

## Why We Suffer – John 9:1-3

John 9:1-3. I'm going to talk about suffering this morning. A word that makes us uncomfortable at the mere mention of it. But it's the issue at hand, and it's a fact of life for every single one of us. Some chronically and some sporadically, some physically and some emotionally, but everyone suffers. Nobody's exempt.

And the raging question is "Why?" *Why* do we suffer? "If God is loving, why is this happening to me? Have I done something wrong? Is God trying to teach me something? Is Satan attacking me?"

Maybe. But sometimes those reasons have nothing to do with it. And the extent to which we cling to the wrong reasons, is the extent to which we miss the right ones. And that keeps us from all that God wants to accomplish. In other words, miss the reasons, miss the blessings. Miss the reasons, miss the point of it all. Starting in John 9.

### Outline

Jesus had just left the temple, and John says in v1 – [1] *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth*. [A form of suffering. Significant suffering. He'd never seen the light of day. Never walked without stumbling. Only known darkness.] [2] *And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

It was a common belief in first-century Judaism that if someone was born with an ailment, they must have sinned in the womb. Or their parents must have sinned. Not unlike the guilt some people feel today.

But neither option has any merit biblically. We tend to *perpetuate* our sin in our kids, yes. And the ill-effects of *unrepentant* sin tend to follow us (Exodus 34:7). But Ezekiel 18:20 says – *The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father*. So his disciples were off.

[3] *Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."* He was born blind, not as a punishment, or the random result of genetic dysfunctions, but according to God's sovereign will. That's the implication of *that the works of God might be displayed in him*. He was born blind to provide an opportunity for God to manifest his power. Extend his mercy. Do his work.

It's reason #1 for why we suffer.

### 1. To display God's work (John 9:3)

Talk about a game-changer. We don't suffer at the hands of "fate." We don't suffer as a result of evolutionary accidents. We suffer to serve as an opportunity for God to do great things. Sometimes by supernaturally healing us, or removing the cause of our suffering; and other times by giving us supernatural strength to live with it. And do so with joy.

In this case, it was the work of healing. To display God's power in *Christ*. A work to authenticate his divinity as the Son of God, that we might believe. And keep believing.

Unfortunately, that's lost on most of us. Especially in the *midst* of our suffering. We just want it to stop. And we never stop to consider that it's an opportunity for God to display his *work* in us, for his glory and our good. Just like the blindman Jesus healed.

But God's work isn't the only reason we suffer. The Bible gives us at least 12 more.

And I want to spend the rest of our time on them, to give you reason upon *reason* to believe. Reason upon reason for the *hope* that lies within you, even when you suffer.

Here's number two.

### 2. The world is sinful and broken (Mark 7:21-23)

The world, referring to the earth itself, the people on it, and the powers of darkness who roam it. *Cursed is the ground*, God said to Adam in Genesis 3. *In pain [suffering] you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth*. More pain. (Gen 3:17-18) So the earth itself is broken. The earth itself inflicts suffering on us.

And so do sinful people. From Cain in Genesis to the Beast in Revelation. (Mark 7:21–23) [21] *"For from within [Jesus said], out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, [and] foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."* Not to mention inflict harm and suffering on others.

And then there's Satan. Wreaking havoc *behind* the scenes. Looking for an opportunity.

All that to say, the world is sinful and broken. And suffering, because of it, is unavoidable. It's not the only reason, but it's always one of them.

Third, we suffer, in order for God . . .

### 3. To discipline us for sinful choices (John 5:14)

I think most people jump to this possibility far too quickly, but it's possible. We saw it back in John 5. After healing the paralytic, Jesus said, *"Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."* (14) Implying that his paralysis was the result of sinful choices.

Same for those who are weak and ill as a result of taking *communion* in an unworthy manner. 1 Corinthians 11 (30). It's discipline for sinful choices. (Numbers 33:55-56)

Does that mean *all* our suffering is the result of sin? No. Emphatically no. God forgives. God protects. God is merciful; often withholding the punishment we deserve.

