

Jesus and the blind man

John 9:1-41

We have been in John's gospel now for about 10 weeks and I don't know about you but I have been enjoying this series. We have called it; Hello I am Jesus!

The whole purpose of John's gospel can be wrapped up in John 20:31. He says, *"These things have been written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing in His name you would have life."*

Last week Matt looked at John 8, I am the light of the world. Jesus lights our path as we journey with him. One of the things I think we all discover as we walk with God is that it is one thing to make a decision to step into the light of Christ, but to stay in the light of the Christ is a huge challenge. And it is all very well to make this decision to follow Jesus Christ when things are looking up and hopeful, but later when life hits us with these unexpected events, it gets harder to stay in the light."

These events can be anything, a spouse telling you after investing 10-20-30 years into your marriage that it's over, a doctor who says; 'well, the prognosis isn't that flash hot, any sort of negative incident involving your child – these events can challenge your faith.

Here is the thing about "the unexpected" in life, whether it be pain, suffering, personal loss or tragedy. When we hear about it in someone else's life, philosophically we can reason it out in our heads and come up with an explanation for why bad things happen in this life, but when it happens to us, it just hurts and it is definitely wrong.

When we step into the light and follow Jesus I don't think any of us ever plan to step out of the light. I am not necessarily just talking about salvation when I say that, I am talking about your discipleship journey, the continual pursuit of your relationship with Christ. That is what I mean by light. I don't think any one of us would say, "I am going to step into the light of Christ and then I am going to step out of it," but through the trials of life you can get shoved out of it.

Here is the question that I want us to consider today as we look at John 9. It is simply this. **How are we supposed to remain in the light of Christ when the unexpected occurs?** When the unexpected tragedy, when the unexpected news, when the moment of suffering comes, how do we remain in the light of Christ?

I have been in fulltime ministry now for nearly 28 years. I still remember clearly starting at my first position as a youth pastor. I was fresh out of Bible College, ready to apply all that I had learnt over the previous 3 years and eager to see young people respond to the gospel and grow in their faith. What I wasn't expecting was that I would be involved in the funerals of 4 young people in my first 12 months.

- Tanya who was a passenger in a car that rolled,
- Darryl who accidentally fell off a balcony in a shopping centre in the city,
- Claire, a victim of a hit and run,
- and one other young woman, whose name I forget, who lost control of her car when following her fiancé home in her car from a picnic at the beach, no evidence of speed or alcohol, nobody knows what happened.

Bible College hadn't prepared me to knock on the doors of their parents and sit and listen to their questions, their pain, their grief. What do you say?

Through some of those experiences faith grew, in others there was a crisis of faith. That, it seems, is just part of the human experience when the unexpected hits your world.

And we spend so much of our time, and so much of our energy, and so much of our prayers trying to insulate ourselves from some of the things that could happen to us. However the reality is that no amount of power, money, planning or even prayer can prevent personal loss and the unexpected from happening in our lives.

So the question that is in front of us is how are we to make any sense of life when the unexpected happens? How do we build a biblical framework so that when the things that threaten to shove us out of 'remaining in the light' happen, we can find the determination to stay there? If you don't build a Biblical framework for how to respond in those types of situations, when life kicks you in the soul, you will fall.

What I want to do as we look at John 9 is I want to read the passage. It's reasonably long but it is just a story so easy to follow and I will pause occasionally to make comment.

John 9: 1-41,

9 *As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. ²"Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?"*

³"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.

That last verse needs to be quoted more often when people try to point the finger at whose fault the hardship might be.

⁴We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. ⁵But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world."

⁶Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. ⁷He told him, "Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "sent"). So the man went and washed and came back seeing!

Here is the irony of this miracle. Jesus has already demonstrated that He can heal just by saying the words – for example, the royal official's son, "Just go home, your son will be healed." But here Jesus decides to spit on the ground and make little mud pies before restoring this guy's sight by smearing it in his eyes.

Actually it is not as weird as it sounds, I am told saliva was regularly used in the First Century for medicinal purposes. In fact it still is, how many kids want their knee kissed better when they take a tumble. And not only that, spit is the number one cleaning agent of mothers around the world. "Come here son, let me clean your face" "No Mum, I am 54 years old!"

Let's read on

⁸His neighbours and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some said he was, and others said, "No, he just looks like him!"

But the beggar kept saying, "Yes, I am the same one!"

¹⁰They asked, "Who healed you? What happened?"

¹¹He told them, "The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.' So I went and washed, and now I can see!"

¹²"Where is he now?" they asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

¹³Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, ¹⁴because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him.

