

TO DISPLAY THE WORKS OF GOD

John 9:1-7

Key Verse: 9:3

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

When we look at any person, situation, or event, there are always two points of view. Rev. Frederick Langbridge said, “Two men look out through the same bars: One sees the mud, and one the stars.” When we face unpleasant realities we might see only the mud and become negative and critical and do nothing except assign blame. On the other hand, we can see the stars: thousands of beauties of life that surround us, examples of virtuous living, the courage and kindness of so many souls, and the countless blessings that we have been given. Then we can have a clear reason to do something good for the glory of God. Our view affects the way we think and act. As our view develops, it formulates our character and personality. In today’s passage we can see two views of a man born blind and their effect. The disciples’ view led to fatalistic resignation and to becoming powerless. Jesus’ view led him to display the works of God through a miracle of healing. Jesus teaches us to have his view. He also teaches us why we must do the work of God and how to do the work of God. Let’s learn from Jesus.

First, two views of a man born blind (1-3). As Jesus and his disciples were walking along, they saw a man blind from birth. He could not see the beautiful world God created: a red-gold sunset over the calm of Chesapeake Bay, the vast and deep Grand Canyon, the grandeur of Victoria Falls, and the lovely faces of family members and friends. Nor could he watch movies or Youtube videos. The only way he could survive was by begging from others. Probably he was wearing old, tattered garments and holding a cup in his hand. Whenever he heard footsteps, he began begging, “Alms for the blind. Alms for the blind.” Practically speaking, he could not drive or move around freely; he could not do many daily tasks that others take for granted. Jesus taught us, **“Your eye is the lamp of the body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness”** (Lk 11:34). The blind man might have been full of darkness because he had no concept of light. He was probably isolated and suffered from loneliness and sorrow.

As Jesus’ disciples looked at the blind man, they suddenly became philosophers who wondered, “Why is this man like this?” Then they asked Jesus, **“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”** (2)

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Their question assumes that the man's blindness was a consequence of sin. The question was whose sin was it? His parents? His own? Or was it God's mistake? It was hard to answer. Even if they could answer, it would not improve the man's condition. Their thinking reflects the common thought of Hebrew people. They believed that all human misery results from sin. In fact, many people believe that when bad things happen, it is due to someone's moral failure. If one becomes sick or has an accident, they assume they are being punished for their sins and feel guilty. Actually, it is true that man's sin brings suffering. When Adam sinned, sickness, pain and all human misery, including death, came into the world (Rom 5:12). But we cannot say that there is always a cause and effect relationship between one's suffering and sin. For example, Job suffered a lot and his friends insisted that it was because of his sins. But actually, he lived righteously before God; the direct cause of his suffering was Satan's envy. God allowed him to suffer so that his faith might be purified. Job realized this and confessed, **"But he knows the way I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold"** (Job 23:10). Peter tells us that all kinds of trials come upon Christians to refine our faith and to result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Pe 1:7). We should not assume that someone's suffering is due to their sins, as the disciples and Job's friends did. When we see someone suffering, we should not pass judgment or slander them behind their backs. We need spiritual discernment which comes through prayer. We should pray for suffering people before talking about them.

The disciples' view was that suffering was caused by sin, which is at the root of everything. According to this view, those born with defects, as well as those in miserable situations, facing tragedies, and terrible hardships are all being punished for their sins. This makes God seem harsh and merciless. If we have such a view, we become negative and powerless. We use all our energy trying to find out who sinned and who is at fault. Then we blame ourselves, our parents, our ancestors, even Father God.

How did Jesus view this man? Let's read verse 3. **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."** Jesus saw the man from God's point of view. God is good all the time. God is sovereign. God is almighty; God never fails. God uses sufferings and hardship for a good purpose, to display his glory. Moriah Peters met Jesus personally at the age of 12 while listening to gospel music. A gifted musician, she began singing in her church. She decided to live a pure life, saving her first kiss for her husband. By the encouragement of her family members, she auditioned for American Idol. She testified that by the power of prayer she advanced from her local area to the finals, on television, before celebrity judges.

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After hearing her, the judges commented that she had a good voice and a good look but that she was trying to be too perfect. They did not appreciate that she led a woman's Bible study and advised her to go out and kiss a boy so she would have something to sing about. Then they dismissed her. In that painful moment, she prayed to know God's purpose and leading for her. Before she left the parking lot of the studio, she was met by a Christian music producer who signed her to a contract. She also met Joel, whom she later married and shared her first kiss with. She was rejected by American Idol, but chosen by God. She displayed the work of God and is happy. Brant Hansen was born with an eye defect that forced him to shake his head from side to side as well as Asperger's. His father was a preacher, but home life was dysfunctional. At the age of 12 Brant accepted Jesus personally. As time passed he came to know that God is good and loving and has a good purpose for him. He gained strength to challenge his handicaps. In the course of doing so, he learned to communicate well. Now he is happily married and hosts a radio program in which he shares the gospel freely. He has gone from thinking "Why me?" to "Thank you, Lord, for using my ailments for your good purpose."¹ There are innumerable stories like these two. Romans 8:28 says, **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."** God works everything out to accomplish his good purpose. And he does so in love. There is no failure or fatalism or fate in God. Painfully difficult events and circumstances are the very opportunity to display the work of God. Let's pray to see everything, including our own lives from Jesus' point of view and display the works of God in any situation.

Second, Jesus teaches why we must do the works of God (4-5). After explaining that we are each made to display God's glory, Jesus gave a clear reason why we must do the work of God in verse 4, **"As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."** When the disciples saw the man born blind they became powerless philosophers. Jesus wanted them overcome their fatalistic way of thinking and become useful to God. So he said, **"...we must do the works of him who sent me."** To fall into fatalism and become powerless is a great sin. We need to get up and do the works of God. Why do we have to do the work of God?

