

GOD IS MORE VALUABLE THAN LIFE & HEALTH

OCTOBER 23, 2022 | WALKING WITH JESUS | JOHN 9:1-7 | PASTOR SCOTT TURANSKY

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and we settle our hearts before you. Lord, we ask that you would allow us to integrate our faith into our life experiences, as some of those experiences this week have been quite distracting and challenging. I ask that the things that we learn today would help us to be more effective as disciples of Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

I'm really grateful for God's word. I don't know what I would do without it. The Bible has so much information in it about who we are and who God is and God's plan for us that it becomes this really strategic place that we spend our time learning and studying. That's why we spend so much time looking at God's word each week, whether it's on Sunday morning or doing Bible studies, or what have you.

But one of the beautiful things about the scriptures is they don't hide controversy. The controversies are spelled out in scripture. In fact, seven times Jesus heals people on the Sabbath. I think He's trying to create controversy, or at least try to get people to wrestle with things inside of their hearts. There's a lot of controversy in our world today and the Bible speaks to controversy. This Bible speaks to the darkness that our world experiences, the suffering that exists out there, the difficult things that happen in people's lives. The Bible speaks to that. I don't know what I would do without the Bible.

I mean, this week I talked to a man who is experiencing a lot of anxiety in his life. I don't know how I could help him without sharing with him the truths from God's word. I talked to a woman who's divorced but doesn't want to be divorced. She never wanted to be divorced. But she is and so she's trying to adjust to all that. I don't know how I would help her without an understanding of God and His grace and what He does in people's lives. I talked to a six-year-old this week about death because she had experienced the death of a loved one. Just how would any of us be able to help someone else without the benefit of God's word? It's just so helpful.

Today we're going to look at a difficult situation. I think one of the most challenging experiences for any of us is when a child of ours suffers. That is so painful. And sometimes it's short lived. Like my grandson broke his arm. I mean, that's painful. He was showing me this week how his arm is strong again, and it is, and that's great. But I'm talking more about those really difficult child experiences. Sometimes children are born with challenges. Challenges like autism, or Down Syndrome, or attention deficit disorder, or emotional challenges that they have in their life, or some deformity, or some kind of a challenge like blindness, as we'll see today. I think it's so painful to wrestle with that. Because it hurts us to see that take place sometimes. I think it's really hard on parents, especially. Parents have to wrestle with those things. Especially with a child like this one – a man who was born blind. He grows up, he's a man now, but he was born

blind. So his parents had to kind of wrestle with that. So today, I think we all need to wrestle with this, with suffering, with difficulties in our lives. I think some parents, you know, they have a child with special needs and they go, "I didn't sign up for this. This isn't what I was expecting when I was going to have children. I expected we'd have this big happy family and they'd go forward. But now our life has completely changed." So my heart just goes out for this family that's represented in our passage today in John 9.

But it's out of this story, one of seven stories that John has chosen to talk to us about and share with us in his book, one of seven miracles. He's chosen to tell us this one because it has some very important things that we all need to wrestle with. Because I don't know if you're like me, but I think all of us could say at certain points in our lives, "I didn't sign up for this." In other words, this isn't how I expected life would be. I thought I would be going and I'd have these expectations, these dreams, these hopes. I thought it would be going this way in my life, but something stopped. It could be the loss of a job. It could be a divorce, it could be the loss of a mate, it could be sickness that comes into your life. And you end up saying, "I don't know how to handle this." So we're going to see how Jesus addresses this issue and the wrestling that disciples are having as we look at our passage today in John 9.

Open your Bibles to that passage or you can follow along on the screen. I put it here so that you could see it. Would you please stand with me as I read these first five verses of God's word today from John 9. It says this: *As he (that is Jesus) passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "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."*

You may be seated.

