

John 9
Job 18-19
Psalm 44

“The Light of the World”

June 28, 2020

There are some really interesting parallels between Job’s friends and the Pharisees.

Job’s friends are very orthodox in their doctrine.

They understand the principles of the Law – even the principles of *wisdom!*

The wicked falls into the trap that he laid for others!

And – for that matter – his children perish with him.

(Think of how the firstborn of Egypt died in the plague –

or when Hitler brought war to Europe –

German children paid a high price!).

But Job’s friends – and the Pharisees after them –

tend to take that principle and work it backwards:

therefore, if you are suffering, it must be because you sinned –

or because your parents sinned.

But Job insists that he is innocent!

Plainly, God has kindled his wrath against Job.

Plainly, God is the one who is destroying God’s family and health and wealth.

But Job insists that he is *not* guilty before God.

He has done nothing to deserve this.

There are three questions that drive the book of Job.

(I owe this insight to Rolf Caylor – who gave a great devotional on the third question!)

The third question is *Job’s question* – in chapter 3 –

“Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul?” (3:20)

Why life? Why light?

That question will drive the initial debate with his friends.

The second question is *Satan’s question* – in chapter 1, verse 9 –

“Does Job fear God for no reason?”

By the end of the dialogue with his friends,

Job himself will be asking this question (ch 23-24).

Have I feared God for nothing?

Why are these things happening to me?

But the first question is really the heart and soul of what *God* is doing in this book!

And the first question is back in chapter 1, verse 8, where the LORD said regarding Job:

“Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth,

a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”

The LORD agrees with Job that Job is innocent!

Job is the innocent suffering servant of the LORD.

When Job says that God has put his target on him –
Job is simply speaking the truth.

Our Psalm of response is the song of the innocent sufferer: Psalm 44

Sing Psalm 44

Read John 9

Why do you suffer?

Sometimes do you suffer for your sins?

Yup. Sometimes you just get what you deserve!

But other times you might suffer for your parents' sins.

There are times when children suffer because of their parents' foolish decisions.

But there are other reasons for suffering as well.

Sometimes you suffer *because* you did what was right.

At the feast of Tabernacles Jesus taught two basic points:

He is the source of living water,
and he is the light of the world.

Here in John 9, Jesus demonstrates these two things.

John structures his gospel very carefully.

Having given the teaching of Jesus on these points in chapters 7-8,
he now gives an example.

John has used his examples sparingly.

This is only the fifth sign that Jesus has performed in John's gospel.

In John 2 Jesus turned the water into wine.

In John 4 Jesus healed an official's son.

In John 5 Jesus healed an invalid on the Sabbath.

In John 6 Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.

Now he gives sight to a man born blind.

The narrative opens with Jesus talking with his disciples (1-5)

Then he interacts briefly with the blind man (6-7)

The central part of the narrative focuses on the blind man and his interaction with
his neighbors (8-12)
and the Pharisees (13-34)

Then there is a second brief interaction with the blind man (35-39)

And the narrative concludes with Jesus talking with the Pharisees (40-41)

While this narrative is placed after chapter 8,

there is no time reference other than that it took place on a Sabbath (14).
John does not follow chronological order,
and given the fact that the Pharisees do not appear to be trying to kill Jesus,
I would suggest that this event probably happened before chapters 7-8,
but is placed here because it illustrates beautifully what Jesus said in chapters 7-8.

1. “That the Works of God Might Be Displayed in Him”: Job and the Man Born Blind (1-7)

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

The whole narrative is shaped by the opening question:

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (2)

This question is rooted in the wisdom debates of the Old Testament.

God had promised in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28

that he would bless those who loved and obeyed him

and that he would curse those who sinned against him and rebelled.

So naturally, those inclined toward a strict construction of the text would assume

that if something bad happens to you it is because you sinned.

But of course God had also said that he “visits the sins of the fathers on the children

to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” (Ex. 20:5)

So if something bad happened to you, then it could be your parents fault!

The case of a man born blind would be particularly interesting.

Did God judge him in advance for sins not yet committed?

Or was this man struck blind for the sins of his parents?

Now if Jesus had been a theologically astute evangelical he would have answered,

Neither. It was Adam who sinned

This is a part of God’s common wrath against humanity.

It is a simply a part of the curse which the righteous and the unrighteous share together.

But he doesn’t.

