The Gospel of John: The Works of God
John 9:1-7

We have recently enjoyed a short series featuring the voice of the minor prophets, but this morning we return to our ongoing expository series through the Gospel of John. If you recall, we were most recently in the 8th chapter of John, almost of all of which takes place in the Temple at the very end of the Feast of Tabernacles. Throughout the 8th chapter of John, Jesus made significant claims about Himself that drew a lot of attention. I will remind you of two of those claims that inform our text for this morning. In John 8:12 Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” And then, at the very end of John 8, in vs. 58, Jesus declared, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” If you remember, that statement so infuriated the Jews that they took up stones with the intent to kill Jesus, but John records that “Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”

That leads us to our text this morning, John 9:1-7. Hear the Word of the Lord:

9 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.

My message this morning will fall under three subheadings: 1) The Workplace; 2) The Time for Work; and 3) The Work and the Worker.

I. The Workplace

We know that very recently a crowd of Jews had picked up stones to kill Jesus, and thus Jesus leaves the temple. I don’t know about you, but if I knew people were trying to kill me, I would not only leave the building, but I would get out of town as fast as I could! Not so with Jesus. He doesn’t leave town. In fact, He doesn’t seem to get far from the temple before He comes upon a well-known beggar near the temple gates…a man who has been blind since birth…and Jesus stops there to gaze upon him. Never mind that men with stones were even now looking to crack his skull open…Jesus is undeterred. He has been sent by the Father to set the captives free, to bring sight to the blind, to be the Light of the World for those who walk in darkness, and so He stops at the very moment that most of us would run. Don’t miss this Church…our Lord is modeling that which He desires of His disciples. Threats will come against those who serve Jesus, but such threats should not deter us from the work set before us, amen?

Now, we might assume that since his childhood, this blind man has been placed near the entrance of the temple by his family that he might beg for alms. Great crowds of worshippers have passed him every day for years on their way to the temple. The citizens of Jerusalem all know his story, and they all have their opinions about him and his family as we shall soon see.

Now, we might assume that Jesus had previously passed by this blind man on several occasions as well, but on this day, at this precise moment, Jesus stops and looks upon the unseeing man with interest. As the disciples join their master in observing the man born blind, they ask a question that everyone in town was curious about, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he
was born blind?” The question of the disciples reveals a theological assumption that continues to be common amongst many people to this day: “suffering is a consequence of sin.”

Church, how often have we looked upon human misery and secretly thought: “They brought it on themselves.” The man begging on the side of the road probably got there because of his sinful addiction. The person confined to the wheelchair with an oxygen machine probably ate too much or smoked too many cigarettes. The lady on welfare was probably too lazy to get a job…she brought it on herself…and it’s no wonder her children are struggling in school and misbehaving. The sins of the parents curse the child, right?

Like the misguided friends of Job, religious people are far too quick to cast judgment upon human suffering as God’s punishment for sinful behavior. Notice here that this pernicious theological assumption even assumed that God cursed people at birth for sins they did prior to their birth! NT scholar William Barclay writes:

Some Jews had the strange notion of prenatal sin. They actually believed that a man could begin to sin while still in his mother’s womb. In the time of Jesus, some Jews believed in the pre-existence of the soul. They got that idea from Plato and the Greeks, and so some Jews believed that a man’s affliction, even if it be from birth, might come from sin…at its heart lies the idea of a sin-infected universe.

The other possible explanation was that this man was cursed from birth due to the sins of his parents. The Jews would quote scriptures like Exodus 20:5 when God states that to those who worship idols, “I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.”

Church, our sins as parents are not committed in a vacuum. Our sin always sets off chain reactions that affects many people, especially our children. But does God curse a child to be born blind due to the previous sins of the parents or grandparents…or even the unborn soul of the man himself? This is the question now asked by the disciples to their Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth.

Let us now consider the answer provided by our Lord: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Church, pay careful attention to the answer of our Lord as it pertains to human suffering. Notice first that Jesus does not give any credence to the faulty theological assumptions of the Jews. He states clearly that this man’s condition is not a curse resulting from the man’s own sin or even that of his parents.

