

Main Idea: In John 9:1-12 we learn some powerful things about Jesus and ourselves by watching His interaction with a man who was blind from birth. There are four revealing scenes in the story.

- I. Jesus faced a revealing question (1-2).
 - A. He met a blind man.
 - B. His disciples presumed the blindness was due to sin.
 - II. Jesus responded with a revealing answer (3-5).
 - A. His response teaches us about the cause of physical suffering (3).
 1. Fundamentally, it’s because we live in a sin-cursed world.
 2. Sometimes it’s because of our own sin.
 3. Sometimes it’s because of the sin of others.
 4. Ultimately, it provides the opportunity for God to put His works on display.
 - B. His response teaches us about the proper response to physical suffering (4).
 - C. His response teaches us about the only hope for all who suffer (5).
 - III. Jesus performed a revealing miracle (6-7).
 - A. Jesus’ actions present Jesus as Creator.
 - B. Jesus’ actions present Jesus as Lord.
 - IV. Jesus produced a revealing response (8-12).
 - A. His work caused people to ask questions.
 - B. His work gave the man opportunities to give testimony about Jesus.
- Take Inventory: Ask yourself some questions...
1. How am I responding to suffering in my own life?
 2. How am I responding to suffering in the lives of others?
 3. How does God want to use me to point people to Jesus this week?

This morning as we open our Bibles we’re confronted with a subject that is relevant to all of us. We’re returning to our journey through the Gospel of John, and in today’s text we meet a man with a physical ailment. This is common ground for humanity. You either have a physical ailment right now, or will, and most certainly rub shoulders with people who do.

How do you respond when you see a person whose body does not work as the Creator originally intended? I learned a lot about relating to people with disabilities from Nancy Rae Litteral, a former member of this church who’s now in heaven after spending over fifty years in a wheelchair as a quadriplegic. I remember her saying that little children would often just blurt out, “What happened to you? What are you doing in that wheel chair?” Little ones can be so transparent, even blunt, can’t they? “And then, when the children get older,” Nancy remarked, “some of them become sort of embarrassed at my condition and don’t know what to say, so they just look away.”

One of the countless things that puts Jesus in a category all by Himself is how He responded when He came into contact with afflicted people. Matthew 4:23–24 says, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.”

When Jesus confronted physically infirmed people, He did not look the other way. That doesn’t mean He always healed them either, for He didn’t heal every sick person in

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelerburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

first century Israel, let alone the world, though He had the power to do so. But Jesus did get involved.

That's what His incarnation is all about. When the Son of God put on human flesh and entered this sin-corrupted, disease-ridden, death-permeated world, He didn't come as a spectator. He came to do something about the horrible human predicament, and that of course involved a work His Father gave Him that took Him to a cross, and then to a tomb where He defeated death itself.

That brings us to John 9. In John 9 we meet a blind man, a man who had been blind from birth, to be precise. And the way Jesus interacted with this blind man teaches us so much about Jesus, about the human condition, and about what Jesus can do about it.

G. Campbell Morgan says the story that begins in verse 1 actually runs all the way to verse 21 of chapter ten. He also points out that this is the seventh great sign in John's gospel, "the penultimate sign," with the eighth and last being that of the raising of Lazarus.¹

The context takes us back to 8:12, where, at the Feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus announced, "I am the light of the world." Kent Hughes points out, "Miracles in John's Gospel are always signs meant to teach deep spiritual truths."²

So what spiritual truth do we learn from the miracle in John 9? A vital one, namely, *how to receive spiritual sight*. The fact is, we all enter the world spiritually blind, but when Jesus comes into our lives, He causes our blinded eyes to see.

There's a contrast in John 9, and we must see it. John 9 begins with the spotlight on a blind man that Jesus healed, but John 9 ends with the spotlight on a group of men who were also blind, yet these spiritually blind men refused to admit it and believe in the One who could likewise heal them.

