

Do His Works
John 9:4-5

We began looking at this chapter last time we were together. We realize that it happened right after the religious leaders pick up stones to kill Jesus at the end of chapter 8. Now, in this chapter he passes by the blind man. And he would have been at the gate of the city because a man born blind would not be allowed to enter the city. His occupation would be the only one open to him and that would be begging. We cannot imagine how difficult his life and existence would have been. We recognize this scene in one way or another because we see suffering all around us. We interact with people who are hurting and suffering, and we hurt and suffer.

And the disciples ask a question that is very significant in verse 2 that is very instructive as we think about suffering, **“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”** They thought there was some direct sin that someone had committed and this is the reason for this suffering. Many even teach that today with the Far Eastern teaching of Karma. If you do not suffer for your misdeeds in this life you will in your next life. Whatever goes around comes around. And their basic philosophy is that his or all suffering is related to sin. And Jesus could have written a book on this question that is asked by his disciples. And we should know that God does discipline his children, but we also realize that we all suffer. There is no one who escapes suffering in this life, and we many times are still surprised when suffering enters our door through one means or another.

So Jesus answers the immediate question of “why?” Why do we suffer? Look at verse 3, **“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”** There is a reason why we suffer, and that is that the works of God might be seen through our suffering. And it is amazing because I challenge you to find a Christian biography where the person being discussed had an easy life. You just are not going to find one. Also, think of all the godly individuals that are in the Bible, and you will not find one that had an easy life. All of them suffered, and through that suffering the “works of God” were displayed among them. Trials are one of God’s ordained means of glorifying him.

I do find it amazing that people balk at this purpose. I have heard countless people say that God didn’t plan or ordain their suffering. In other words, it is just part of life but no one is ultimately the cause, or they try to give some other answer. But anytime you try to explain your suffering apart from the reason given here there is no hope. It doesn’t mean that we have everything figured out or we have all the answers, but God - our God is fully in control, and planned our suffering for our eternal good and his eternal glory. What comfort is there in saying that this is part and parcel of living in a fallen world where terrible things happen, and God either could not do anything about it or stood idly by and let it take place? Do you think you would be drawn to a God like that? Another explanation is that our suffering is caused by Satan, and it certainly much of suffering like Job could be caused by Satan. But what comfort is there in that? Is Satan greater than God? Is Satan more in control of God, can he thwart the plan of God? Would we run to God in our hurts and distresses and even pray for change if he was powerless against Satan? Although this verse might be difficult, it is also so comforting. God has a definite plan for our suffering. What we suffer is not a mistake in

God's plan. It is God's plan and we can trust in the God of that plan even in the midst of the tears. So that is the why question. Why do we suffer? Well, here is one glorious reason - that the works of God might be displayed in us. Next he answers the "what" question. What do we do with suffering? What do we do when we encounter suffering? How do we respond to it so that God is glorified? I want us to see two points tonight as we answer this question.

1. We need to see that we enter suffering peoples' lives. V.4a.

There is a couple of things that I have to say before we look at this verse. The first is that when we suffer we want everyone to drop everything many times and minister to us, but many times we are not willing to enter into the suffering of other people. It is hard and difficult to sit with someone who is mourning. We just do not know what to say or do. This verse is calling us to enter into people's lives. And we might just sit and cry with them, and we do have so much to offer them because we do have the gospel of Christ. I have heard this from countless believers who are or were going through deep waters, and they say, "I don't know how anyone can go through this without Jesus Christ?" And if we know the truth of the gospel, then we can share that truth and that comfort with others. We have an eternal hope, one who will one day banish all the sickness and sorrow and death away. What a great comfort that this is not all that there is. God will banish all suffering from our midst and we deserve so much worse.

