

Date: March 22, 2020

Scripture: John 9:1-41

Title: TELL THE STORY OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE

Many people believe they deserve all the blessings they have in their lives. They worked for them. Their good people, and that earns them good karma! People really hold tight to the idea of being a self-made man or woman.

Now, let's change the conversation for a minute. What do you think would be the most difficult aspect of being born blind? What would you miss out on? What would you need help with? How do you think other people would treat you?

I want you to think about that as we read again the opening words to today's scripture: "As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"

There it is again. This issue of earning our privileges, deserving our blessings has been around a long time. The underlying belief here is, that all of life should be just and happy and under our control, so injustice and suffering must have a root cause. We must deserve it in some way. Because, if the blind man didn't deserve his disability, then we don't deserve our blessings and comfort and safety and health and happiness, if he didn't deserve his blindness. And if none of us deserves our lot in life, then none of us can boast or complain if our lot in life changes. Whether we win or lose, we don't deserve either state.

Sometimes our ideas about what makes life worthwhile, about what we "deserve," about what constitutes a blessing from God, stands in the way of us understanding God and living a life of meaning and purpose.

I mentioned this a few weeks ago, and I want to mention it again. Usually, when someone comes to Jesus with a question, Jesus answers with another question, or with a parable or a challenge. In fact, author Philip Yancey says he once heard a theologian say that Jesus was asked 183 questions in the Bible, and he only answered three of them directly. Three out of one-hundred-eighty-three. So, pay attention.

Jesus was asked, "Why was this man blind?" This is one of the most important questions of human existence. And it's one of the few instances when Jesus answers a question directly. Jesus said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him . . ." After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. He told him, "Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam." So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

Notice, that there are two acts of healing in these four verses. **There's the physical healing.** What a great joy and blessing this man received because he stepped out in faith. He received his sight!

But, I think the first act of healing occurred when the blind man heard Jesus say, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works

of God might be displayed in him.” Jesus’ statement gave the man hope and healed his sense that his disability was somehow a curse that made him a lesser man. And this hope is evidenced by the fact that the blind man got up and went to the pool of Siloam to wash the mud off his eyes. Have you ever tried walking across your bedroom in the dark? Most of us are reluctant to do that. So can you imagine how far that man had to walk in the hopes that this stranger wasn’t lying to him, wasn’t tricking him, but actually had the power to heal him? We don’t know for sure where the blind man was when Jesus healed him. But one commentary writer says, “A trip to Siloam and back from the nearest wall of the temple, would be about 1,300 yards.”

Would you walk blind even half that distance on the word of a stranger? Jesus’ words gave this man so much hope, that he was willing to take that risk.

A well-known professor in the field of management has said something profound about suffering: “There’s some pain that needs a solution, and some pain that needs a story.” In this moment, Jesus gave the blind man both a solution, physical healing, and a story, that he was not disabled by some sin that either his parents or he had committed. I want us to focus on that fact today, because most of us know what it is to carry around certain pains in life for which there’s no solution. An unanswered prayer. An undeserved burden. We beg God for a solution. What if God gives us a story instead?

I think the first part of this story would be that God can use every part of your life for His glory. Many of us settle for a wimpy call. We’re content if we’re just good people who go to church and help our neighbor occasionally. We’re not a shining example of the love, the strength, the power and the grace of Almighty God. Part of the reason for that is, because we hide our suffering and questions and pains from each other. We think that our weakness makes us less of a witness for Christ. Instead, it’s walking in faith through our pain that causes others to see God’s glory in our lives.

Sheila Walsh is a best-selling author, Christian singer and former co-host of *The 700 Club*. She struggled with depression for years but tried to deny it. She didn’t dare let down her guard and admit how hopeless and sad and burned out she was. One day, a guest on *The 700 Club* said, “Sheila, you ask us every day how we’re all doing, but how are you doing?” And this question broke through Sheila’s carefully pious image. She began to cry uncontrollably, right there on air. By that evening, she had checked herself into a psychiatric hospital. She gave up her co-hosting job. She took a step back from her ministries. And she admitted that she didn’t know who she was anymore.

