

MAKING SENSE OF SUFFERING, JOHN 9:1-7

◆**Intro:** Many years ago I read about a Christian in an oriental prison camp who was made to walk chest high through the sewage pit. He would say later that he was glad to do it. It was the only time the guards would leave him alone, and he sang songs to God and prayed aloud during those moments. Bad things are happening right now (A growing number of people are dying all around the globe from covid-19, nearly 129,000 people.)

◆One of the first questions people ask in the face of suffering is “Why?”. We quickly assume that something bad happens because someone was bad. We’d like to find that culprit and fix blame. One of the most popular persons to blame for suffering, as it turns out, is God. We imagine that he ought to do things in all the ways each of us would do them, and when he doesn’t we blame him for not being as good as we subconsciously think we would be if we were him. Our text shows how in the dark that view is. Why is there suffering. There is much to think about in this, but here is a beginning.

◆**1. Sinfulness in general (the fallen state of our world) can lead to my suffering. Sin is behind suffering, but not necessarily directly.** The Bible makes it clear that sin is what has caused suffering and trouble in the world. The creation groans and is disrupted with thorns and disasters because of the sin of human kind (Genesis 3). In the new heavens and the new earth there will be no sin, and also no results of sin: sadness, crying, pain, etc (Rev.21).

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◆ The disciples shared the Jewish assumption at the time that our suffering came directly in proportion to our sins. That's why they ask the question in v2. But in this case Jesus says, it had nothing to do with the man or his parents! They thought, the more sinful you are, the more suffering you get. But that's just not true. Self-sacrificing missionaries are murdered, and self-aggrandizing movie stars can live long lives. Jesus makes it clear that we ought not make assumptions based on our tragedies.

◆ "Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."" Luke 13:1-5, NIV.

◆ So sin leads to death, perishing, suffering. But not always in direct proportion.

◆ *"he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities." Psalms 103:10, NIV.*

◆ **2.** My sin can lead to my suffering: In a parallel passage of John (5:8-15) Jesus heals another man, this time a lame man, next to another pool (Bethesda). And he tells him this:

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◆ *"Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.""* John 5:14, NIV.

◆ So there is a link between sin and trouble, for sure. Exodus 32 tells us that God will not let the guilty go unpunished. Exodus 20 tells us that God may allow punishment to pass on to following 3 or 4 generations of those who reject him, such that children can reap the trouble sown by their parents. (However, the point of that passage is to compare how much more gracious God is toward us, than merely fair. He gives love to 1000's of generations of those who follow him.

◆ And of course, while God promises always to forgive when we repent, he does not always take away the consequences of our sin. As believers, we know this is part of his loving and fatherly discipline.

◆ So if you fry your brain with drugs, you can receive forgiveness. That doesn't mean you won't have affected your brain. If you end someone's life in a moment of anger, that too can be forgiven, but it doesn't mean God will bring that person back to life on this earth. If you play around with illicit sex and repent, God will forgive you, but you may likely have to live with some serious diseases.

◆ **3. Other people's sin can lead to my suffering:** Joseph's brothers sinned in their jealousy and it resulted Joseph became a slave in Egypt. (Of course God could well have seen flaws in

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Joseph's own character and determined to correct them through his brothers acts.) Righteous Able was killed by his sinful brother Cain. It was not a punishment. It was the sin of another Cain that cause suffering of Able. More often than not I suspect that our sin causes other people to suffer even if we secretly feel like we "got away with it." Paul reminds us that "the wages of sin is death." It always end in death one way or another. Your addictions cause more people to suffer than just you. Your greed is part of the reason others struggle to get by.

◆**4.** Reasons wholly apart from sin can lead to my suffering. In the Book of Job, we are specifically told that Job did not sin against God, but that Satan and God were having an argument as to why Job followed God. Satan claimed it was because God was good to Job, so God let Satan be bad to Job to prove otherwise.

◆So be careful about assigning the blame for suffering. It often has multiple possible reasons at the same time, or non of what you thought. We do well to consider how we might have contributed so that we can repent. We do even better turning to God for direction in the suffering. Which brings us to...

◆**5.** My suffering are opportunities for God's display of his goodness. This is an acted parable, you might say. Jesus miracles always have a message. Always. What's the message? Our text takes place right after Jesus has declared that he is the Light of the World.