I want to start by looking at the very first line. I want to do this because I think we tend to start the story with the question. We want to get to the question who sinned? Was it the parents or the child that this man was born blind? But that isn't where the story starts. The story starts with Jesus seeing him, moving toward him, being aware of his situation. That can be challenging sometimes. If you see somebody who's different, obviously different, I think sometimes we have a tendency to move away, to go somewhere else. But Jesus sees a man who's different, has an obvious problem, and He moves toward him.

One of the delights that I have here at GraceWay is the openness that GraceWay has to children who have special needs. It starts right at the top. Don and I, when we first started pastoring together at the beginning earlier in the year, we went to a pastors conference, and you choose what workshops you want to go. Don, what does he choose? One of the workshops he chooses to go to is a workshop on developing disabilities ministry in your church. It just makes a statement about his compassion and his care and his interest in disabilities ministry. Denny just has a heart for children who have challenges, and tries to set things up in a way so that those children can be embraced into our classes, our Sunday school classes, or AWANA, or whatever it is. Many times some of you have stepped in to be those buddies alongside, because often those children need one-on-one attention. So your help in all of that has been instrumental, I think, for us as a church

to see a child who has disabilities, to move toward that child. That's where it starts. This idea that Jesus saw a man blind from birth.

So let's broaden this just for a moment, because no doubt you have experienced or will experience or are experiencing some kind of suffering, some kind of disappointment, some kind of wrestling in your own heart with "Lord, this isn't what I expected life to be like." The first thing, before we get into the theology of it all, the first thing you need to know is that Jesus sees your pain. Jesus sees your challenge.

One of the Old Testament names for God is El Roi, the God who sees. Oh I got to tell you the story about it because it just brings meaning to this whole subject we're talking about. Because here's a woman, Hagar who had in her mind what she was doing. She was the servant of Sarah and Abraham and she was doing well. Through the course of events Abraham had a child with Hagar, thinking that was the promise that would take place. But as things opened up a little bit more, they realized that that wasn't the promised child. So Hagar and her son, Ishmael, were kind of shunned and eventually were pushed away and they had to leave the family. When they left the family, there's this part of the story where Hagar leaves the boy underneath the tree and she goes off away thinking they're just going to die.

I don't know if you can experience or you have experienced the loneliness of that story. The disappointment of relationships, the pain of loneliness, the pain of desperation, and I don't even know what we're going to do now. But that's what was happening in the passage. God introduces Himself to this family, to this woman by saying that He's El Roi, the God who sees. Wow, that's where it starts. When we start experiencing suffering, let's not move quickly to the theology. Let's move quickly to the compassion of God because God cares about people who are struggling, even you and me in the challenges that we face in our lives.

He was a man blind from birth. That means the problem started when he was young. But I suppose one of the greatest challenges for parents is to have a child who has some kind of disability that's going to continue on for a long period of time. So hard to be able to deal with that. Maybe in your own heart you have some hope that you had about life that would continue on and it's been shattered. It's not going the way you thought it would go. Jesus is going to have a solution for us that we must embrace if we're going to go through life and enjoy life. Otherwise, we become bitter and we become angry and we become despairing. But there's something we can do taught in this passage that helps us to be able to align ourselves with the Father and be able to move forward. Jesus saw a man that was born blind.

Well, the disciples aren't very compassionate in their question, are they? This isn't the wisest thing to say. I just want to say that I don't want to blame the disciples because they're thinking more about their theology than they are about their care and love for someone. But if you go up to someone who has a disability, you're probably going to make a mistake. Okay? You may say the wrong thing. I just want you to know that parents of special needs children often are very compassionate. If you're trying to be compassionate, they have much more grace for you. So I think it's okay for us to try to care for people who are suffering in particular ways even though we might not do it the right way.

But the disciples were thinking about the theological issues here. Jesus is seeing the man. They're watching Jesus see the man and they say – *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* The question reveals a thinking error that they have in their minds that sometimes we have in our own hearts, and that is this thinking error that sin is attached to suffering. Oh, and it is sometimes isn't it? So this is kind of hard. Because if you drive 90 miles an hour down the freeway and crash, then your pain is a result of your sin, so to speak. If you go on a spending binge and spend all kinds of money and extend all your credit cards and go into debt, then the path out of that is a painful path. And it's caused by your own sin in that respect. So there are times when sin is associated with suffering, but not all the time.