I'm convinced that God has something powerful to say to us in John 9. I love this story. It's going to take us about three weeks to work our way through it. We begin today with John 9:1-12 where we see Jesus in four revealing scenes.

I. Jesus faced a revealing question (1-2).

Verse 1 begins, "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth." In John's Gospel, Jesus is on the move. He's on a journey to the cross, and all along the way we see Him interacting with a variety of people in need. There's a confused teacher named Nicodemus in chapter 3, an immoral Samaritan woman in chapter 4, a lonely paralytic in chapter 5, five thousand hungry people in chapter 6, and so on. These aren't just stories. John is using these encounters to prove the point of his Gospel, namely that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God, who gives eternal life to all who believe in His name (see John 20:31).

And now in chapter 9, John gives us yet another story of a person who met Jesus.

A. He met a blind man. *Blind from birth*, says John. Congenital blindness. Later we're told the man was a beggar too. In the first century, that was about the only way a blind man like this could put food on the table, by begging.

We mustn't miss the Savior's sovereignty here. There were surely other blind beggars in Israel that day, but this one received Jesus' attention. John says that as Jesus went along, he *saw* the man.

¹ G. Campbell Morgan, p. 162-3.

² Kent Hughes, p. 257.

Ironically, Jesus' disciples saw him too, but from a different perspective. Verse 2 says, "His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"

That's quite a question, isn't it? As Wiersbe observes, "The disciples did not look at the man as an object of mercy but rather as a subject for a theological discussion."³ Sort of a theological puzzle to chat about. It's a whole lot easier to talk about afflictions than it is to do something about them.

"Who sinned?" the disciples asked. Notice...

B. His disciples presumed the blindness was due to sin. They're like Job's friends. When bad things happen, the reason is sin, right? When a man's kids are killed in a storm and he ends up in a pile of ashes with boils, as with Job, there must be sin, right?

That's the disciples' presumption, too. They see a man who was born with non-functioning eyes, and they know the cause is sin. The only unknown is *whose* sin. Is it the man's sin, or his parents?

That may sound strange to our ears, but there's indication that some rabbis actually taught that babies were able to sin in the womb, i.e. prenatal sin. They went to texts like Genesis 25:22-26 and concluded that in the womb Esau tried to kill Jacob.⁴ You'll hear the same kind of thinking at the end of our story when the religious leaders tell this man, "You were steeped in sin at birth (34)!"

It's a revealing question, isn't it? *Who sinned?* The question reveals both an inadequate view of this disabled man and of why there is suffering in the world.

It's not just in the first century either. There are suffering people all around us, too. And there's faulty thinking as to why there is suffering.

That's scene one. Jesus faced a revealing question. Now scene two...

II. Jesus responded with a revealing answer (3-5).

His response teaches us three things regarding suffering.

A. His response teaches us about the cause of physical suffering (3). Listen to the Master in verse 3, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

I had an aunt who contracted polio when she was a little girl and she spent the next seven decades with a twisted body. Why? And you have people coming to mind, too. Why do tragic things like polio and AIDS and blindness happen in this world? That's a valid question. Why is there sickness and disease?

Here's where we get in trouble, just like the disciples. We want a simplistic, one sentence answer. "It's sin." Or, "It's the devil." Or for some, "It's too complicated for us to understand." Simplistic answers won't cut it. But there are answers, divine answers. When we look into God's Word we find at least four different explanations for suffering.

1. *Fundamentally, it's because we live in a sin-cursed world.* That's what we're told in Romans 5:12-21. Death, and the suffering and disease that leads to death, is in the world today because of the fateful and sinful choice of the first man, Adam. "Wherefore as by one man, sin entered the world, and death by sin," says Romans 5:12.

³ Wiersbe, p. 324.

⁴ Observation by William Hendriksen, p. 73.

In Genesis 2 God said, “If you eat that tree, you’ll die.” And that’s what Adam did in Genesis 3. Just read Genesis 3, and you’ll see the sin that alienated mankind from his Maker and brought the curse of sin on the universe.