Today, Sheila Walsh is back in ministry, speaking and writing and sharing her struggles with depression. Instead of being rejected or put to shame for her condition, she discovered thousands of women who struggled with the same issue and needed to know they weren’t alone. God didn’t miraculously heal her of her depression; instead, God has used her depression to draw her into a deeper relationship of trust with Him and increase her ministry to hurting people. As Walsh says, “The Good News will never be good news until you know that God knows all of your bad news.”

Not only does God know all your bad news, God can use all your bad news. God is glorified in the way we handle our suffering. We are inspired by those who overcome hard times, who choose joy in the face of sorrow, who choose love in the face of betrayal or hatred.

So every blessing and every hardship, every strength and every disability, every joy and every sorrow in our lives is an opportunity for God to work out His plan through us. Does that mean that God plans everything that happens to us? No. There's suffering that comes from the sins of others, like abuse or neglect or divorce. There's suffering that comes from impersonal forces outside our control, like the coronavirus, or cancer, or drought, or recession. God didn't intend for us to endure this suffering. He does intend to work through this suffering to strengthen us and make us better able to demonstrate His glory in all circumstances. People need to see the character and power of God in how you handle your suffering.

The second part of our story is that you don't have to understand everything about God; just share what you do know about Him. When the formerly blind man is questioned by his neighbors about his healing, he says, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes." A few verses later, the Pharisees interrogate the man harshly. But this man turns his hard time into an opportunity to share the truth of Jesus. He still doesn't know who Jesus is or why Jesus healed him. He thinks Jesus might be a prophet. He didn't let what he didn't know prevent him from sharing what he did know. It doesn't stop him from speaking truth to power.

The formerly blind man's story is a story of hope, love, life and grace. It's the story of what Jesus did in him. And he refused to be silenced by the fear tactics of the Pharisees. The next time they interrogated him, they accused Jesus of being a sinner. And the formerly blind man said, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

And the final part of our story is that we never know who needs to hear God's story through us. There's a beautiful story on the *Divine Opportunities* blog by a man named Larry. Many years ago, Larry was driving down Highway 240 in Memphis when he saw a car pulled off on the side of the highway. He felt strongly that God was leading him to stop and help. He pulled up behind the stopped car and saw a young woman standing by the side of the road, staring off into space. When he asked if she needed help, she began to cry. This young mother had just come from St. Jude Children's Hospital where her two-year-old son was undergoing treatments for leukemia. Her husband had walked out on the family, not long after their child's diagnosis. And this flat tire on the side of Highway 240 in Memphis felt like the final straw for this young woman. She felt so lost and alone.

Larry didn't have a solution for this woman. But he did have a story. He knew now why he had felt the urge to stop. Eight and a half years earlier, when Larry's little son was just two years old, Larry's wife had died of leukemia. He knew what it was to

be grief-stricken and confused. He knew what it was to be a single parent. He knew what it was to feel alone and helpless and desperate. And he knew what it was to rely on God for his strength. And so Larry began sharing the story of how God worked through his grief, anger, and loneliness. He shared how God had helped him to be a single parent to his little son. Larry wrote on the blog, "It was a God thing. I don't recall a lot of what I said, it's like it came in and went out, a lot like a gift of the Spirit. It's not necessarily something I thought about and said. It just flowed."

Larry sat with the woman while she cried. Then he changed her tire and prayed with her. And when Larry drove away that day, he understood in a new way how God had used his pain to bring comfort and strength to someone else in need.

As a professor said, "There's some pain that needs a solution, and some pain that needs a story." You may never get an answer to your "Why?" So change the question to "How can God use this?" We ask God for a reason; God gives us a purpose.

In this lifetime, you may never get a solution to your pain. You may never experience healing. You may never see how God is using it. But if you give your pain to God, you can have a new story. It will be the story of how God is glorified in our weakness, not in our strength. God is glorified in our perseverance more than our power. God is glorified more by our attitudes than by our achievements. And God is using our pain to grow us into people who reflect His glory and draw others to Him.

We ask God for a solution; God gives us a story instead. Someone needs to hear the story of God in your life. Not just the shiny, happy parts. God is glorified in the tough parts. The good news is that God can use your bad news to share the good news. Will you let Him? Let yourself be used to God's glory by Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation. Amen.