

John 9:1-5 “Are You a Beggar?”

JOH 9:1-5 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 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. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

You'll remember from last week that this section of Scripture is in the context of Jesus having fled for His life as the Jews picked up stones to stone Him because of Jesus' claim to be God, as He answered the question posed by the Jews, "how could you have seen Abraham when you're not even fifty years old?"

JOH 8:58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

Essentially Jesus was telling them that He existed before Abraham, and that He is none other than Jehovah whose name was given to Moses at the burning bush incident when God told Moses to go back and tell Israel that *I am* has sent him to them.

And so, as we come to our text, this is some time after this incident of Jesus fleeing from the Jews, though we don't know how long after; maybe a day, maybe a week. We just don't know.

But the amazing thing is that despite how many of the Jews want to see Jesus put to death, what we find is that our Lord doesn't flee Jerusalem. In fact, He continues to actively seek out the lost sheep of Israel.

JOH 9:1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

It's not a coincidence that the apostle John records this for us because our Lord continually shows the connection between physical blindness and spiritual blindness, and how He alone is able to solve both.

But blindness is used to also describe the chosen people of God in Israel who continue to choose darkness over the light.

JOH 1:4,5,11 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not

understood it. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

And so, despite the fact that His own, that is the Jewish people as a whole, did not receive Him, He continues to be that light as He is about to demonstrate to an individual in that nation.

By the way, you'll notice that this is no ordinary blind man. The word of God specifically tells us that this particular blind man was born in this condition. Blindness in the ancient world more often than not was the result of disease or accidents which today we can treat with medicine.

In those days a simple fever in the life of a child could escalate into something very serious. In fact, even in this country, up to about a hundred or so years ago, the mortality rate among children was very high compared to today. And for those children who survived certain diseases they were often afflicted with other maladies as a result of the original disease.

This was the case for adults in the ancient world as well. And so, blindness may have resulted from a number of things in their lives. But in the case before us this man has never seen. He has never witnessed a sunrise or the colors of the springtime, he has never seen the face of his mother or father.

He has never even understood what light is like, unlike many others who experience blindness later in life who have seen prior to their blindness. And so, the picture we have before us is the utter darkness and hopelessness which Christ is able to penetrate, both physically and most importantly, spiritually.

But what is fascinating, as we continue in our study, is how the people of Israel had an understanding of sin and its effects. They understood, to some degree, how sin was at the heart of many things in this world, and more specifically in the lives of individuals, even though some of their understanding was flawed as we're about to see.

JOH 9:2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

On one level this is an astute question. But on another level it shows the ignorance of these people as to how God deals with sin in the lives of individuals.

And so, the scene we have before us is one where Jesus and His disciples are walking somewhere in Jerusalem and they come upon a beggar who is blind, as was the custom for many of the infirmed or impaired, since they were not able to do regular work.

It's interesting to note that nowhere in the Mosaic Law was there a provision for begging. On the contrary the Scriptures associate beggars with the curse of sin and evil as David points out in Psalm 109.

PSA 109:10 May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes.

This was not to suggest holding back mercy from those who were unable to work like certain widows or the fatherless, but generally speaking Israel made provisions for those people.

DEU 24:19 When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

But, in Israel, during the time of Christ, begging came to be an accepted practice for certain individuals, though it was still associated with a curse, which is one of the reasons the disciples ask the question, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

And so, what we're about to see is the mercy of Christ as He approaches a person who is not only having to make a living by begging alms from passers-by, but who for all intents and purposes is seen in Israel as one who is being judged by God and who is therefore relegated to the position of beggar.

Most people wouldn't give the time of day to these beggars, but the Son of God desires to give them light and life, as He does today.

But back to the question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The Jews understood how sin was associated with life in general. They understood for example how the curse of sin, way back in the Garden of Eden, affected the world.

GEN 3:16-19 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

They also understood the association of sin with the condition of those around you, specifically the sins of the parents.

EXO 20:5-6 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Unfortunately, the Jews had taken that passage and turned it on its head by suggesting that I am somehow responsible for the individual sins of my father to the degree that I, in part, somehow have to pay his debt to God. This simply isn't the case.