A child has brain damage from the bite of a rabid dog. A woman gets malaria from the bite of mosquito. A microscopic virus destroys a teenager’s lung. And the cause? In each case, it’s because we’re living in a sin-cursed world. That’s the fundamental cause. There were no rabid dogs or disease-carrying mosquitos or hostile viruses in the first paradise, just like there won’t be in the new heaven and earth to come. They’re here because of the curse of sin. “It’s appointed unto man once to die,” says Hebrews 9:27. And that’s reality. Unless Christ returns first, there’s no getting out of this world alive.

By the way, my non-Christian friend, that’s why you need Christ to save you. Jesus Christ offers us life beyond this life, eternal life, first in heaven, but ultimately in a new heaven and new earth that He will create for His people. He died to pay sin’s penalty, then conquered the foe of death so that those who trust in Him may live with Him forever.

So why is there sickness and disease and death? Fundamentally, it’s because we’re living in a sin-cursed world.

2. *Sometimes it’s because of our own sin.* Not always, but at times people get sick because of their own sin. Because of her rebellious spirit, Miriam was struck with leprosy (Num 12:10). Paul says that some Christians in Corinth got sick, and some even died, because of sin (1 Cor 11:30). If you don’t treat your body as God’s Word says, like God’s temple, there are built in consequences. If you smoke, you may well end up with lung disease. Drunkenness can destroy your liver. Overeating can contribute to heart disease. So sometimes, we bring physical afflictions upon ourselves, by our own sinful actions.

3. *Sometimes it’s because of the sin of others.* Think of crack babies. Think of the drunk driver that maims another man for life. Think of the spouse and kids that have lung problems due to second hand smoke. Sometimes people get diseases because of the sinful choices of other people.

And there are other factors that the Bible uses to help explain why there’s physical suffering in the world. Demonic oppression is one (Mark 7:25). But I want us to ponder carefully the one Jesus mentioned here in John 9.

4. *Ultimately, it provides the opportunity for God to put His works on display.* Listen to Jesus again. He said, “This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

This happened—this man’s blindness. *So that the work of God*—actually, it’s plural, so that the *works* of God, that is, the miracles to follow. Which is an interesting perspective, as Leon Morris states, “What was to happen is to man a miracle, but to God no more than a normal ‘work.’”⁵ *Might be displayed in his life*—there are things God wants us to see that He knows we will see most clearly when they’re placed on backdrop of suffering.

It’s sort of like a Thomas Kinkaid painting. It’s the light that captures your attention, but it’s the dark colors that provide the backdrop and accentuate the light. God

⁵ Leon Morris, p. 479.

doesn't cause evil and suffering and pain, but He works with it and through it to put His glory on display so we'll see it.

We saw it happen this past Thursday when a surgeon worked to remove what appears to be a cancerous tumor from our brother, Jim. You see, the surgeon wasn't the only one working in that hospital. The Lord was working, too. Doing what? Putting His works on display in and through His people.

How would we know God's sufficiency if we were never in positions of need? How would we learn of His wisdom if we never felt the frustration of not knowing what to do? How would we learn of His power if we never our weakness?

You see, God wants us to know Him, and He often uses our physical infirmities to make Himself known to us and through us.

Now, a word of caution. I said God *uses* our infirmities, but there's a difference between *using* and *causing*. F. F. Bruce said it well, so let me borrow his explanation: "This does not mean that God deliberately caused the child to be born blind in order that, after many years, his glory should be displayed in the removal of the blindness; to think so would again be an aspersion⁶ of the character of God. It does mean that God overruled the disaster of the child's blindness so that, when the child grew to manhood, he might, by recovering his sight, see the glory of God in the face of Christ, and others, seeing this work of God, might turn to the true Light of the Word."⁷

So in His response, Jesus teaches us about the cause of physical suffering. But there's more. In verse 4...

B. His response teaches us about the proper response to physical suffering (4). Here's what He said, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."

