

## **The Supremacy of God over Disability**

One thing about preaching through a book of the Bible like I have been doing with the Gospel of John is that sooner or later the passage is going to bring up something that no one wants to talk about, or are uncomfortable about talking about it. Such is the case for the passage we come to in John 9. I have to admit that in preaching the passage in previous times, I focused more on the sign miracle that is presented in this passage more than the problem that existed that was the occasion of the sign miracle. I guess most preachers side-step the hard part of this passage because it is something to which they can't really relate.

Therefore, it makes them squirm and worry that they will say something wrong or offensive. But I sense that God wants this addressed. So, bear with me if you will.

John 9:1-8

*As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.*

*<sup>2</sup> And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?"*

*<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*

*<sup>4</sup> We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.*

*<sup>5</sup> While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."*

*<sup>6</sup> When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes,*

*<sup>7</sup> and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came back seeing.*

So, what is the theme that is here that is so controversial in some circles? Birth defects and disabilities.

Among circles where the existence of God is questioned if not completely denied, the argument goes something like this: If God is so great and beneficent, then why does He allow children to be born with birth defects and why do disabilities happen to good people?

This affects our church very much. Whether it is an adult who has lived with birth defects all of their lives, if it is the seven year old who is now in MUSC having been born with mitochondria, or if it is one our own teenagers here with autism; I know questions are asked if not out loud, then definitely within ourselves. The same holds true for those with any disability whether acquired in life or in birth.

The Bible gives answers to these issues. Right here in our passage is one of them. I want to approach this with two points of view at this man who was born blind.

### **The Disciples' Focus**

The disciples' focus is the focus of humanity. The focus that humanity usually gives towards defects and disabilities is that of cause. What caused the condition? The question may not be asked aloud, but the questions and the curiosity looms.

Such was the case of the disciples. In verse 2, they inquired to the only one who could truly answer the question. Rabbi, teacher, who sinned that caused him to be born blind? Was it his parents? Was it him himself? Did he somehow sin in his womb that caused him to be born with this problem?

That sounds insensitive. And it is. Yet, we must understand those questions came out of the culture in which they lived. The Jews believed that birth defects or disabilities are the direct result of a sin committed whether the person born with the problem or the parents. So, for all this man's life, he bore the label sinner. Perhaps his permanent state of blindness was indication that his sins will never be forgiven. I don't know if that is how that culture saw it. Knowing that culture in how unforgiving they could be, I would not be surprised if that is how they thought. However, I guarantee someone thought it or even tossed that around in a huddle group of gossip.

Let's be honest here. Sometimes disabilities and birth defects are the direct result of sin. Moms abuse their bodies with drugs and other means that directly result in birth defects. I admire families who have adopted crack babies. When a person abuses their bodies in ways that do not glorify God, they subject themselves to disabilities.

However, we should know without explanation that defects and disabilities are not the direct result of sin. Things sometime happen in the mother's womb that causes problems. One of your members was born with a birth defect that may have been due to some kind of oxygen deprivation in the first trimester. It was nothing the mother did or the baby did. It just happened.

If we want to get down to causes of defects and disabilities, we can say that our defects and disabilities though not caused directly by sin, they are caused by the fact we live in a sinful and broken world. Since that is the case, it is the sins of each of us that cause birth defects and disabilities. When you get right down to it, each of us is born with a spiritual birth defect. It is called being a sinful person. We are spiritually dead. That is a problem. That is a major problem.

So humans look at the problem and ask what is the cause? We don't know about any of the specifics of that person, the family, the environment, the triumphs and the pain and suffering.

### **Jesus' Point of View**

I love the first verse. As Jesus passed by, he saw a man born blind. The man caught His eye. It caused Jesus to stop and take note. Jesus really cares about us.

The statement Jesus makes identifies how God sees our defects and disabilities. Humans asked the question. Jesus makes a statement. Humans ask, "What is the cause?" Jesus says "I have purpose for this."

As harsh as it may sound, God sees in the womb and sees the defects. He chooses not to intervene. That sends all kinds of signals to the atheists and agnostics. How can there be a God who would allow such a child to be born?

Notice what Jesus says. "Jesus answered, '*It was neither that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*'"

Whether God chooses healing or non-healing for the defect or the disability, God by fulfilling His purposes in those lives will bring glory to Himself and will manifest His power and presence in that person's life if they choose to let Him.

John is careful to point out the specifics of what led to this man receiving his sight. Jesus took dirt and made mud and put it on the eyes of the man. Jesus used the means around him to display His power. But the man had to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. There was the responsibility of obedience on the part of the man. Whether Jesus chooses to manifest His power through healing or non-healing, he will use the means around us to fulfill that, and He does require our submission and obedience to Him.

What if God chooses not to heal? Where is the glory in that? How does God show forth His power in that?

Go with me to another passage. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

*<sup>7</sup> Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to <sup>b</sup>torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!*

*<sup>8</sup> Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. <sup>9</sup> And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast <sup>c</sup>about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*

"The thorn in the flesh is a messenger of Satan to torment him."

I came across this on John Piper's Instagram. "Satan wants you to see your weakness and despair. God wants you to see His work in your weakness and rejoice." Charlene Nelson

Notice again verse 9. "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Do you see what that does? It parallels grace with divine power. Grace is divine power in us. That's how God glorifies Himself. He displays His power in our weakness so that as people see what is done, they see God working in that person. They see God working in the families of those who are disabled or born with defects.

Tony Campollo was camp pastor of a youth camp for a week. One of the campers was named Steve. Steve had cerebral palsy that made talking difficult for him. His walk was clumsy which opened him up for ridicule by some of the mean campers. They would mimic him in walk and speech as a way of making fun of him. At the end of camp a spokesperson was chosen from each cabin to tell how God revealed Himself to the people of their cabin. As a way of extending their ridicule, the guys in Steve's cabin chose him to be their spokesman. Testimony time came. Steve got up, awkwardly walked to the podium to the sneers of the kids, and spoke these words. "I love Jesus. And Jesus loves me." Snickering stopped. For a moment there was dead silence. God used that short testimony to move in the lives of those kids so that revival literally broke out in that camp that night. Tony says that from time to time, he would meet someone who was in that camp, and that night was always brought up in the conversation. Some were testimonies of salvation all because God chose to reveal His power through Steve.

I wish I can allow parents, grandparents of kids with defects to tell their stories of God's power working in them. I wish I could have the time to let some of you with disabilities tell how God displayed His power in you.

Whatever the disability or defect, God sees purpose. The question is, "Will you be as the blind man and obey to see the purpose become reality?"

All of us are born with a spiritual birth defect. It is sin. We are born with sin in our lives. That defect is so, so greater than what we suffer. My defect will have its complete healing in eternity. Your suffering of the defect of your sin will compound in eternity. It will only lead to an eternal death that is an eternal separation from God. BUT it is a defect that only God can fix. Will you let Him fix you?

Ask God to forgive you of your sin. Acknowledge what Jesus had done for you in dying on the cross and being raised to life. Commit your life to Him.