EZE 18:18-20 But his father will die for his own sin, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people. 19 "Yet you ask, 'Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?' Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. 20 The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.

What Exodus 20:5 teaches is that the sins of the fathers will most certainly affect the lives of those who come after them to the degree that when God judges the fathers for their sins the children will often take up their fathers' sin and thus continue to reap what they sow.

And by the way, when we come to passages like Exodus 20 and other Scripture which specifically mentions this association between the sins of the fathers and their children, it's almost always in the collective sense. In other words, in Exodus 20:5 it doesn't say, "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing

the child for the sin of *his father* to the third and fourth generation...”

So, what this means is that God is punishing a group who follows the sins of the fathers in the sense that when the fathers disobey God the rest of the group, in this case Israel, often times will reap what those leaders sowed as the pattern of sin continues on for many generations as they are unwilling to repent and believe on the promises of God.

This is why for example, that practically the entire nation of Israel was taken into captivity into Assyria and Babylon despite the fact that there may have been some in Israel who were trying to be faithful to God.

It's the same today. If I go out and commit a crime and my name is plastered all over the papers, my family suffers for the sin I committed. It doesn't mean they were guilty, but the consequences of the sins of others sometimes affects the lives of those close by.

But the other thing to consider in Exodus 20:5 is that God is dealing with Israel in general terms and pointing out what is referred to as the dual sanctions of the covenant. To put those two in their most simple terms God says, “If you obey Me you will be blessed, if you reject Me you will not be blessed.”

This is why Exodus 20:5 must be understood within its context. Let's look at it again briefly.

EXO 20:5-6 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

God is saying that the children who hate God will be those who will be judged along with their fathers who hated God, but those who love the Lord will be shown love by the Lord.

All of this to say, that the disciples of Jesus Christ were simply misinformed about such passages as Exodus 20, which is why they ask their question, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

And let me quickly add, that there are people who claim to be Christians today who follow this same misunderstanding of

Scripture to where if a person is sick or has a misfortune in his life, he necessarily has some sort of sin that God is dealing with.

To that I respond with one word, one name; Job. To suggest that there is always a one to one correlation of specific sin to sickness, for example, is to entirely miss how God works in the lives of people.

This doesn't mean that there may not be a response from God in this way when a person sins, but to suggest that this is God's modus operandi, (mode of operation), for every situation is to presume upon God's will and ways.

And this is exactly what Jesus teaches His disciples in this case before us.

JOH 9:3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

Now, when Jesus says that, "neither this man nor his parents sinned," He does not mean to suggest that they weren't sinners. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Jesus is simply responding to the faulty thinking of His disciples in light of this man's plight and the sin of his parents or his own sin.

Jesus essentially responds by saying that no personal sin on the parents' part, and obviously no personal sin on the part of the unborn child, had anything to do with the child being born blind.

Again, this doesn't negate the general teaching on how the curse of sin affected all mankind. If Adam had not sinned no one would be born blind and no one would be sick. We would all be living in Paradise in a perfect world where no sin or its effects existed, which by the way, will be the norm on the new earth after our resurrection.

But as it relates to this one to one correlation where one sins, therefore God punishes with affliction in every case, Jesus denies this proposition.

But He goes on to teach His disciples, and thus us, that even affliction can be used to the glory of God. He denies that the sin of his parents, or any sin of the son, had anything to do with his blindness, but He does say that "this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

The sovereignty of God aside, as He has ordained all of life and history for His glory, Jesus is making the point that the disciples cannot impose their preconceived idea on how God wills certain things in the lives of people as His disciples use their own standard of good and evil.

And so, as F.F. Bruce in his commentary on John points out, “it [means] 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 world.”

And by the way, this should bring us great comfort in the midst of trials and afflictions. Often times we think that maybe God has abandoned us to such things when in fact God is acutely aware of everything that is going on in our lives.

And to the degree that we view this life and its problems in the light of God’s perspective and His ability to use us, despite the difficulties of life, we can actually find ourselves being strengthened instead of continuing to walk in our weaknesses as we blame such things on God, instead of realizing that the curse of sin affects us all and that God can work through such things.