But there *are* times when he allows or ordains suffering in our life, to make a point. To emphasize the severity of our sin. To remind us of its consequences. To call attention to *unconfessed* sin. Sometimes, we do suffer as discipline for sinful choices.

But it's never just punitive; punishment for punishment's sake. Rather, it's . . .

### 4. To correct our behavior and share in Christ's holiness (Hebrews 12:6,10-11)

We suffer at times, in order for God to correct our way, alter our life, or change our heart. All to share in Christ's holiness. (Hebrews 12:6,10-11)

[6] *"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves [it says in Hebrews 12], and chastises every son whom he receives."* . . . *He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. [11] For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness [holiness] to those who have been trained by it.*

Sometimes God brings suffering into our life, to lead us to repentance – a change of heart and mind and direction – that we might share in holiness. And praise the Lord for it. Where would we be without such correction?

But it's not always discipline or correction. We also suffer in order for God . . .

### 5. To test our faith and strengthen our character (James 1:2-4)

Test, as in challenge our faith to make it stronger. Like a muscle is tested when we lift weights. We don't do bicep curls to *break* our muscle, but strengthen it.

Same for our faith in light of suffering. **James 1:2-4** – [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds* [suffering], [3] *for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness* [staying power; consistency; strength], [4] *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* Perfect and complete in your character. Who you are.

That's the story of Job. God tested him by allowing Satan to sift him; inflict suffering on him. And beginning to end, Job's faith was strengthened. (Job 23:10) His character perfected. (Job 1:21b)

God uses suffering to test our faith and perfect our lives. And while it's never any *fun* to meet trials of suffering, our primary thought should be, "Have thine own way, Lord. Have thine own way. Thou are the potter, I am the clay." (Adelaide Pollard, 1862-1934)

Sixth, we suffer . . .

### 6. To make us rely on God (2 Cor 1:8-9)

Depend on God. Trust in God. This time it's something the Apostle Paul was explicit about. In speaking of his *own* suffering. (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)

[8] *For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia* [Asia Minor]. *For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.* [9] *Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.* On God, who has the power to rescue us from *any* kind of suffering. On God, who's an everlasting rock. On God, who's a refuge and fortress.

The suffering Paul and his cohort endured wasn't meant to toughen them up, but toughen their trust. Increase their reliance on God. Their dependence on God.

He may not *relieve* your suffering, but he sure will sustain you. He sure will keep you. He sure will help you. You can rely on it.

Seventh, we suffer . . .

### 7. To keep us humble and show God's power (2 Cor 12:7-10)

Once again, Paul's experience. Having seen visions and received revelations, he was at risk of boasting. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

[7] *So to keep me from becoming conceited* [he says; proud] *because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.* [8] *Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.* [9] *But he said to me, "My grace [my goodness] is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

[9b] *Therefore* [Paul says] *I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me* [settle and remain on me; characterize me]. [10] *For*

*the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities* [suffering of all sorts; I'm content]. *For when I am weak, then I am strong.* When I am weak, God's power holds sway. God's power is displayed.

Talk about working all things together. Even a messenger of Satan can be used for God's purposes. In this case, to keep us humble and show his power. For our good and his glory.

Eighth, in a similar vein, we suffer . . .

### 8. To magnify Christ (Philippians 1:29-30)

We suffer to shine a spotlight on him. Heighten his renown. Make much of him.

(Philippians 1:29-30) [29] *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,* [30] *engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.* Referring to his persecution, imprisonment, fightings within, and fears without. And the point, is that such suffering has been *granted* to us. Given to us. Just like our faith.

If you're a believer, you will suffer. It's just a matter of extent and frequency. And the purpose, is to magnify Christ. Suffer for his sake. *Always carrying in* [our bodies] *the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus* [may also] *be manifested.* (2 Cor 4:10)

Ninth, we suffer . . .

### 9. To spread the Gospel (2 Timothy 1:8-12a)

To make sure it's proclaimed. Make sure it's advanced. Make sure it's taught, and explained, and applied.