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- ◆[We examined this during Lent, so you might recall that he made the claim during the Feast of Tabernacles in the part of the temple courts where at night they would light three giant torches and dance into the night celebrating the pillar of fire/ Shekinah Glory Cloud that led Israel through the desert(Jn. 8).]
- ◆You can tell then, that in this instance Jesus is giving an acted proof of that he is the Light, the **Shekinah** of God (presence), that led Israel through the darkness of the desert. He adds a little more; he makes mud and anoints the man's eyes, reminiscent of God and **Creator**, who made man from the "dust of the earth" (Genesis 2). Jesus sends the blind man to the pool of Siloam, same pool they ceremonially retrieved jugs of sacred water from for the torch-light rituals of the Feast. The name Siloam means "one who is sent". That's interesting too; in chapter 8 where Jesus claims to be the Light of the World, he also says no less five times that he is the "**one who is sent**" from God! And the **Messiah** was to be the "one sent of God".
- ◆**A.** So do you see the message of the miracle? God IS. God can! God has come! He uses our problems to get our attention! Every problem in the world is an opportunity for us to look for and find God at work. This is part of Jesus' point in v3-4. God was at "work" through his Son Jesus. God was giving "daylight" in him so that his goodness could be seen by us! This fellow may have endured 20-40 years of blindness (we don't know his age) just so

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that Jesus could show the world that he can create sight with a touch.

◆**B.** Light is best appreciated when recognizing your darkness.

That's why suffering is so effective in getting people to wake up. CS Lewis is famous for having said that "God whispers to us in our pleasures, but he shouts to us in our pain." Have you noticed some things we're seeing in the news that we never used to see, now that the pandemic Covid-19 has threatened every corner of the globe with death? **Church** activities are getting notice. News sites show pictures of doctors and **nurses praying!** **Politicians** are actually endorsing and appreciating religious workers and institutions.

◆Darkness is a pretty good backdrop for beauty, and it gives us a deeper appreciation for light. When I was buying my wife diamonds the jeweler laid them out on a black velvet cloth, so we could see how shiny they really were. When you are in the Dark Woods of Darkness, a simple little flashlight becomes a special treasure.

◆Well, the man born blind knows all about his darkness. He was a beggar. He had no claim to fame, no pride standing in the way of being helped. Let's call him Jeremiah. Jerry was the little blind baby his mom pushed around in her baby buggy. He was blind all through little league age, so Jerry only sat on the sidelines *listening* to the games going on. Blind through high school, walking the halls with one of

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those long white sticks so he didn't trip on the girls sitting by the lockers putting on fingernail designs. Blind when all the other kids were getting their camel licenses. No license for Jerry; you can't drive if you can't see. Now suddenly Jerry can see! It's a miracle!

◆ *But isn't it odd that none of these Jewish community around him seems to stay blind.* You'd think they would have jumped to conclude, "Whoa, God must be real and Jesus must be special, 'cuz something wonderful just happened to blind Jeremiah"? But 1) the neighbors pass him off as a look-alike. 2) The parents don't want to get involved because it's stain their reputation (v22 they would be *put out of the church!*) 3) The Pharisees are more excited about whether a rule was broken than that something GOOD happened! Hello! A human adult suddenly gains sight! How can they be so lost, so out of focus. (You know, church people can be this way too; automatically against something even if it's good!)

◆ **C.** As a consequence, in our text we find suffering leading to both darkness and light. The blind man is moving from physical blindness toward light, and also from spiritual blindness toward the Light of the World, Jesus. But the religious leaders are moving away from the light and into darkness in their rejection of Jesus. They don't appreciate the Light of Jesus at all. They are the **fault finders** and the **blame-fixers**, the complainers and the

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skeptics. Beware this characteristics. They block out the light.

It's like John said in chapter one:

◆"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." John 1:3-5, NIV.

◆It begs the question, which ones will we be? The ones finding the light through suffering, or the ones going blind even in a healing.

◆"*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--*" John 1:12, NIV.

◆**Conclusion:** Look for God in your suffering. God is always there! Many years ago I read about a Christian in an oriental prison camp who was made to regularly walk chest high through the sewage pit. He would say later that he was glad to do it. It was the only time the guards would leave him alone, and he sang songs to God and prayed aloud during those moments. Maybe we are blinded by our sufferings because we haven't learned what to look for. Instead of looking for someone to blame, let us look for the work that God is displaying.