The word that jumps off the page is the word *we*. Jesus tells His disciples, "We must do the work." As long as it is day, in other words, as long there's opportunity, *we*, not just Jesus, but Jesus *and His disciples* must do the work. What work? The work given to Jesus, He says, by the One who sent Him, the Father. What work is that? The work of rescuing sinners.

You see, God is on a rescue mission. That's why He sent Jesus into the world, to provide the means for rescuing sinners, through His atoning death. But Jesus now includes His followers in this rescue work. When His followers see hurting people, like this blind man, He wants them, not just to talk, but to work. That's the proper response to physical suffering, to *do the work of Him who sent me*.

Night is coming, said Jesus, *when no one can work*. Based on John 12:35, I think He's referring to His coming arrest and crucifixion, when the powers of darkness seemed to prevail and the followers of Jesus scattered in fear. When the night came, the work stopped, or so it seemed. But then Christ overcame the darkness, left the tomb, and then recommissioned His men, saying, "As the Father sent me, I am sending you (John 20:21)." And then He sent His Spirit to mobilize these men into action.

So this isn't just Jesus' work. *We* must do the work, He tells the disciples. And that includes you and me. We're not just to talk about physical suffering. We, as did our Savior, are to meet physical needs, but we're to do it realizing those physical needs are

⁶ A slur or a slander

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, p. 209.

just symptomatic of the greatest need of hurting people, the spiritual need, the need for a Savior.

Jesus made that point clear in verse 5 when He said, “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

C. His response teaches us about the only hope for all who suffer (5). What do sufferers need? Not just healing. They need light. And Jesus doesn’t just give light. He *is* the light. “In him was life, and that life was the light of men,” said John 1:4.

There’s the only hope for those who suffer. It’s the One who said, “I am the light of the world.” But anybody can make a claim. If people are going to believe you, you must substantiate your claim. And that’s what Jesus does in scene three. First, He handled a revealing question. Second, He responded with a revealing answer. Third...

III. Jesus performed a revealing miracle (6-7).

Verses 6-7 tell us how He did it. “Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ‘Go,’ he told him, ‘wash in the Pool of Siloam’ (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.”

Even if you don’t know much about Jesus, you’ve probably heard about how He healed people. In John MacArthur’s commentary on this text, he provides a helpful summary of Jesus’ healing ministry, and points out six things that were true of how Jesus healed people, in contrast with the so-called faith-healers in our day.

First, Jesus healed with only a word or touch (Matt 8:5-13; 9:6, 20-22, etc). Second, Jesus healed instantly (Matt 8:3, 13, etc). Third, Jesus healed completely. Remember Peter’s mother-in-law? Right after being healed, she served her guests. Fourth, Jesus healed everyone who came to Him, unlike those frauds today who pick and choose. Fifth, Jesus healed organic, physical diseases and infirmities—not invisible ailments such as lower back pain, heart palpitations, and headaches. He restored and replaced crippled legs (Matt 11:5), replaced withered hands (12:10-13), bent spines (Luke 13:10-13), blind eyes (Matt 9:28-30), and deaf ears (Mark 7:32-37). And sixth, unlike modern fakes, Jesus actually raised dead people (Mark 5:22-24, 35-43, etc).⁸

I referred to the miracle in John 9 as a *revealing* miracle. Actually, every miracle Jesus performed is a revealing miracle, for every miracle reveals something to us about Jesus. What about this particular miracle? It teaches two things.

A. Jesus’ actions present Jesus as Creator. Notice what He did in verse 6. John says that Jesus *spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes.*

Why the spittle? Some commentators mention that while it’s repulsive to us, it wasn’t in ancient times. Barclay explains, “Spittle, and especially the spittle of some distinguished person, was believed to possess certain curative qualities.”⁹ Then he says, “Jesus took the methods and customs of his time and used them. He was a wise physician; he had to gain the confidence of his patient. It was not that he believed in these things, but he kindled expectation by doing what the patient would expect a doctor

⁸ John MacArthur, pp. 389-90.