Because we are willing and we intentionally enter the lives of fellow sufferers. Christians should not only say, "I don't know how anyone can go through this without Jesus," but also, "I do not know how anyone could go through this without the body of Christ - his church?" But the question is: are we willing and do we ever intentionally enter the suffering of others? God actually will send us through things we would never want to go through to prepare us to minister to others. We know what helped us in our valleys and what did not. We know the Scripture truths and promises that gave hope and direction. We can and are called to enter the pain and heartache and suffering of our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The other thing to keep in mind here is that we can be like the disciples, and suffering is something kept at arms length. It is something philosophical. They are going to pass by this man in his misery and not help. We can speculate about why someone is suffering. We might even know some theological truths about suffering that God uses it to refine us, to chasten us and to help others see Christ, and even though we have all this knowledge about suffering never enter into the suffering of others.

This is where the works of Jesus really should challenge us. Look at verse 4, "**We must work the work of him who sent me.**" Now notice in this verse Jesus calls not just on him self but also his disciples or follows, and he uses the word: "must." It is easy to see. This word is indicating that we are all involved in this ministry. The more I look at the modern day church the more I see that we have changed the words here to 'You must work the work of God.' We pay the professional pastor or minister or the select few, but that is not for us. We see right here the call is for all of us to work the work of him who sent Jesus Christ into the work. We have to be active and labouring to alleviate the suffering of others. This again, as indicated in the last verse is how God of

eternity is seen and heard in this day and age. It is through the efforts of God's people. We'll talk more about that in a moment.

But listen to what John Phillips writes about this, **“Christians often wonder about God's will for their lives. But this is not difficult to determine. God's will for a Christian is to glorify him by doing his works! We all have worldly affairs to attend to: we have jobs to perform and families to raise. But of all our work, that which is done in God's name is most significant and alone promises eternal results. Boice asks, ‘Do we apply the same discipline and enthusiasm that we have in other areas of our lives to the work of God?’ Are we willing to take on difficult or unpleasant tasks on God's behalf and for his glory?”** This is the work that all of us are called to do.

And here the context is the sufferings of others. We are to intentionally enter into their world. And the question becomes, what are we to do? And the answer is not hard. The first thing is that we are to do acts of mercy. It might be if someone is going through a difficult times making a meal, or a simple phone call, or going out to coffee with them. But it is volitionally and intentionally entering into their lives. So many believers have a faithless faith, and what I mean by that is one that does not work - one that does not seek to put faith into action in the lives of others. James even says in James 2:14-17, **“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”** Let me ask you if that describes your faith? We are not saved by works, but by faith alone, but that faith will produce good works. It will be known for its merciful acts to others.

The other way that we do the works of God is point hearts and minds to the God of eternity. We direct people to the Gospel of God. All people suffer in this world. All suffering gets our attention. But there is another truth, and that is - every single person will spend an eternity somewhere. And the suffering to come to those outside of Christ is greater than anything they can suffer in this life. The gospel and the person of the gospel - Jesus Christ - always has to be the main focus. It makes all that we do in cooking meals, paying the bills of others, weeping with those who weep uniquely Christian. It is because everything that we do is about a person - the person - Jesus Christ. Without him there is no hope and no comfort. God has positioned all his people to be active in this ministry of caring for the hurting and the dying. James Montgomery Boice writes, **“Men and women are perishing in our time without the gospel and without Christ. They fill our cities and our countryside. There are the poor, the lonely, the outcasts of our society. The need is there. Who will reach them? Will you? Do you feel that you must work? Jesus felt it and, as a result, was a blessing to all who knew him. What have we done to be a blessing to those who are in need?”**

2. The second thing I want us to see here is that the time is short. V.4b-5.

I was watching a news segment that talked about the drought that the west was suffering from, and how it was destroying the wheat crop for this year. And the analyst said that would translate into higher prices for anything like bread to cereals to anything else that had wheat in it. And the reason why is that any times you have a limited amount of something it causes that product to become more valuable. When you have a lot of wheat, it is not that valuable and prices go down. Here is the thing that we see in this verse, most of us are convinced that we have so much of this commodity of what we call time. We have so much that we put off the good that we can do for God's kingdom because we always have tomorrow. And that kind of attitude shows a couple of things. One is if time is really limited and valuable then it shows our misaligned priorities. It is not that we say that we do not want to serve the Lord or help others who are suffering, but the way that we use our time and invest in others things is that we say these others things are more important than the work that our God has given us to do.