Please, please, please resist rehearsing faulty theology. God does not curse us or our children with suffering such as sickness, blindness, infertility etc. as punishment for our sins. That’s not how God works. Is there a curse upon creation due to the sin of Adam’s fall in Genesis 3? Yes, and things are not as they should be. That is theologically and biblically accurate. But we must resist thinking that God continues to cast curses of suffering upon people and their children due to sin, such that everything that happens to us or our children is somehow God’s reward or punishment for how good we’ve been lately. You would be shocked to discover how many people in our church continue to question why God has cursed them with so much suffering, as though their inability to get a job, or to find a spouse, or to have a child is somehow directly linked to some sin of their past.
Church. Human suffering is an inevitable reality for those of us who breathe air on this side of the Fall. Human suffering is not to be seen as a direct result of God’s curses upon our sinful behavior or that of our parents.

Now, it is true that some of our suffering…and some of the suffering of our children, results from the natural consequences of our sinful decisions and behaviors. For example, if we get drunk at a party and decide to drive home, the car accident that kills or injures us, our kids, or someone else’s kids was a natural consequence of our sinful behavior and decisions. Did God kill those children…was that His curse upon you or your children or someone else’s children because you got drunk and got behind the wheel of the car? No. God doesn’t operate that way. It is true, however, that God rarely spares us the natural consequences of our decisions, as painful as those consequences might be. We know that the painful consequence of our poor decisions often lead us to repent and to call upon God for the forgiveness of sins; but those painful consequences were our doing, not the curses of God.

In the same way, some of our suffering comes as a natural consequence of other people’s sinful decisions and behaviors. If you get drunk and drive such that my child is injured, you have introduced suffering into our family that has nothing to do with our moral choices or decisions. Again, God did not introduce suffering into our lives because of our sin, nor did God injure my kid as a means of cursing you for driving drunk. My child got hurt because of the natural consequences of your poor decisions.

There is also suffering that results from accidents where no one is at fault. If a man walks out on his driveway and slips on the ice and breaks his neck, we should not ask what he or his parents did to anger God! God doesn’t operate that way. Ice is slippery, gravity is unforgiving, and parts of our bodies break when dashed against concrete. There is no moral cause of accidents; accidents happen in a fallen universe, and we should not attribute suffering from those accidents as God’s curse upon sinful people. I must move on, but please resist judging your suffering or the suffering of others as God’s curse…that is biblically inaccurate and incredibly hurtful…not to mention by not the least bit useful for those who are suffering. Time invested into determining blame for human suffering has never a hungry mouth fed. Theological inquiry has its place, but in light of human suffering, let us heed the words of Charles Spurgeon who writes:

Postpone the inquiries—how they got into this condition? What is the origin of moral evil? How is it transmitted from parent to child? Answer those questions after the day of judgment, when you will have more light, but just now the great thing is to see how you and I can get evil out of the world, and how we can lift up the fallen and restore those who have gone astray. Never let us imitate the man in the fable who saw a boy drowning, and then and there lectured him upon the imprudence of bathing out of his depth. No, no, let us land the boy on the bank, dry him and dress him, and then tell him not to go there again, lest a worse thing happen to him.

Those within the church who are engaged in the current cultural conversation regarding race, poverty, inequality, and so on would do well to consider the rebuke of Pastor Spurgeon. Placing blame on slavery, Jim Crow, or the welfare state; parsing the philosophical dangers of Critical Race Theory or Cultural Marxism; or destroying property in unbridled rioting does nothing at all to help the suffering of mothers who have no food or the plight of children who cannot read. Shaming people because of the color of their skin; or the origin of their ancestors; or the sins of their fathers only increases suffering…it does nothing to alleviate suffering. Church, may God
give us the grace and humility to set aside the paralysis of analysis that we might do the works of God in the midst of human suffering, amen?

Now, let us once again heed the words of our Lord: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Church, according to Jesus, the condition of this man’s suffering provides an opportunity for the works of God to be displayed in him. Did you hear that? The wanting condition of man is the workplace of God! The weakness of man is where the glory of God might be put on display!