On a practical level, I do think we need to ask ourselves that question first. I think we need to say, “Am I sinning in this way because I disobeyed God? Am I in this problem that I'm experiencing because I didn't do the right thing?” I think it's a good question to ask. But I don't think we have to stay there. If God doesn't reveal something to you and say, “Yes, this is sin,” then I think we go on because this very important principle exists. It's the principle that not all suffering is the result of personal sin.

This is important because not only in our judgmental attitude that we sometimes look at someone we say, “Look at that person. If they would have done life right, they would not be in that situation.” Sometimes we develop an attitude toward people who are suffering or down and out that isn't compassionate. It's judgmental. Because we sometimes somehow link suffering to sin too tightly. But sometimes it happens in our own hearts and our own lives. That we look at our lives, we get down on ourselves, “Oh man, I'm such a wreck, and we start blaming ourselves for all the problem. I must be doing something wrong.” And maybe we ask that question first. But maybe that isn't the cause of the suffering that exists here. Because not all suffering is the result of personal sin.

Now Jesus could have launched in and He could have said, “Well, let me explain this to you.” He could have said, “Well, you know, sin is ultimately the cause of all suffering, because when Adam sinned, that sin brought brokenness into the world. And as a result then we have suffering.” He could have done that. But He doesn't because it's not very compassionate and it doesn't get you too far. Yes, it is theologically correct that suffering may not be the result of personal sin but is a result of generalized sin. That cancer came in to the world and all these other things came in because of sin. But that doesn't get us very far in how we're to handle the sufferings, and the pain, and the disappointment, and the “I didn't sign up for this” kind of response that we have in our own hearts.

So Jesus is going to respond differently in this passage. He's going to move from causes to something else. Because that's what they're saying. What caused this? Man's sin himself. “Now if he was born blind, how could he have sinned?” you might say. Well, there was a belief at the time that maybe someone could sin in the womb, and that would cause their sin. Because they believed that sin and suffering were so attached to each other that he must have sinned. Or maybe the parents sinned. Well, we know that if parents are sexually immoral, they can get a STD that would cause blindness. Or maybe they just did something wrong in their lives and therefore God is kind of punishing them. This is the mentality that exists in these disciples at this point.

Jesus wants to say no. In fact, He's pretty clear about this. Because He starts by saying *not*. Look at what He says. I underlined it. It says – *It was not*. Let's be really clear, He's saying that not all suffering is a result of personal sin. *It was not that this man sinned, nor his parents*. So let's not try to blame the parents for the problems of the children. Let's not try to blame the person for the problems that they're in. We need to ask that question. Yes, it might be the personal sin, but it could be much different. And we need to be careful of that judgmental attitude.

And then he goes on in verse 3 and he says this: *But that the works of God might be displayed in him*. Now we know the story. We know that Jesus is going to heal this man, and he's going to have his sight returned to him. So we're excited to see that. But you know, there's nothing in verse 3 that requires healing. Nothing. There are some times that there's suffering in the world so that the works of God might be displayed in and through us. It might be that there's the miraculous healing. But that isn't always the case. Sometimes it doesn't happen that a person gets healed. In fact, here's what happens. Sometimes when you pray for healing, and I do pray for healing for people. If you come to me and you're saying, "Hey, would you pray for me," I will pray that God will heal you. Because that's one of the options that takes place. That God does miraculously heal people today. But sometimes God heals gradually through a process called sanctification.

For example, if a person who is addicted to something, they might experience miraculous healing. And God might take away the desire for alcohol or drugs, or whatever it is. Miraculously they are changed. But there's other times where the addiction is actually worked through, as God says, *work out your salvation with fear and trembling*. There's this working that takes place where we work out our salvation into the areas where we learn how to deal with the stress, or how to manage our desire for pleasure, or whatever it might be. And God works through those things. So we don't go back into an addiction or some other addiction. So the process of sanctification is somewhat progressive. But it's one of the ways that God provides healing. It takes time and He uses the sanctification process to do that.