This is one reason Paul could say to the Romans.

ROM 8:28-29 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

This does not mean that He will always miraculously take away our affliction or even our trial. Look at Joni Erickson Tata. She’s written numerous books and is known for her music and paintings which she, by the way, paints with her mouth.

She was involved years ago in swimming accident where she was paralyzed from the neck down. There were people who claimed to be Christians who told her that her affliction was the result of some unknown sin in her life. This crushed her for years.

But the Lord showed her that it was not the result of her parent’s sins or her sin, but that through her life He would display His life in her to His glory. My wife and I met Joni at a nursing home in Ft. Lauderdale in the late 1980’s when we were involved in a nursing

home ministry. Her father happened to be in that very nursing home.

She was visiting him on the day we were there. And I'll tell you that there is not a more sweet spirit than can be found in this woman. I'm sure she's got her bad days like we all do, but she has resolved to live her life for Christ in the afflicted body she's got with the hope of her resurrection body to be given to her on the last day as Christ ushers in the new heavens and new earth.

It is through her decision to do such that literally thousands of people have been given hope in their own afflictions and more importantly how many who have read her books or have had personal contact with her have been given the truth of who Jesus Christ is and why He came into this world, which is to save sinners.

Unfortunately, many Christians don't have this kind of perspective of living life so that Christ's life might be displayed in them. There is a tendency among some Christians to live life to God's glory only if life goes well for them. If it doesn't, they either decide to sit on the sidelines thinking they've failed God and can never be useful for Him, or that it's just too hard to live for Him at all.

I hope this is not a revelation to any of you, but life is hard for all of us at some point. For many life is hard for the duration. But until we begin to realize that life in Christ is meant to be lived for God, not our own desires, then we will always be questioning the goodness of God and will effectually become ineffectual for any service unto Him.

Many Christians scoff at the words of James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, who said in JAM 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

I've actually had people who profess Christ tell me that that is a cruel statement by James. And I suppose that if we are not seeking the things above it could be perceived by some as cruel. And I'm not suggesting that going through trials and afflictions is to be seen in some joyous masochistic way; and neither is James.

The joy doesn't come in the form of the trial. The joy comes from knowing the One who will be there with us in the trial, realizing

that our Lord Jesus is going to personally use such things to make us better servants of our God Most High, and in addition we may possibly be the conduit through which someone might actually be delivered from darkness into the light of God's salvation, as we're willing to walk in Christ, even in a trial.

What an awesome way to be used by God. And that's what Christ desires of all of His children.

JOH 9:4-5 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Jesus uses language here to indicate that we must all do the work of the Father who sent His Son into the world. In other words, while it is day, or while we are in this world and have the ability to be lights to the world, we must be about our Father's will, which is to be conformed into the image of Christ, and bring the message of reconciliation to a world which has been separated from God.

This is precisely what the apostle Paul understood about his work for the Father as he encourages us to take up this work as well.

2CO 5:17-21 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

You and I have the privilege of being used to extend the Kingdom of Christ as we are faithful witnesses to the light of the world. Jesus Christ tells us that He is that light. And though it is true that the world tends to reject the light of Christ we must still shine for Him as we love the world with the truth.

Of all the people that Jesus could have healed He picks one man who was undoubtedly seen by the majority of Jews in Jerusalem as unworthy; a blind beggar. But if there is anything good a beggar can do it is to seek mercy.

And that's where we all were at one time as we begged God to extend mercy and grace to us as He enabled us to see our need to beg for forgiveness of our sin, as His Spirit gave us eyes to see.

And it is in that attitude that we found mercy, grace and forgiveness in Christ. But one who has been forgiven of much loves much and appreciates the salvation they have been freely given.

It's the one who approaches salvation, not as a beggar, but as one who is entitled, who loves little and appreciates little.

May we be sanctified beggars who tell other beggars where they can find the bread of life and the living water who satisfies for eternity.

Next week we'll look at this particular beggar and glean some things from his new life in Christ.