Consider the work of the skilled surgeon. He is a man with great learning and exceptional skills, but where shall we observe his greatness? Is it not amongst those riddled with cancer; amongst those whose heart valves have ceased to work or those whose bodies have been burned, crushed, or wounded? The greatness of the surgeon is seen only in his workplace, when he is presented with those infirmed bodies lacking good health and comfort. We observe little of the surgeon’s skill among those who have no physical need.

Church, how do we know God to be merciful except in His works among those so desperate for mercy? How do we know God to be the Healer except in His work among those who know they are sick? How do we know God to be the Provider except in His work among those who are lacking? And how do we know Jesus to be the Light of the World for those who walk in darkness, lest we see Him at work, bringing sight to one born blind?

Church, human suffering and want is the workplace of God…it is where we see God’s work put on display for all the world to see. It is why we are drawn to the testimony of those who have suffered greatly, like our brother Andrew Brunson or our sister, Joni Erickson. Do you complain about your weakness? Do you lament all that you lack? Do you find yourself wanting for health, for employment, for intimacy, for peace of mind, for basic provision? Consider the words of our Lord: it is there, in your weakness, in the place of your suffering, that our Lord comes to do the work of the Father…it is there that the world will come to see His work on display in you. Take heart, Church, Jesus is passing by; and though the world may have taken up stones to destroy Him, He will not defer His mission. He comes to do the work of the Father; He still comes to those who walk in darkness, for He is the Light of the World, amen? Let us now consider my second subheading:

II. The Time for Work

As He gazed upon the blind beggar, Jesus states, “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.

As we have observed on more than one occasion, Jesus exhibits a sense of urgency about His mission. He states here in vs. 4, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.”

Jesus knows that the time of His earthly ministry is quickly coming to an end. His “day” is now; but His hour is coming. Night is coming soon when He will hang from a cross and be laid in a borrowed tomb, when the sun will be darkened and the curtain torn. But now, in this time before
His hour has come, Jesus is urgent about His mission to bring sight to the blind and liberation to those who are oppressed. And notice, Jesus doesn’t say, “I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day…” He says, “WE…WE must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day…” We are WE…we the church, the disciples and followers of Jesus, must share this sense of urgency with our Lord. Night is coming for all of us. All too soon our time for work will have passed, and we shall have the rest of eternity to reflect upon what we could have done…the impact our generosity might have made upon those who are suffering…the impact our testimonies might have had upon those lost souls we met along the way…the hope our friendship might have given to the lonely and depressed.

Some of you watching today have been resisting the work of the Holy Spirit upon your lives. The Holy Spirit has called you time and again to turn to Jesus and repent of your sin, but you delay. You keep telling yourself that one day you will make things right with God. Don’t be foolish friends: turn now while it is day, for night is coming…and then it will be too late.

The Lord has called some of you to vocational ministry or some form of volunteer ministry, but you keep making excuses. Abandon your excuses and pursue the Lord’s call upon your life while it is day, for night is coming. The opportunity to do the works of your Lord will be gone, and those works set aside for you shall remain undone at great cost to a hurting world.

Many of us are growing old; we have settled into a lifestyle of safety and comfort, risking little to work the works of our Lord. With all due respect to my honorable elders: if you’re not dead, you’re not done! Look and see the hurting culture around you, and do the works of our Lord while it is day…night is coming soon for you, and that will be your time for rest in the place our Lord has prepared for you! Now it is yet day…and that means there is yet work to be done!

Church: hear the Word of the Lord! Now is the time for work, while Christ is in us and we walk in the world amongst those trapped in darkness. As we read in Hebrews 3: …exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. I shall conclude now with my third subheading:

**III. The Work and the Worker**

As we return to the text, hear now all that Jesus said to the disciples in response to their question and then watch what He does: “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.” Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). So, he went and washed and came back seeing.”

Church, what are the works of God? Jesus didn’t say, did He? No…Jesus didn’t talk about the works of God…He just did them in front of His disciples, because that’s what good teachers do! Let’s walk through what Jesus did.