⁹ Barclay, p. 40.

to do. After all, to this day the efficacy of any medicine or treatment depends at least as much on the patient's faith in it as in the treatment or the drug itself."¹⁰

Is that it? The spit either provided some medicinal value or some sort of placebo effect? I don't think so. For starters, I don't see this man's expectation having anything to do with his healing. His eyes were healed because Jesus healed them, regardless of whether this man expected it to happen or not. And of course, Jesus didn't need any medicinal help for His miracles, as evidenced by how He healed other blind people. On one occasion Jesus healed two blind men merely by touching their eyes (Matt 9:27-31). In Mark 8:22-26 He healed another blind man, first by putting spittle in his eyes and then by touching them. Wiersbe remarks, "Though the healing power was the same, our Lord varied His methods lest people focus on the *manner* of healing and miss the *message* in the healing."¹¹

So why the spittle mixed with dirt? The truth is, we don't know, and we don't know because Jesus doesn't tell us.

But perhaps there's a connection here. Where else do we see God Almighty getting His hands dirty? In Genesis 2:7, which says, "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground..." Which person of the Godhead is that with dirt on His hands? John 1 tells us, "In the beginning was the Word... Through him all things were made (verses 1, 3)."

And now He's got His hands in the dirt again. The One who used dirt to create the first pair of eyes is now using dirt again to recreate a pair of eyes, not because He needs dirt to do it, but because we need to know He's the Creator!

There's something else we see in this miracle. First, He's Creator. Second...

B. Jesus' actions present Jesus as Lord. Notice the commands in verse 7. *Go*, said Jesus. And *wash*. I'm not sure the significance of the Pool of Siloam. But I'm sure the verbs aren't suggestions, but imperatives, and they speak of Jesus' Lordship. As does what happened when the man obeyed them. He *went* and *washed* and *came home seeing*.

He doesn't do what Naaman did. Remember Naaman? He's the leper who came to the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 5. When Elisha told him to go wash in the Jordan River, Naaman objected, saying there were better rivers back home in Syria. But apparently, this blind man didn't protest at all. He did as instructed, and went, and washed, and then started seeing.

My friend, don't miss the obvious here. You don't relate to Jesus on your own terms, but His. He is the *Lord*.

Let's take it a step further. Just think what happened when Jesus put the mud right on the man's eyes. Wiersbe uses the word *irritation*, and suggests that this action strongly encouraged the man to obey Jesus' instructions and head to the pool for cleansing. "You might compare this 'irritation' to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit," says Wiersbe, "as He uses God's Law to bring the lost sinner under judgment."¹²

Often Jesus does things in our lives, even uncomfortable things, to get us to move in the direction of His blessing.

One more scene. First, Jesus faced a revealing question. Second, He offered a revealing answer. Third, He performed a revealing miracle. Finally...

¹⁰ Barclay, p. 42.

¹¹ Wiersbe, p. 324.

¹² Wiersbe, pp. 324-5.

IV. Jesus produced a revealing response (8-12).

By response, I'm talking about the people in the story. We meet some of them right here, and we'll see others next time in the scene to follow.

Listen to verses 8-12, "His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, 'Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?' Some claimed that he was. Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' But he himself insisted, 'I am the man.' 'How then were your eyes opened?' they demanded. He replied, 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.' 'Where is this man?' they asked him. 'I don't know,' he said."

Back in verse 4 Jesus talked about His *work* when He said, "As long as it is day we must do the *work* of him who sent me." You'll notice that Jesus' work produced two results. First...

A. His work caused people to ask questions. Like... Isn't this the man that used to sit and beg? How were your eyes opened? Where is this man?

You see, whenever Jesus does a work, it causes people to ask questions. Some people ask questions because they're confused. Some ask questions because they're skeptical. Some ask questions because they are flat out disturbed.

Jesus knows that. He knows, to bring it closer to home, that some of you are asking questions regarding a work He's been doing in your life, or perhaps in the life of someone you know.