¹⁵The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, "He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!"

This guy is not in to the religious politics. This guy just gives us the facts. He is neutral. He is not necessarily siding towards Jesus, yet, he is not siding towards the Pharisees. He is just stating what Jesus has done for him.

¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath." Others said, "But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?" So there was a deep division of opinion among them.

¹⁷Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, "What's your opinion about this man who healed you?"

The man replied, "I think he must be a prophet."

So keeping in theme with John's gospel, this guy is on a journey, he hasn't got it all sorted, but he is making his way toward belief. He knows Jesus is a good bloke, he knows Jesus has some sort of power, he thinks he knows He is a prophet, but he does not know yet that Jesus is the Son of God.

¹⁸The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. ¹⁹They asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?"

²⁰His parents replied, "We know this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹but we don't know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced

that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue.²³ That's why they said, "He is old enough. Ask him."

²⁴So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, "God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner."

²⁵"I don't know whether he is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!"

²⁶"But what did he do?" they asked. "How did he heal you?"

These guys were in denial. You see sometimes it is share stubbornness to change our minds that keeps us the truth of the gospel. We hear it. We just don't want to receive it.

²⁷"Look!" the man exclaimed. "I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

Imagine the smirk on the blind guys face?

²⁸Then they cursed him and said, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! ²⁹We know God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where this man comes from."

³⁰"Why, that's very strange!" the man replied. "He healed my eyes, and yet you don't know where he comes from? ³¹We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. ³²Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he couldn't have done it."

³⁴"You were born a total sinner!" they answered. "Are you trying to teach us?" And they threw him out of the synagogue.

Spiritual Blindness

The story closes with Jesus' tracking down the now-healed blind man. Jesus has heard that as a result of the healing this man was expelled from the synagogue community. Here Jesus moves from healing physical blindness to healing spiritual blindness.

³⁵When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

³⁶ *The man answered, "Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him."*

³⁷ *"You have seen him," Jesus said, "and he is speaking to you!"*

³⁸ *"Yes, Lord, I believe!" the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.*

I wish that it was always that easy! But I think sometimes we make it harder than what it needs to be. What we need to make sure we do is, at the right time ask the question, do you believe? Or what is stopping you from believing?

³⁹ *Then Jesus told him, "I entered this world to help bring discernment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind."*

⁴⁰ *Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, "Are you saying we're blind?"*

⁴¹ *"If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty," Jesus replied. "But you remain guilty because you claim you can see."*

What we see in that chapter is this great exposition of how a guy receives his sight, and how he journeys from unbelief toward belief, and how those hiding behind religion get exposed to the fact that they are actually blind.

My original question was; how are you and I supposed to remain in the light of Christ when the unexpected occurs?

The problem of pain is always the question of why. Why does God allow this? If God is all powerful, why doesn't He do something to stop it? These are the issues that this passage raises and I need to bring this all together in the next 5 mins or so.

What do you think Jesus is saying to the disciples at the very beginning of the chapter? **I think He is saying that when life doesn't seem to make any sense, God is still at work.** When life doesn't seem to make any sense, when the unexpected happens, even something as random as a guy being blind from birth, God is still at work in our lives. This is often a struggle for us because we want to know the reason why.

So what is the cause of suffering and can I just say that often 'the cause' and 'the reason' are not the same thing. They are distinct. There might be a little bit of overlap but actually they are two different things.

When we look at suffering we have to go all the way back to Genesis 1. Let's not worry about how he created the world, but what he thought about it at the end! When He looked at it? He said, "this is good, this is very good, exactly what I intended."

Then to cut a long story short - sin entered the world.

It wasn't that Adam and Eve looked at that apple and said, "that apple looks amazing, I've got to have that apple." That wasn't the temptation. The temptation was, "Be your own God. You can call your own shots. God is keeping something from you."

Now think about every sin or struggle you have in your life, every point of weakness, every selfish impulse that you have, and what is always the temptation behind it, "I'd actually like to call my own shots. I don't care what Mum and Dad say, I don't care what God says. I don't care that the Bible says. Don't tell me what to do I will make my own mind up."

This is the rebellion that messed up God's created order.

Ships Clock

I have a clock at home on the wall. It works, but it rarely tells time accurately. It's an old solid brass ship clock that we bought in Bangladesh. It weighs 4kg. Bangladesh has a beach that is a ship's graveyard. Ships are driven up on the beach and dismantled. It's an old wind up clock which either goes fast or slow, depending if the weather is cold or hot. I'll set it to the right time and sometimes it can be good for a day or two, other times it can be 5 mins fast or slow within half a day – depending on what the weather is doing.