He says “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents,

but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day;

night is coming, when no one can work.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (3-5)

Jesus says, this man was born blind so that I might give him sight.
Then he spat on the ground, and used his own saliva to make an anointment of mud.
He places it on the man's eyes, and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam.
He went, washed, and came back seeing.
Having just said in John 7 that he was the source of living water,
he now uses his own saliva to open the eyes of the man born blind.
The living water will allow this man to see the Light of the World.

Why was this man born blind?
For that matter, why are children born with Down syndrome?
Was it because they or their parents sinned?
No. It was so that the works of God might be displayed in them.

Some might say, but pastor, that's not fair!
That man suffered perhaps 30 years of blindness,
just so that Jesus could open his eyes?
Children born with genetic problems have numerous physical ailments all their lives,
just so that God might display his power in raising them to new life in Christ?

That doesn't sound fair.

Hold that thought,
and see if by the end of the story you still want that sort of fairness!

Watch the man born blind.

2. The First Dialogue: "How Can a Man Who Is a Sinner Do Such Signs?" (v8-23)

⁸ *The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"* ⁹ *Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."* ¹⁰ *So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"* ¹¹ *He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."* ¹² *They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."*

¹³ *They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.* ¹⁴ *Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.* ¹⁵ *So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."* ¹⁶ *Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.* ¹⁷ *So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."*

¹⁸ *The Jews^[a] did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight* ¹⁹ *and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"* ²⁰ *His parents answered, "We know that this is*

our son and that he was born blind. ²¹ But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus^[b] to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) ²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

His old neighbors saw him, and wondered.

Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?

Yes, it is he!

No, it just looks like him.

But if you were born blind, then how were your eyes opened?

The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."

News of this sort quickly made its way around,
and so they brought the man to the Pharisees.

Oh, and by the way, just to make things a little more interesting,
it was the Sabbath when Jesus opened his eyes. (14)

Now the Pharisees asked him how he received his sight,
and when he tells them,
they reply, this Jesus "is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."
But others point out "how can a man who is a sinner do such signs?"

Even the Pharisees were divided about Jesus.

His signs are so powerful that they realize that this is no trickster.

So instead they ask the man,

"What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?"

The man simply replies, "he is a prophet."

But the Pharisees (now called simply "the Jews") were unwilling to believe the story.
So they called his parents to verify it.

Is this your son, who you say was born blind?

How then does he now see?

The parents understood what they were being asked.

This Jesus has become very divisive in the Jewish community.

If they say anything in Jesus' favor, they could get in trouble.

So they simply replied, "he is our son and he was born blind,
but how he now sees, we do not know."

Ask him yourself.

Verses 22-23 explain that they were afraid,
because the Pharisees had determined to put out of the synagogue
anyone who confessed Jesus was the Christ.

3. The Second Dialogue: “If This Man Were Not from God, He Could Do Nothing” (v24-34)

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

So again they called the man who had been blind,
“Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.”

Ah, that doesn't prejudice the case, now does it?!
But the man born blind now sees more clearly than his parents.
“Whether he is a sinner I do not know.
One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

The Pharisees continue pressing him:
How did he do it? What did he do to you?
(Besides healing on the Sabbath, Jesus also made mud, which was considered work)

But the man born blind has the light of the world illumining his eyes,
and so he says “I have told you already, and you would not listen.
Do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”

The Pharisees mocked him, saying “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.
We know that God has spoken to Moses,
but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

The man born blind turns around and mocks the Pharisees:
“Why, this is an amazing thing!
You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.
We know that God does not listen to sinners,
but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.
Never since the world began has it been heard

that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.
If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” (30-33)

Yesterday he was a blind beggar.

But now God has displayed his works in him,
and now he confidently proclaims the truth about Jesus.

The Pharisees, however, locked in their mistaken theology, declared:

“You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?”
And they cast him out of the synagogue. (34)

4. Who Is as Blind as Those Who Think They See? (v35-41)

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”^[c] ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt;^[d] but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

Hearing that he had been cast out of the synagogue, Jesus found the man and said,

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

The man born blind has no idea what Jesus is talking about,

but like Peter he is convinced that Jesus has the words of eternal life:

“Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”

“You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”

“Lord, I believe.”

Both in verse 36 and 38 the word is kurie—Lord

“Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?”

“Lord, I believe.”