God didn't give us a spirit of fear, Paul says, *but of power and love and self-control.* (2 Timothy 1:8-12) [8] *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner* [he says], *but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God* [It's a command], . . . *the gospel,* [11] *for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher* [to spread it], [12] *which is why I suffer as I do.*

Share in *suffering* for the Gospel, to *spread* the Gospel. *Proclaim* the Gospel.

If you've ever wondered why missionaries give up so much to go, and endure so much to stay, this is it. To *share in suffering for the gospel*. It's why pastors forsake a career to minister in a local church. It's why believers in Muslim families choose expulsion rather than inclusion. It's why martyrs lay down their life. It's why you risk rejection to invite someone to church. It's all for the Gospel. That it would speed ahead and be honored.

Tenth, we suffer . . .

### 10. To bless the church on Christ's behalf (Colossians 1:24)

That's the idea of Colossians 1:24. Where Paul says – *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh* [my body, my actions] *I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.* Lacking, not in the sense that Christ's suffering and death on the cross was somehow insufficient for us; but lacking in the sense that he's no longer with us in the *flesh* to mitigate our struggle.

He's appointed *us* to do that. For one another. He's appointed *us* to fill that ticket. Designated *us* to complete his work. Chosen *us* to suffer *for* him. Not just for his sake, like we saw in #8, but the church. *For the sake of his body.*

How? How do we bless the church in suffering? By giving of our time, talent, and resources at the expense of something else. Our blood, sweat, and tears at the expense of ourselves. Our effort, service, and attention at the expense of our family. We suffer to bless the church, on behalf of the one who blesses us.

#11, we suffer . . .

**11. To strengthen our faith and prepare us for Jesus (1 Peter 1:6-7)**

Just like we saw in #5 from James. It's also Peter's testimony. Several times in his epistle. Starting with **1 Peter 1:6–7**.

*[6] In this you rejoice [he says], though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials [suffering], [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus Christ.*

We can rejoice in our suffering Peter says, because it tests, and strengthens, and proves our faith, in order to prepare us for Jesus. So that we *praise* his appearance instead of fear it. Anticipate it instead of question it. Revel instead of rebel. Rejoice instead mourn. (See also 1 Peter 4:12-13; Job 19:25-27) We suffer to strength-test our faith, and prepare us for Jesus.

#12, we suffer . . .

**12. To prepare us for heaven (2 Cor 4:16-18)**

It's true. Not that heaven is going to *include* suffering, and therefore we have to practice for it, or get accustomed to it. But that our life in heaven is going to be just the *opposite* of our suffering. In both quality *and* quantity.

**2 Corinthians 4:16–18.** Our suffering accomplishes so many good things Paul says – *[16] So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17] For this light momentary affliction [whatever the nature of our suffering] is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen [like suffering] are transient, but the things that are unseen [like the glories of heaven] are eternal.*

We suffer, to give us an itty-bitsy teeny-weenie sense, like a feather on a scale, of the *eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison* that awaits us in heaven. Suffering, is preparation for glory. To convey, that as bad as you might have it here, it's going to be disproportionately better there. (Acts 14:22; Rom 8:17)

And last, we suffer in order for God . . .

**13. To get our attention and save our soul (Job 36:15)**

It's one of the things Elihu, one of Job's counselors in the Old Testament said. That God uses suffering to get our attention and deliver us. Summing up so much of what the Bible as a whole indicates. And many of your testimonies. How God dropped a rock on your head to get your attention and bring you to the end of yourself. Am I right?

Speaking of God, in **Job 36:15**, Elihu said – *He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity.* So God not only uses *kindness* to lead us to repentance, but suffering. Affliction. To get our attention, open our ears, and deliver us from evil.

**Summary**

13 reasons we suffer. 13 reasons for the hope that lies within us. 13 reasons I hope you take to heart, and treasure, and lean on. Because we don't suffer for nothing. It's not meaningless. It's not futile. It's *full* of significance. Full of purpose. Not the least of which, is God's glory and our good.

Prayer – Lord, I understand now why you tell us to *give thanks in all circumstances*. How good it is to know your Word. So *remind* us of these truths, will you? Especially in the *midst* of suffering. Use them to comfort us and strengthen us. Bless us and prepare us. For your glory and our good.

**You Are Loved**