My clock is a pretty good description of the created world in which we live. It is a pretty good description of our physical bodies. It is a pretty good description of our relationships in life. Life just ticks along but when we consider what is good and right, we think "That's not right, what in the world went wrong there?" We live in a world where things are out of sync. The clock is still ticking but it's nowhere near accurate, it's not doing what it is meant to be doing.

At a theological level this is why we experience the unexpected. This is why pain, suffering, and tragedy have entered into our world. And actually God isn't any more happy about it than you and I are. When things don't go to plan, we need to remind ourselves that we live in a broken clock.

So what is the cause of suffering?

If you look back up in verse 2 of chapter 9, the disciples asked this question immediately of Jesus. They see this guy who is blind from birth and they say to Jesus, “Jesus, who sinned? Did this guy mess up or did his parents mess up?” It seems that we are always looking for someone to blame. We think that if this happens, somebody must have done something to deserve this.

So they say to Jesus, “Jesus did this guy sin?” which is kind of interesting because he was born blind. Did he do something in the womb? Did God foresee something in his life and punish him with foresight? But that is ridiculous because we are all sinners, and therefore we should all be blind physically.

If you notice how Jesus answers, He says, “Neither,” and this is very similar to something He said in Luke 13. In Luke 13 a group of people came to Jesus and they said, “Jesus did you see on the news that a big tower fell on a group of people. Were they worse sinners than we are? Is that why that happened?” And Jesus said, “No that is crazy. They weren’t worse sinners than you are but don’t think you are safe. Repent of your sin.” In other words, Jesus is basically saying, “Listen, all of us are going to eventually perish, so be ready.”

The premise behind these questions; “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Or, “Who is to blame for this unexpected tragedy?” is the assumption that God owes us a comfortable life. It’s like, “I know my life won’t be and can’t be completely perfect, but there is a line, and God you owe me, you owe me this comfortable life down here.” We don’t necessarily say that out loud but that is what we imply.

However the overall teaching in Scripture basically says that my pain and suffering cannot be blamed on others and it cannot, entirely, be blamed on me.

God is not up in Heaven trying to pay me back, or you back, for everything we have done wrong specifically. So if we say, “God is in control. Why doesn’t God stop this,” we need to pay attention to the gospel message. God has basically said, “I’ve already dealt with this. I’ll make things right.”

So what is the Christian response to the unexpected that happens in our world?

We have to say, “on the one hand, if there is pain and suffering we have to have some humility and take some responsibility in this because nobody is

righteous. Yet, on the other hand, it doesn't mean that God doesn't care and it doesn't mean that God is punishing me, because the gospel says that all of my punishment fell upon Jesus on a cross. All of it."

So what is God doing in the midst of all this suffering? He is doing several things, he will be doing different things for different people. I think one of the things God is trying to do in my own life when I go through the unexpected is that God is trying to encourage me to trust him, to let go of my control and trust him.

So much of our prayer life is spent in self-preservation. We sit and we pray asking him to insulate us from everything. It is not that we shouldn't ask God to heal. It is not that we shouldn't ask God to protect us from certain things. It is just that we forget that we don't do that with our own kids.

There were so many things that my kids asked me for that from their perspectives seem completely normal and healthy but I knew that if I allowed them that they will grow up to be very self-absorbed, immature adults who will make life miserable for their spouses and co-workers. I did actually, at times, let them cry, let them struggle, let them throw a temper tantrum, but they knew, and I let them know that, as their father, I was always going to be there, I would never give up on them.

So many of our prayers are, "God will you bail me out?" when they should be, "God will you walk with me through this?" because God desires to refine my heart, and yours. God is more interested in refining our character than He is in keeping us from pain.

If you are thinking "God that stinks" I'm right there with you, because sometimes it seems the pain is just too intense.

Here is what Scripture says in Psalms 56. It says,

You keep track of all my sorrows.
You have collected all my tears in your bottle.
You have recorded each one in your book.

That image shows me that God cares and is there, and that maybe one day when you and I come into Heaven He will open up that bottle and say, "Let's go through the tears. Let me explain or let me try to make this thing right."

While we wrestle, while we struggle, God is refining us in the furnace.

What makes more sense to you?

- That there is no God and we somehow appeared on a dirt ball, we go through bouts of pain and suffering and then when we die, it was all for nothing?
- Or there is a God who created the Cosmos, something went horribly wrong, and God has promised to one day make it right and all these challenges are refining our character for an eternity with Him.

Whatever you are going through at the moment - Don't give up. Remain in the light, through the expected and the unexpected.