have translated in our text as lawless “*anomia*” literally means: “*a*” without and “*nomia*” the law—or without God’s approval. Other Bible versions translate this word as those who practice iniquity and wickedness. Again, if it is not of God it is evil; there is no in between.

This is a powerful truth that can lead us into true freedom. However, if we do not fully accept it and are not convinced deep down in our bones of its truthfulness, we will never understand the beautiful and perfect answer to one of the most troubling questions that have plagued every man, woman, and child who has ever lived. Why was this man born blind? Why was I raped? Why was I humiliated as a child? Why was I born into poverty? Why did my parents expect me to be perfect? Why did my parents tell me I was stupid? Why was I physically abused? Why was I sexually abused? Why did my husband leave me? Why did my sister have to die? Why was I born into a family that is so dysfunctional? Why did I have to parent my parents; why could they not just act like adults? I mean why did they even have kids in the first place? Why am I disabled? Why do I have to have this disease? Why was I constantly picked on as a child? Why was I alienated and alone for so much of my life? Why did my mother cheat on my Dad causing our family to split? Why were my parent’s alcoholics? Why did my mom always try and control and manipulate me with guilt? Why was my dad such an angry jerk? Why did he

never invest anything in me or teach me to do anything? Why did my parents not love me the way they should have? Why was I born in a country that is overwhelmed with pestilence, poverty, starvation and plague? Why does my family hate God?

I have so many painful wounds, I have so many disappointments, and I have so many reasons to hate life and to be mad at God. It's as if my body is covered with puss-filled infected injuries. I just don't understand why me, especially when so many others did not seem to get the short stick. Honestly, how do you expect me to trust God and love God when all of this has happened in my life? It is so easy for you to tell me that I just need to trust and follow God; but I say why. He did He not protect me, He did He not provide for me, He did He not care for me, and He is the one who made me this way. I thought you told me He loved me. Well, the experience in my life so far is not what I would call loving. Oh I know that He showed His love to the world and died for our sins so we can go to heaven (and for that I am grateful—I want to go to heaven and I want others to go) but what about my life? What about my now? Doesn't He care? Can't He see how hurt I am?

Honestly, I have cried out to Him so many times asking Him for healing, asking Him to remove this infliction from my life that I get exhausted just thinking about how many times I have asked for His help. Do you think I am this way because I want to be? The pain is so deep and it is always gnawing at me. I have come to Him, I have tried to trust Him, but nothing has changed. I am still the same. My wounds are still the same. I am just more disappointed. There have been times where I could just swear that He was hearing me and I just knew that He was going to do something about it for me, but nothing; nothing at all. Today is like yesterday and tomorrow will be like today. I just need to take care of myself, protect myself, defend myself, and provide for myself. I must continue to act like my own God in

the places that really matter. After all, it does not seem that He is going to do anything for me; for all I know, this will be the way things are the rest of my life.

Is this you? I know it has been me. I am fairly confident that this reflects this blind man's emotional condition. Not only was he blind and left to beg, his family was horrible to him. We will find out later on in the story that they cared more about protecting their own skin than their own son. They were dragged before the priests and they pretty much threw their son under the bus. So we know his family was not too supportive and seemed bothered with the trouble their son brought into their life. There is no way that this guy was not confused, angry and totally disillusioned with his life. I am sure that he spent many lonely nights just wishing he was dead wondering why God even brought him into this world.

Tonight, we are going to deal with the "why" question which has haunted all of us. But before we can do this, we need to lay a foundation of truth that will enable us to ultimately reconcile what has happened in our lives with the love of God. Let's quickly review what we have covered so far: 1) there is no middle ground of "good;" 2) every one of us has sinned; therefore, we are not perfect but we encompass all that is not God; and 3) this man's affliction was not a result of his sin or the sin of his parents, but he was born blind in order that the power of God could be seen in him. With these firmly fixed in our heads, let's focus on 3 other critical truths.

1. God chose us before time and His plan was always to bring us to Him.

Ephesians 1:3-6; 11

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with

every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.* God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family *by bringing us to himself* through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son...Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, *for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.*

This passage pulls us outside of time in order to see things from God's perspective: the beginning and the end all at the same time. From this view we can see that even before God created anything He knew you and picked you to be His. Unbeknownst to you, your life has been a journey of Him drawing you to His love and He has been working out everything according to His plan in order to effect His purposes in your life. So Biblically it is not accurate to think that your relationship with God began when you prayed to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. No; He had already chose you and was involved in all the intimate details of your life—all of them—in order to bring you to Him!

2. God's knows everything about you and His plan for you has been established.

Psalm 139:1-6

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.

You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!

Psalm 138:8

The Lord will work out his plans for my life—for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever...

Psalm 139:13-18

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. *Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.* How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!