That's intentional. The Lord often does things to shake our world and get us asking questions. Then there's a second result.

B. His work gave the man opportunities to give testimony about Jesus. The neighbors pounded him with questions. "Who did this?" they asked. "The man they call Jesus did," he replied. "Where is he?" they wanted to know. "I don't know," he said.¹³

Not much of a testimony, is it? Not yet. But of course, Jesus isn't finished with this man yet. The work has just begun. He started with his eyes, but Jesus won't stop until He has healed the eyes of the man's heart.

I'm not convinced this man is a true believer yet. I say that because He doesn't even know who Jesus is. There's a difference between believing that Jesus can fix your broken body and believing He can fix your sin-stained soul. Remember the paralytic in John 5? Jesus healed him, but then gave him a grave warning, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you (5:14)."

When you read this chapter, you'll watch this man goes through four stages in his testimony about Jesus.¹⁴ In verse 11 he says He is "a man called Jesus." In verse 17, He is "a prophet." In verse 33 He is "a man from God." You don't have to be a saved man to say those things about Jesus.

But at the end of the story we hear the testimony of a saved man. It's after the man is excommunicated by the Jewish leaders. Jesus finds him and asks in verse 35, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man's response? Verse 36, "Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him."

¹³ Keep in mind the man hasn't seen Jesus yet. He was still blind when Jesus sent him to the pool.

¹⁴ Observation by Warren Wiersbe, pp. 324-7.

He's not there yet, is he? He's a healed man, but he's not a saved man, not yet. His eyes are working, but the eyes of his heart are still blinded.

Then Jesus said to him in verse 37, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." And notice the effect Jesus' words produced on this man.

According to verse 38, "Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him."

MacArthur calls this miracle "a living parable."¹⁵ That's a good way to think of it. Jesus did something for that blind man that illustrates what every person blinded by sin needs. We need Jesus. We need Jesus to do a work that we cannot do for ourselves. We need Jesus to open our eyes, so we'll admit the truth about ourselves and about Him. He is the Creator. He is the Lord. He is the Son of Man sent from heaven to rescue us from our sins.

And you'll notice it wasn't just Jesus' touch that opened the eyes of the man's heart. It was His Word. He spoke, and the man believed. Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ.

I ask you, my non-Christian friend, do you hear the Savior's voice? Do you hear His question? He's asking you, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Who is he? you ask. "You have just seen Him in the pages of His Word. In fact, He who spoke to the blind beggar in John 9 is now speaking to you."

You say, "What's the right response?" Do what this man did. Say, "Lord, I believe," and then worship Him.

As we close, I want to talk to believers for a moment. I want us to take inventory of our response to suffering, and specifically physical suffering. I want to take us back to Jesus' staggering words in verse 3 when He said, "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed." With those words in mind, I want us to ask ourselves three questions.

Take Inventory: Ask yourself some questions...

1. *How am I responding to suffering in my own life?* Jesus just said that at least one of the reasons we suffer is so the work of God can be displayed in our lives. I must confess that far too often I miss that work. I don't see it. I don't want to see it. I want comfort. I want health. And that's coming in eternity. But in this life, there's tribulation and hardship and suffering, and God intends to manifest Himself through it all. Our part is to trust Him, to see Him in the suffering, to savor Him, to rest in Him, to share Him.

2. *How am I responding to suffering in the lives of others?* Jesus said, "As long as it is day *WE must do the work of him who sent me.*" So what are you doing when you see others suffer? Are you joining with Jesus in the work, the work of helping and healing and bringing people into the full knowledge of who Jesus is and why He came? When we see suffering, we have that opportunity.

3. *How does God want to use me to point people to Jesus this week?* Maybe it's through your own suffering. By His grace, let's suffer well so people will see Him in our lives. Maybe it's through the suffering of others. Let's not just talk about those who suffer. Let's join with Jesus in the work of touching their lives for the glory of God.

¹⁵ MacArthur, p. 394.