But the word “kurie,” can mean either “sir” or “Lord”

It can translate both a title of respect and the attribution of deity.

Plainly in the first instance, the man thinks of Jesus as a prophet.

But after hearing that Jesus is the Son of Man,

there is an added sense of devotion.

There is no way that the man would have worshiped Jesus prior to verse 37.

He still thought of him as a prophet.

But when Jesus reveals himself to the man, he worships.

The light of the world has opened his eyes.

So Jesus says, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see,
and those who see may become blind.” (39)

The Pharisees are indignant at this and say “Are we also blind?”

Jesus replies: “If you were blind, you would have no sin;
but now that you say ‘we see’ your sin remains.”

The passage opens with the question “who sinned?”

It concludes with the answer: “the Pharisees!”

Because they insist that they can see when they do not have the light of the world.

Jesus says that he came into this world to give sight to the blind, and blindness to those who see.

I told you earlier to hang on to the question of whether it was fair for God

to afflict this man with blindness from birth, simply in order to display his power.

If it’s not because he sinned, his parents sinned, or because Adam sinned,

then how can it be fair?

John is preparing you for the cross.

When Jesus is lifted up on the cross, he will be revealed in all his glory.

If it is unfair for the righteous to suffer, then Jesus could not have gone to the cross.

The Pharisees should have understood that.

After all, they had sung Psalm 44 all their lives.

We sang Psalm 44 earlier.

Verses 9-16 express the grief of Israel as they have been rejected by God,
and defeated by their enemies.

If Psalm 44 had been written by the Pharisees,

they would have moved on in verse 17 to find some trivial sin to repent of.

But verse 17 takes a different approach:

“All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you,
and we have not been false to your covenant.”

The righteous are suffering, and they want to know why!

This is not what Leviticus and Deuteronomy had promised.

The covenant said that if Israel was faithful, God would bless them.

But the Psalmist says “our heart has not turned back,

nor have our steps departed from your way.” (18)

We have been faithful to your covenant, O Lord; but where are you?

Job had the same experience.

His friend Zophar told him that

“God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.”

Zophar and Dave Ramsey would have gotten along great!

But Zophar does not understand the purposes of God.

Job replies with scorn “no doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!”

Show me how I've sinned, and I will repent!
Neither Job nor Psalm 44 are claiming sinless perfection.
Rather they are pleading the terms of the covenant.
God had promised that those who trusted in him
could deal with their unintentional sins (their ordinary sins)
by means of the sacrifices.
Since they have repented of all their sins, and are trusting in God,
why are they now suffering?

And that is the question that the disciples asked Jesus.
Why was this man born blind?

Jesus says that God is revealing his power in them.
The works of God are being displayed.
All through the Old Testament,
God gives glimpses of the cross in the suffering of the righteous.
Jesus takes the problem of suffering and reorients it toward the cross.
The problem of unjust suffering is not a problem when you see Jesus Christ on the cross.
It is the solution.
It is only if the righteous suffer that there is any hope for the unrighteous.

But what about us?
What about our loved ones suffering so terribly before their death?
What about our children afflicted with all sorts of diseases?

If Jesus has suffered and died for us, why do we still suffer?

Psalm 44:22 moves us in the right direction:
“Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

This is quoted in Romans 8, of all places.
Romans 8—that great statement of how
“there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1)
Romans 8—which says that “all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.” (8:14)
And yet, that same chapter says that if we are children, then we are heirs,
“heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,
provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (8:17)

Indeed, it is our very sufferings that reveal our union with Christ.
It is in our *unjust* sufferings that we see how nothing can separate us from Christ.
“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all day long;
We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’” (8:35-36)

Paul turns to Psalm 44—the Psalm of the righteous sufferers—and says, that means you!
But whereas Psalm 44 ends with a plea for deliverance,

Romans 8 ends with a song of triumph:

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers,
nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation

will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (8:37-

39)

The problem of Psalm 44—the silence of God in the face of unjust suffering—
is solved in Jesus Christ.

God is not silent in the face of unjust suffering.

He is speaking in that suffering,

pointing you to the cross,

conforming you to the likeness of your savior.

The Light of the World shines in the midst of that suffering,

illuminating the cross as the place where the works of God

were displayed before all nations.

Can you see?

God is opening your eyes to see the glory of Christ.

For he has come through suffering to glory.

And you are called to bear your cross with him.