First, Jesus stopped and saw the man who was blind. He looked upon Him with empathy and understanding. Though Jesus was in a bit of hurry, given that people were attempting to stone him just a few minutes ago, Jesus stops here to give His full attention to the plight of this man.
Let us first acknowledge, then, that to do the work of God we must first slow down enough to see people and to enter into their situation with empathy and understanding.

Notice also that Jesus doesn’t get caught up in the philosophical debate about how this man came to be a blind beggar. We get the sense that such questions mean little to Jesus. What matters here is that a man is trapped in darkness, and Jesus is the Light of the World! The man needs Jesus...there is no other who can address his need. No one else has ever been able to bring sight to a man born blind...just Jesus. So the work of God means moving past the theological and philosophical debates regarding how people end up in situations of suffering in order that they might be ministered to by Jesus, the Light of the World, Amen?

Next, Jesus spits on the ground and makes mud. Why? Well, there are a few reasons. First of all, it was a commonly held belief in the ancient world that saliva, particularly saliva from important people or fasting saliva, had healing powers.

We might also note that it was also a breach of the rabbinic Sabbath code for people to make mud out of saliva on the Sabbath, and as we’ll see later in the story, Jesus is healing this man on the Sabbath. So...Jesus is once again demonstrating that He is not bound to the ridiculous minutia of man-made religious code. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and He chooses to inspire hope into the heart of this blind man by mixing mud and anointing the man’s eyes. Now, as we know, healing is one part medicine, and ten parts hope, so Jesus uses ancient methods that would have given this man hope as he made his way blindly to the pool of Siloam.

By the way, the pool of Siloam was thought to be the purest water in town. The reason it was called “Sent” is due to the history of the aqueduct that delivered the water a considerable distance to that pool. The water was literally “sent” from its source.

Now, in this instance, the blind man is “sent” to the pool. Jesus commands the blind beggar to get up, to go to the pool, and to rinse in the pool. The blind man has the choice not to...a choice that would seem nonsensical to us, but Jesus will not heal the man against his will. The blind man is invited to participate in his healing by showing faith in Jesus and obediently following His directions. Take note of this church. The works of God rarely involve doing something for people...instead, the works of God often require actions that we do with people. The works of God involve bringing people to Jesus; presenting His offer of light and healing; and then encouraging people to have faith and obediently do what He has instructed. In the end, each person who walks in darkness must trust the commands of Jesus to go and do as He has instructed. If they refuse, their darkness remains; if they get up and go, they will come back seeing! That is exactly what we read in the text: “So, he went and washed and came back seeing.”

Now, who is the Worker? Jesus is the Worker, right? None of us can bring sight to one born blind, be it physical or spiritual sight, amen? Jesus works the miracle because Jesus has the power and authority to bring sight to the blind and liberation to the oppressed. Jesus is the Worker, and though His ministry on earth lasted only a few short years, His ministry on earth continues through His Church! Such is why Jesus looked upon His disciples prior to His departure and said, 14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light
to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that[a] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus is the worker, and ever since His ascension to the Father, Jesus chooses to work through us. We are the workers now. We are the hands and feet of Christ. We are ambassadors of reconciliation. We are those who carry the light of Christ into this dark and hurting culture. We are those who carry healing and hope for the world, if only we will follow our Lord’s example and do the works of the Father in the time that remains.

Church, take a minute and think about this story. Think about those in your sphere of influence who walk in darkness. Think about those you meet every day who are suffering. Is it not the call of our Lord to do the works of the Father, just as He showed us? I know you are busy, Jesus was busy. I know you are in a hurry, Jesus was in a hurry. I know people oppose you, people opposed Jesus. But here is what He said, “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.”

Jesus is the Light of the World. There is no other. If Jesus lives in you, then you are the means by which those who live in darkness will come to meet the Light they have always longed for. Be bold and courageous Church. The Light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. I pray that we will go now and be the light of Christ in this hurting culture; doing the works of the Father so that the lost are found, the broken made whole, the fatherless find hope, and our city is blessed. Let’s pray.