And, thirdly, there are times when a person isn't healed. Where the pain doesn't go away. We know that from another passage. It's very much like this one. So I'm going to take you to the other passage because I want you to see this. Because it describes how the works of God can be displayed in Him in a different passage. This is a passage you know. This is a passage in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, where Paul is praying about the thorn in the flesh. The idea is that because it's the flesh, it's some kind of physical problem that he's addressing, and wishes it would go away. *Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* He's saying the works of God will be displayed in me, is what he's saying. And what is the key here? It's the grace of God. So we have to understand that sometimes we will suffer in our lives, and we will not get well. Sometimes the situation will not change. And there's this grace of God that helps us in the midst of this.

This puts us in a rather challenging situation, because we find ourselves wanting wholeness or we're wanting this picture of where we want our life to go, and it's not going to happen. There's a very important truth that we must embrace in order for us to change our hearts to align with

God's plan and what He's doing. So this becomes the title of the sermon that I...well not yet. This is a very important thing. Suffering can only have meaning in relation to God. This is why I love the Bible so much. Because the Bible takes us into these different places and helps us understand how the gospel message is so powerful.

And even when we suffer... When I'm talking about suffering, I'm talking about that "I didn't buy into this" kind of attitude. "This isn't what I signed up for" kind of experience that we all have sometimes. Suffering can only have meaning in relationship to God.

So what Jesus is doing is He's taking the question that they have about what is the cause of sin and He's not going to answer the question about cause, He's going to answer the question by flipping the question on end and He's going to talk about purpose and meaning. So we don't ask the question about suffering why. We ask the question about suffering how? How God can you use this in my life to change me? How can you use this work through me to bless others? How can you do a work to glorify yourself? *The works of God might be displayed in him.* How can you do that, Lord?

So this idea of meaning that Jesus is trying to help the disciples understand, is only understood if we have a biblical worldview. It is only understood in relationship to God. Otherwise suffering gets in our way. It's damaging. A person can become very emotionally upset and disappointed and discouraged and despairing of life itself. Because life isn't going the way they wish it would go. There is a solution for that. Thus, the sermon title for today, which is "God is More Valuable Than Life or Health." That's big. That's hard.

This is the underlying belief that you must have if you're going to allow God to work in your life in the midst of the disappointment. Let's take marriage, for example. When you get married, when you're moved. Nobody gets married thinking they're going to get divorced, okay? But there's this picture that we have of marriage that has in it the wedding pictures. You know, the beautiful bride and the groom looking their best. And that's the picture of marriage. And then life starts happening. Marriage takes its turns and difficult things happen in life. Now we have a problem. We have the picture of marriage, or whatever, the hope of having a lot of money, or the desire to be successful, or have a good job or career, or sometimes some people want to go into ministry and they aren't able for whatever reason. There's this desire that's here of what I wish I could have. But that's not what I have. I have this over here.

Now we have a choice we make in that moment. Because if we hold on too closely to the pictures, then we find ourselves getting angry and bitter and upset and anxious and disappointed and despairing about life. There's a point in every marriage we have to put the pictures aside, you say, "I'm going to embrace marriage the way it is now." There's a point in every one of our struggles that we have in life that we must say, "I'm going to recognize the suffering is part of my life now and I'm going to ask the question, how can I display the works of God or have Him display them through me? I want to cooperate in that." And we make this transition that allows us to accept the suffering and pain. We don't know what God's doing. I don't know. People come to me all the time, "Why am I suffering?" I don't know! I don't know the answer to that. But I do know that God is the solution. And when we align ourselves with God and we make Him more valuable than life itself, that's pretty big.