In verse 4 Jesus said: **"As long as it is day...."** The word **"day"** refers to the time when we have life, while "night" refers to death. While we have life, we must do the works of God. When we die, we cannot do the work of God any longer. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, **"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all**

¹ Moriah Peters' and Brant Hansen's testimonies can be found on the website iamsecond.com

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your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.” We need to have a sense of time and to manage our lives well. When we work hard during the day we can rest well at night. Foolish people waste their time during the day. Then they try to work at night, but they are too tired. Some people think, “I will enjoy life while I am young and do the work of God when I am older.” But when they are older, they are too tired, they have no experience, and it is harder to learn. Some people think that they will live forever. They try to enjoy their lives as much as possible. But man’s life is like grass and his glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall (1 Pe 1:24-25a). Our time to work is limited. Jesus did not say “Night will come,” but “Night is coming.” It is already approaching and draws nearer moment by moment. As young people, we can have a privilege to make mistakes. But we don’t have much time for trial and error. We need to realize the importance of serving God at a young age. Those who work hard for God from a young age gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus (1 Ti 3:13). God sent us into the world for a purpose. Jesus said: **“to do the work of him who sent me”** (4). We need to find God’s purpose as soon as possible, and do it with all our hearts.

In verse 5 Jesus said, **“I am the light of the world.”** Let’s read verse 5. **“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** Here Jesus teaches us why we can do the work of God. Though we have God’s good purpose and desire to do his work, there are still elements of darkness in our hearts that resist serving God, such as fear, anxiety, pride, laziness, lust, greed, jealousy, and the like. We need light in our hearts. When the light of Jesus shines into our hearts, all the elements of darkness are removed. We are filled with the power of life. Then we can do the work of God.

Third, Jesus teaches how we can do the works of God (6-7). After explaining why we must do the work of God, Jesus showed us how to do the work of God. Verse 6 says that Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. Jesus could have healed the man by speaking a word. Then why did he use mud and saliva? It was to heal the deep-seated fatalistic thinking in the hearts of his disciples by means of an audio-visual demonstration. Though Jesus wanted to heal the blind man, there was no medicine or medical equipment available. Jesus did not give up in despair. He looked around and found that there was dirt. He looked for water so he could make mud, but there was no water. So Jesus used his spit instead of water. He probably had to spit many times. Then he made mud and put it on the eyes of the blind man. The way Jesus worked may seem very strange, unhygienic, and unreasonable. It seems that there was no skill

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involved. But this is the secret to experiencing the power of God. This would help his disciples overcome their fatalistic way of thinking. Usually people think that to do the work of God they need money, a building, a computer, beam projectors, microphones and cameras, and all kinds of things, including coworkers. Without having such things, we can easily give up in despair, saying, “Well, I wanted to do the work of God, but there was just no way to do it.” If we do not decide to do the work of God, we can find many excuses to justify ourselves. But if we decide to do the work of God, we can find a way. Where there is a will, there is a way. Jesus worked with whatever was available in the given situation. Everyone has dirt and saliva. That means that everyone can do the work of God in any and every situation. So we can say that doing the work of God is not a matter of method and skill, but a matter of spirit and faith. If one wants to do the work of God, he can do it in whatever situation he is in. Seemingly impossible situations are the time to learn faith in God, experience his power and grow.

After Jesus put mud in the man’s eyes, he said, **“Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam”** (7a). What was the blind man’s response? Blind men are usually sensitive and self-conscious. He could have been rebellious when heard Jesus spitting and felt him touch his eyes with mud. He could have doubted God’s love. Yet when Jesus wanted him to obey, he simply obeyed the words of God, overcoming his sensitivity. He obeyed by faith. Then he experienced God’s power. He could see! He beheld the blue sky for the first time in his life. He saw his own handsome face reflected in the Pool of Siloam. His heart was full of light. All the darkness was gone. By faith that trusts Jesus’ grace and obeys he displayed the works of God through his life.

As we were preparing the ISBC 2013, on July 3rd, intern shepherdess Sara Lee was suddenly detained at the airport as she returned from Montreal. She was confined for a night and then sent back to Toronto the next day against her will. She was warned not to come back for five years. Humanly speaking, she was misunderstood. Spiritually speaking, it was a test of faith. At first, she was shocked to the point of sickness. But as we prayed earnestly for her, she gained strength to challenge the situation. Her efforts seemed like mixing dirt and saliva. At the final moment, she gathered the documents she had and went to the border. Miraculously, she was granted permission to enter. As the conference was just about to begin, we heard that she had come. It was the assurance that God had answered all our prayers and would bless the conference. In this way Sara displayed the work of God in a time of hardship and finished her internship with an A+.

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As Jesus' disciples, this passage teaches us to see people with Jesus' eyes and to serve them with faith. Spiritually speaking, our mud may be the mixture of prayer and the word of God. When we prayerfully teach the word of God to spiritually blind people, the Holy Spirit opens their eyes. More than 50 young people from El Camino College ministry attended the ISBC 2013. How could one missionary family bring so many students to this conference? The ministry leader, Dr. John Baik, freely told his secret. He taught the word of God faithfully, prayerfully and persistently to spiritually blind students until their eyes were opened. Sometimes we think that without fully mastering a Bible passage we should not try to teach it. This can make us too cautious. Dr. Baik encouraged young people by faith, saying, "Whatever you learn, it is good to teach others. Teaching is learning." God blessed his simple faith and worked in the hearts of many young people. We need this kind of faith. There are numerous young people who are spiritually blind. They need the light of Jesus. They need someone to help them come to Jesus.

Let's see people the way Jesus does and share the word of God with them prayerfully by faith. May the works of God be displayed through us in this fall semester.