Ecclesiastes 6:10

Everything has already been decided. It was known long ago what each person would be. So there's no use arguing with God about your destiny.

-
3. All things will all work out for the good.

Romans 8:28-30

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to *those who are called according to His purpose*. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Proverbs 19:21

You can make many plans, but the Lord's purposes will prevail.

So let's try and pull all of this together in a way that we can understand because this is one of the most beautiful love stories that has ever been written; a love story which tragically few have ever truly understood. If you are a believer you were chosen by God to know Him, to be in relationship with Him, and to be adopted into His family as a child of God. [Chart 3] However, there has always been this huge problem of your blindness which has kept you separate from God and unable to see the light of His love. Remember, we encompass all that is not God; all that is evil. And worse yet, according to ***Jeremiah 17:9*** (which we studied last week) we have actually convinced ourselves that we are not that bad and that there really is a "good" middle ground; and we are in it. As a result of both our blindness and self deception, ***Romans 1*** and ***Psalms 14:2-3*** tells us that left to ourselves we would

have no interest in God at all. In fact, the story gets even uglier than that. In *Genesis 6:5*, *Romans 8:17* and *Galatians 5:17*, we are told that our base human nature is an enemy of God and always stands in opposition to Him.

This is why God has been busy drawing us to Him; we would never come on our own. Like a man in love with a woman, God has been pursuing us, trying to get our attention, so we could receive His love. He knows everything about us (always has); He knew us when we were being formed in our mother's womb. And since He chose us before the world began He has been working all things—that means all events throughout history—for the purpose of having His light of love break through our blindness so we could finally see and choose to receive His love.

So please consider this: if God chose you, if God is absolutely sovereign over your life, if He has planned out all things to draw you to Him, then every pain, every wound, every hurt, every horrible thing that has ever happened in your life, and every tool that He used (whether a person, place, situation, or thing) was absolutely necessary; and it all came (either directly or indirectly) from God's hand. Yes, God is the one who is ultimately responsible for every pain you have endured. Think about all that has happened in your life; it has all been purposeful to lead you to freedom.

I know this is hard to fathom but it is one of the core messages of the book of Job. In reading this book you will discover that Satan was the tool through which all hell was loosened on Job's life; but God was the one who gave Satan the permission to even touch Job and God is also the one who placed a limitation on what Satan could do. And the most amazing thing is that Job understood this truth. He never once blamed Satan for all the hardship and destruction in his life; he only blamed God. And what is even more amazing is that God twice said that Job was right in all that He spoke about Him.

God knows everything about you: how you were wired, how you think, how you process what happens in your life, and the place that you give your emotions. Therefore, He knows exactly what you needed in order to break through your darkness and get you to look to Him, desire Him, and receive Him. Remember, God never forces anyone to choose Him. The power of choice is ours; but He works all things out for the purpose of getting us face to face with Him so we can make the choice to receive His life.

I know that some of you have suffered horribly, but it was not to punish you for your sins; no, just the opposite! God was in pursuit of you and He knew exactly how much pressure was needed (and the exact places the pressure needed to be applied) in order for you to finally open up so that His light could pierce your darkness. Imagine for a moment, if God did not allow the pain into your life, you would never have seen the need to turn to the Lord—never! You would still be walking in blindness living in the delusion that you were “good.” That would be a worse tragedy for it has eternal consequences.

This is what the Holy Spirit was communicating to us in *Ephesians* when He said that God has been working all things out for the purpose of drawing us to Him and in *Romans* where He says that He works all things out for the good of those He has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Yes, every detail of your life (as both a believer and unbeliever) has been about drawing you to Him and helping you see your need. Unfortunately, we are so locked in darkness that God has to take such drastic measures and literally tear apart our self dependence, our arrogance, our religious pride, and our belief that we can be “good” like God. He brought every wound into our lives in order to convince us that we are desperate without Him.

What started me down this path of discovery was the story of Job. Most of you are familiar with it so I will not go through the details. But I have always been troubled by the part where God shows up and seemingly flexes His muscles and humbles Job. That never sat well with me. I mean poor Job. His life has been devastated and he has suffered greatly; of course, he was going to struggle with the “why me” question. That’s natural. You would think God would have given Job a break. But God shows up and takes Job on a personal journey of all that God has created. He takes Job to the cosmos and shows him the heavens and explains that He put every star in its place, knows them all by name, He holds all things together, and ordered all things in the universe. He takes Job to the earth and shows him the wonderful details and unique attributes about the animals He created. He demonstrates how He cares for each one. He talks about the wind, the rain, the snow, and how the earth is watered and cared for. Then He even seems to take Job into the realm of the unseen world and shows Job one of the most beautiful and perfect creatures that He ever created, the one who is king over all the sons of pride; likely, Satan himself.