I think of Stephen who was martyred. He never knew the purpose of his pain. He never knew that Saul was standing there and he would become Paul, the great Apostle Paul. Stephen didn't know that when he was stoned to death. But even in that stoning, even in the losing of his life, his eyes just reflected the glory of God. That the works of God would be displayed in him.

Can we come to that place where we say I value God more than life or health? That's big. Maybe this is advanced spirituality. Because I think we all wrestle with this and we must. I think the key is sometimes we find ourselves disappointed too much and we need to say, "Okay, Lord. I want to readjust my heart to your heart so that I can follow along with what you're doing." I would say that when someone's suffering, we don't want to look for causes so much. We want to spend more time looking for meaning and helping people see that, look, I don't know why you're suffering. I do know that God is in control. God is good. God cares for you. And something is going on that you may never know about, you may never understand all of this, but God is working in our lives and He is moving us forward. It's big.

In verse 4, we continue on and Jesus makes these statements in verses 4 and 5 that I think are important. He says this: *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day (we'll talk about that in a minute); night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*" I think the key of understanding night and day is this statement, *as long as I am in the world*. So He's drawing that together. In other words, what He's saying is, now we're going to heal people, now we're going to bless people, but there's another day coming. A day coming that's going to be very dark, the darkest day in human history when Jesus Christ is going to die on the cross to satisfy the wrath and the justice and the holiness of God. That He's going to take away from us the power of sin. He's going to do this deeper healing work in this night experience at the cross for us. This powerful work that He's going to do that's going to transform us from the inside out. That day is coming, He's saying. So there's this night versus day. We've got a blind man who's going to see.

And then he makes a statement – *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world*. I don't think that's an accidental statement. I think the idea of the light is very significant, considering a blind man and day and night. Jesus is going to be that light in the world. He's going to bring healing to this person, yes, and He brings light into our lives so we can understand things. But I think the key idea here is that Jesus Christ in the darkness of our suffering brings into it the light that we need so that we can move forward. Does the light mean we'll understand who caused this, his parents or him? No. It is not about causes. It's about Jesus comes into our suffering, and He offers us something more than the darkness that surrounds us. He offers us the ability to embrace Him and to trust Him, and to follow Him and to value Him in ways that we never could do otherwise.

This man. "Mercy for the blind," I imagine him saying. Living his life and just he's a blind man. Next week we're going to look at the healing that he experiences. We'll start with it today. But we're going to look at the healing that he experienced and we go, wow, that is really big what takes place. He did not expect to be healed. I think there are times when we're going forward in life, and disappointment comes into our lives, and we embrace what the Lord is doing. "Lord, I don't know what it is. But I'm going to serve you, I'm going to, I'm going to exalt you, I'm going

to praise you, and I want you to take away my despair and my discouragement, and the pain that I'm experiencing. And I'm going to trust you in this." Sometimes God does something in the midst of that, that turns into another miracle that we didn't expect. That's going to happen in the blind man's life. It doesn't always happen. The key isn't putting our hope in the future miracle. The key is putting our hope in God now.

I want to take one more idea from the story, which is this next one. Because this is kind of strange, I have to admit. He says – *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.* It's just plain weird, okay. So I'm going to tell you, because I did a lot of research on this. Why he used mud and saliva to put on this man's eyes. The answer is I have no idea. Actually, I have this one theory. And here's the theory: The disciples that He's training, all these guys He's working with, they're hanging around and watching Him do all these things. And I think they are so amazed by the fact that He heals people. And Jesus is telling them, "You're going to heal people too," and he empowers them to do that in certain ways. I think they're taking notes. If you look at the way Jesus healed people, you can imagine that sometimes Jesus reaches out and touches the person. I think Matthew was probably was the one taking notes. Remember, he was the tax collector. He was the detail guy, probably. And he was probably writing down these things. He wrote the gospel of Matthew. But he was probably writing down these things and saying, "Did you see how slowly He moved His hand out there? Did you see where He put his hand right on her shoulder there? He didn't squeeze it. He just put it right there." He's probably taking notes there and saying, "Oh, wow, I'm going to write that down."

