

Blind Sheep John 9: 1-17

Rabbi, who sinned- this man or his parents that he was born blind?
It sounds more like a question the Pharisees would have asked Jesus rather than his closest followers. We don't know whether it was out of morbid curiosity like rubberneckers at a Biblical traffic accident or a genuine desire to understand the man's condition but either way they asked Jesus a loaded question with no good answer.

If the man's personal sin was responsible for his birth defect it would mean he sinned while he was still in his mother's womb, a premise bordering on the ridiculous. And if his blindness could result from personal sin in his parent's lives, what prospective parent would take a chance on bringing a child into the world in that condition? Either premise might lead one to assume that the man deserved to be blind and beg for a living.

Rabbi, who sinned- this man or his parents that he was born blind?
Do you wonder if the blind man asked himself that same question on occasion, especially at the end of a day of begging when the dirty and banged up cup he used to collect a few mynas remained empty? God what did I do to deserve this? The fact is that there will be times when we will struggle to understand human suffering, whether it is in our life or that of someone we love. What we really want to know is how we can avoid it.

The disciples were no different. They recognized that sin, which in simple terms is the willful disobedience of God, and suffering, which in simple terms is human misery, are often related. That unholy alliance began in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, where their disobedience to God resulted in their banishment from paradise and a seemingly continuous human cycle of sin, suffering, repentance and forgiveness. Beginning with their firstborn children Cain and Abel, we find that envy, jealousy, and unrighteous anger leads to violence, which results in bloodshed, death and the pain of separation. Throughout human history we find that greed results in selfishness, which can lead to poverty, which can lead to the pain of children with an empty stomach. Time after time we find that broken promises can lead to broken relationships, which can lead to suffering of many sorts. Sin and suffering often go together. It is a cycle that continues today. The question is how do we break it?

The fact is that like the early disciples of Jesus we also struggle to understand human suffering. We want to know why there is blindness, MS, cancer, heart disease and corona viruses. We want to know who has them, where they came from, when they came down with them and what causes them so we can prevent or avoid them at all costs. The disciples did recognize that sin and suffering often go together but Jesus made it clear to them that in this case, unlike the paralytic man He healed earlier, personal sin had nothing to do with his blindness. Verse 3- neither this man nor his parents sinned- he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.

Can you hear the objections of those who don't know Jesus? How can you believe in a god who would cause a man to be born blind just to demonstrate some sort of supernatural power? How can you believe in a god that would allow blindness and suffering to remain when he has the power to end it? Those questions and others like it are ones that people have struggled throughout human history.

Some will simply choose to believe the lie that God is not real. Only the most devout atheist would believe that to be true. Some will choose to remake God into a god that is much less objectionable than the God of the Scriptures, a god that soothes our consciences. Still others will insist that the Bible is the problem, believing it to be a fictional or mistake ridden book written by deceitful men. If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that none of those possibilities are satisfactory. Difficult questions do not have easy answers, yet if we earnestly seek the truth, we will discover it. God is God, and we are not. We will also find that faith in Jesus is not the problem, but the solution to the problem of sin and suffering.

Jesus made it clear that the man was blind from birth through no fault of his own. But the fact of the matter is that he was just as blind as one whose sin did cause it. The cause of his blindness was secondary. And then the key verse, verse 4. We must (like we must go through Samaria) work the works of the one who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

This was not the time for them to learn about sin and suffering but the time to bring glory to God. There was work that needed to be done. Instead of dwelling on the root cause of the man's problem they were to meet his needs while there was still time. Jesus did just that. Much to the horror of some watching Jesus spits on the ground and mixes it with the dry dusty dirt of the desert. Much like the creation account where He forms man from the dust of the earth and gives him life He makes a paste of spit-holy spit-and dirt and proceeds to anoint the blind man's eyes with it and then tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The Bible says the man went and washed and returned back- able to see for the first time in his life.

That's when the trouble started. Some in the crowd were unable to believe what they were seeing. In spite of the man's own testimony and the visible proof they refused to believe the guy in front of them was once the blind beggar but someone who happened to look like him and just happened to claim he was healed by Jesus. The Pharisees- the religious leaders who couldn't heal a minor cut let alone someone blind from birth were outraged. Their jealousy was made evident by their phony sanctimony and regard for the Sabbath. How dare this man make mud on the Sabbath and claim to heal this sinful beggar. How dare you wash on the Sabbath? But there were others who opened their eyes and found the truth – Jesus was indeed who He claimed to be- God in the flesh. He gave the man his sight so God would be glorified. Relieving his suffering was an added but secondary benefit.

Now more than ever, there are some very practical lessons here for us.

1. Like the works of Jesus, every good work and every good deed we do "must" be done for one purpose- to glorify God. Someday we will know how much suffering and pain remained in this world because so many failed to recognize and act on that basic Biblical truth. Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man so that the eyes of those around the blind man would be opened to allow them overcome their unbelief and place their faith in the only one that can make that happen- the Son of God. Whether we are helping those afflicted with poverty, blindness, leprosy or the corona virus our primary motivation for doing so is not to relieve their suffering but to bring glory to God by bringing others to Christ through our efforts.

2. The Scriptures are Good News, yet nowhere will we find that Jesus has promised us a life on this earth free of pain and suffering. What Jesus does promise is to remain with us in our pain and suffering. He says fear not, I will never leave or forsake you, no matter what disease you might have or virus you might catch. This health crisis is a graphic reminder that we live in a fallen world, the domain of Satan. Heartache, pain and suffering are graphic reminders of the evil that can influence our daily lives. Panic, fear-mongering, hoarding and selfishness are a visible manifestation of that evil.

3. As followers of Jesus, we have work to do. Like Jesus and the early disciples, our primary task is telling and showing others that we can suffer from much worse things than corona viruses. We must help the world to overcome the things that will harm the soul rather than the things that will harm the body. Remember what Jesus said -the night is coming when no one can work. If the headlines of the day and our empty pews are any indication dusk is upon us.

There are many kinds of ailments that afflicted many people throughout the ages-the corona viruses are just a few on a list of thousands. Like other disease and pestilence, these viruses have been around for a very long time. They are the cause of the common cold and the deadly respiratory infections travelling the world at this moment. There will be many more corona viruses to come. Perhaps this latest one is a warning, a way that God's grace is being poured out upon us. Whether we are infected or not, there remains one deadly thing that can affect all of us. It is one we all share, spiritual blindness. We are like blind sheep, unable to see God. Jesus came to cure us of that terminal disease. Just as he gave sight to that blind beggar so long ago, He can cure our blindness also. Let the words of the blind man in verse 38 be our words as well – "Lord, I believe". Amen