But the other thing is we do not recognize reality. Our time is running out. There is an expiry date if I can word it that way. This life and the things of life and the material aspect of this life and the relationships of this life are not eternal. By what we do and where we invest our time in we are showing whether our hope is ultimately in this life or the one to come. We are either living for our small and temporary kingdom as if it was eternal or we are living for God's kingdom and therefore for the welfare of others and the glory of God. Do you realize that your time is running out? The things that you could have done yesterday, well that time is gone. You cannot go and relive that day. It is gone forever, and we are one day closer to eternity. There should be an urgency among us as the people of God.

So look at what Jesus says here, **"We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work."** Jesus blends the imagery of light and darkness to bring out the message that time is short. He realizes that his time is shorter than ever before, but that is the same for each one of us. There is coming a time where it will be night and our sojourn will be over. And therefore as Ephesians 5:16 instructs us, **"making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."** Time is such a valuable commodity. Jesus was aware and therefore took every opportunity to make much of his Father in Heaven.

I wonder if we see that urgency and the value of time. Once time is gone there is no getting it back. For pastors, they have to recognize that. Every sermon I preach I realize that it is a stewardship. I am one sermon closer to my last sermon, and I do not know when it will be or if this will be my last one. So the command to feed the flock takes on a new urgency. It is the same thing about any service we render. Every time we carry it out is one closer to the last one whether a Sunday School class or working the sight and sound, or labouring in the nursery. All of that service will come to an end.

And it is true of parenting also. **"Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."** This day with you children will be your last at that specific age and day. You will never have them at that certain time in history again. It is so easy to say: I will become a godly and dedicated parent tomorrow. And I know of many parents who wish they could get those days and years and hours back. They are gone. It is so easy to yell or snap at your children rather than disciple and recognize their need of Jesus

Christ, recognize that they are sinners. And to recognize that the greatest influence that God has put into their lives is parents. Night is coming. One day they will not be with you. Based on what you are doing and how you are using your stewardship with them, does that scare you?

And then there are those who are suffering. We are commanded to minister to them, to help share their burdens and pain. But you know what happens. We have good intentions. There are other people ministering to them. I will wait, but then the opportunity to enter into someone's life in a meaningful and eternal way slips by and is gone. I want you to think honestly: if time is a gift and stewardship given to us by God, how much time have we wasted? How much time have we spent on things that are all about me? How much have we truly sought to know the Lord and minister to others? I often see people who should be so mature right now but have been stunted in their growth because they have made time all about them for so many years. I have heard so many say, "I have wasted so many years of my life." And that might be true. But we have today. We can serve him, learn of him, and truly seek to be a blessing to others today. Night is coming but it has not arrived yet.

And look at verse 5 because this verse is so significant, "**As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.**" This might be a reference to the Jews just seeking to stone him, it might also be a reference to his coming death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. But as long as he is in the world, he is the Light of the world. He is the great "I AM" — God in human flesh who shines light in dark place. He shone the light on the religious leaders dark hypocrisy. And now as the great I AM he will open up dark eyes and give sight to this blind man and show where true salvation is found.

But there is a message here for us. Jesus is not here today. He is not physically with us. He certainly is with us as God who is present everywhere. But his light is still in this very dark world. And how it is — is through believers reflecting that light by representing the glorious light of our Saviour and Lord. Our calling for the short time that we are here as believers is to reflect that light of Jesus Christ. Listen to what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:14-16, "**You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**" We see who we are, and that is light. We see what we are not to do and do, and that is not hide our light but shine forth the light of Christ. And we see the purpose - and that comes right back to last week, and that is the glory of God. It is not about us.

Let me ask you: are you willing to enter into the lives and hurts and sufferings of others as Jesus' representative? Are you willing to reflect that Light that shines so brightly through this gospel? Is your faith an active faith? Can you think of anything or any cause more worthy of your time and efforts than Jesus Christ? Let us seek to make much of him as we minister to those whom God has sent into our lives. Let's not waste the valuable stewardship of time.