Then another time, Jesus just speaks to the person and they're healed. And I think, "Oh, hey, get the book out. Write that down, Matthew. Write that down there that did you hear His voice? It was kind of authoritative, but it was caring at the same time. Write that down. We got to practice that." And I think that disciples may be looking for techniques in the healing process.

There's some times when Jesus would heal someone who wasn't even there. He would say to the man, "Your son is healed," and the man would go back and sure enough his son was healed. "Write that down? Did you see what kind of words you use with that man?" I think sometimes we can start looking at the techniques. How is God going to heal a person? How is God going to heal me? How did He heal that person? Oh, He healed that person that way, but I'm going to do those same things and maybe God will heal me." So we get started to get focused on the techniques.

So I think in this experience, they're all sitting around there and here comes Jesus, and they know he's a blind man, and they know what Jesus is going to do. So they've got the notebook out. And Jesus spits on the ground with mud. They go, "You got to be kidding me. Throw the book away." Because it's not about technique. It's about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It's about the power that God has. So it's not about the technique.

We wish that God would heal us sometimes in a particular way. We say, "God, this is how I think you should bring healing into my life and the suffering that I'm experiencing." We kind of lay it out for the Lord. And sometimes God does it a completely different way. He doesn't work in all of our lives the same way. But the power of God is present in all of our lives. The

perspective that God offers us is present in every situation. Our job is to look at this suffering that we experience, the disappointment that we have this period in our life. Maybe it's a period, maybe it's a long period, maybe it's forever, or at least till we die. We don't know. But we must embrace this idea that God is more valuable than health. God is more valuable than life.

I talked to a young man who was married and was going to have a child, and he was experiencing a lot of anxiety. He was actually afraid that he would die given the disease and things that are around in our world right now. He was just kind of consumed with this idea and being so overprotective and so on. It was really a problem for him. So I said to him, "Look, you need to be safe. Okay? You need to make choices that are wise about your health. But you can't be plagued by it as if that's the most important thing."

He says, "Yeah, but I don't want to die because that'll leave my wife and my child alone."

I said, "I just want to explain something to you. God's grace is so big that if you do die...I'm not saying you're going to die (but you're afraid you're going to die and so we kind of push the envelope here with the anxiety), that's what you're afraid of? You're going to die? I just want you to know, if you do die, God's grace is going to take care of your wife and your child."

And here's his statement. He says, "Yeah, I guess I believe that, but I don't want to die."

I say, "I don't want to die either." But do you see what he's saying? This anxiety is caused because he's wrestling with this idea – is life more important than God or is God more important than life?

Oh, I'm preaching to myself. I think we all need this because we face these times in life where we say, "This isn't what I signed up for. This isn't what I expected of life." In those moments, we must embrace God in a new way. We must move to the next level of our personal development when it comes to the Lord and understand Him in ways we never could understand Him before. We must rely on Him. It's the only way to experience joy. God wants us to experience joy in the midst of suffering and pain. It's the only way that we can experience peace. Because it's God's peace that He gives us, even when our life is chaotic. It's the only way we can really love other people in the midst of that challenging situation.

Wow, a message I think that we all need in our lives.

So I'll leave that with you. We're going to continue on in the passage and we're going to learn more about spiritual blindness as we pick this up next week and look at the rest of the chapter. So read ahead and see what God is doing. But don't read too fast. You'll forget the message for today. It's a message we all need, don't we?

Let's pray together. Would you stand with me?

[PRAYER] Lord, this is a hard truth, a difficult one that touches each one of us when we experience the disappointments, suffering, challenges in our life. So Father, we do ask that you would give us a faith to receive this. I feel like the man who says, "I do have faith, but give me more faith, Lord, to embrace this idea." We know that you provided a life for us that experiences joy and peace and love. But sometimes we find ourselves embroiled in the negativity. And so Lord, give us the ability to see how big you are and to value you more than anything in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.