As God revealed all this to Job, we see Job repent in dust and ashes. Job said that he was sorry for his complaints for he was speaking about things he did not understand, things far too wonderful for him (*Job 42:1-6*). Now the idea that God was showing Job how small he was in comparison to God and how he should step back and be careful about what he says does not represent God’s character and how He deals with us. Besides, our base nature is so evil that we would normally just respond with rebellion to any attempt by God to shove His ways down our throats. That is the pattern of all humanity. However, *Romans 2:4* tells us that it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance; not the power of God. So I believe that in revealing to Job that He actively manages every last detail of every moment

of all creation, Job realized the answer to the “why” question: all that God allowed in his life was a beautiful expression of God’s love and detailed care for Job.

You see, God knew exactly what was needed in order to fulfill the true desires of Job’s heart. During all those months of tragic suffering, Job was being made ready, being groomed, so to speak, in order that he might be one of the privileged few to ever have a face to face encounter with the living God. Job’s repentance I believe was a personal epiphany that it was all necessary; it was all an expression of God’s great love and mercy.

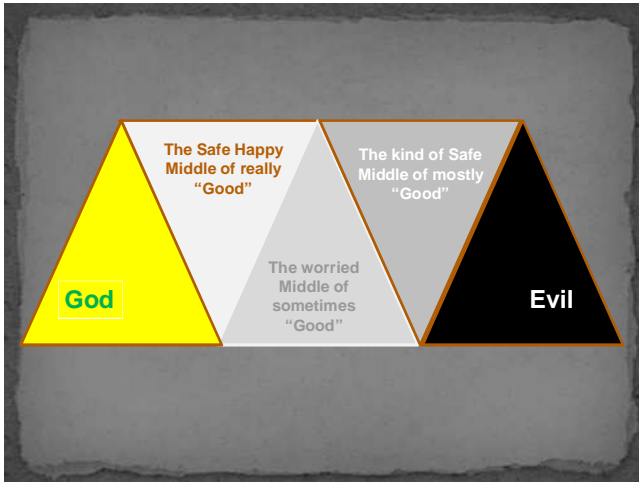
This is why this man in John Chapter 9 was born blind. God knew exactly what this man needed in order that one day he might be ready to have a face to face encounter with the living God and not only receive salvation but experience God living through Him. The healing of his sight itself was incidental (but I am sure greatly appreciated) and served more to help us understand how blind we are and how desperately we need His light to break through our darkness. We will find out next week that the real healing happens when this man chooses to believe that Jesus is God and then proclaims His name in the face of immediate persecution.

Imagine, God has lovingly pursued you in the very same way. All that God has directed and allowed to happen to you (as horrible as it has been) was for the purpose of grooming you and readying you so that you can also experience the living God in a way that is beyond anything you could ever imagine. I know it has not been easy and God has used real people to do some real horrible things to you and the pain still echoes in your soul. But it has all been under His control and nothing has happened that was not necessary. He knows you, He loves you, and He knew what was needed so that you would have the opportunity to be in relationship with Him. Further, He knows what is needed now so that you will learn to trust Him with your whole life so that the works of God will be shown through you.

This truth should shed a new perspective on all those people, places, situations, and things that have been the tools of God's mercy in your life. Trust me; God will deal with others for how they treated you; that is clear. But realizing that every pain was a precious gift from God and an expression of His love for you should help you begin to experience *true healing* and *true freedom* from the horrors in your life and help you let go of the hang-ups, the anger, and the disillusionment that you live with. I know this is opposite to all we think and very hard to wrap our heads around; that is why we must come to grips with our blindness. I wish we could be convinced of the love of God by blessing alone; but we are too selfish and self seeking; we have to be broken. Come on, Adam and Eve had everything they could ever ask for and still they believed the lie.

In closing, I want to cycle around to the issue of perfection; it can be yours and for those of you who are believers, it is yours. [Chart 4] If you have not accepted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, then you must first take that step so He can place within you a new nature—a new aspect to your being where He will dwell in the Person of the Holy Spirit. A nature that is in His image: righteous, holy, and true. Now, when this happens your old nature does not go away (at least not until you are dead) but you are now *free* to choose to believe and trust God and His Word with everything in your life such that He is the one who gets to live His will and do His works through your life; for it is only His works that are perfect. Remember, your works, no matter how religious, are still tainted with darkness and are eternally worthless. You must believe this truth in order to truly be free. You must now always choose to actively believe that God is your I Am, the provision for everything you need, and let Him have His way in every part of your life.

Let's Pray



Jeremiah 17:9

Romans 1

Psalm 14:2-3

Genesis 6:5

Romans 8:17

Galatians 5:17

Our Heart, our Flesh, our Old Sinful Nature

The Enemy of God

Our soul (mind and emotions) is corrupted by our Old Sinful Nature and we are deceived

Our physical body Obeys its Dark Master

Ephesians 4:24

You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true

