



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Questions That Can't Go Unanswered

The Gospel of John

John 9:1–40

Tim Badal | January 30, 2022

Turn in your Bibles to John 9. We're in a series we've entitled "The Gospel of John." in which we're looking at this biography of Jesus through the eyes of His closest earthly confidant, the Apostle John. John's life was changed and made new as the result of what he had seen and heard in the life of Jesus. He wrote this so that through what we see and hear, we might also believe as John did. This morning we'll be looking at the entire chapter of John 9, considering these verses under the heading "Questions That Need to Be Answered."

Jesus left the temple after a week of celebrating the Festival of the Booths, or Tabernacles. Chapters seven and eight told us how Jesus proclaimed He was living water and the light of the world. Now as He's leaving the temple, Jesus encounters a man who had been born blind. This story brings us to three questions we cannot leave unanswered. We must have answers in order to find peace. Let's face it, we live in a world that is full of questions. We have questions about who we are, where we're to go, whom we're to engage with, maybe who's going to be involved in our lives. Questions swirl in our minds regarding all kinds of things.

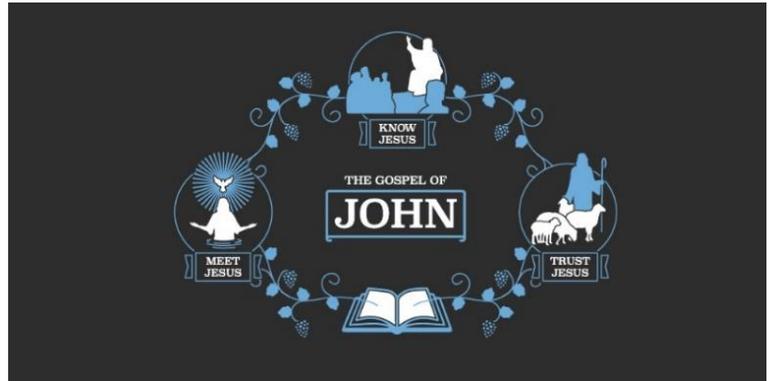
Our world and our lives are filled with questions—sometimes even odd questions. Back in 1980, the United States was mesmerized by a question. Maybe you old fogies remember this question. It had to do with one of the hottest TV shows in that day. The nation was spellbound by this simple question: "Who shot J.R.?" How many of you remember that? You just dated yourselves. It was the number one show of all time. That episode had the highest ratings because people wanted that question answered—and it was. Don't ask me what the answer was, but they did figure out who shot J.R.

What about this last weekend? We had a question about sports: "Will Tom Brady retire or not?" Word came out yesterday afternoon that he was retiring—the greatest quarterback of all time—only to have his dad and others go to social media and say, "No. He hasn't retired." So maybe in the next few days, we'll know whether or not Tom Brady is going to retire once and for all at the ripe old age of 174.

Churches have questions that need to be answered. One of the questions we always want to ask here is, "Who is the most beautiful and smartest of all campus pastors?" You know what the answer is, right? In the first service, Laura Wood was here, the mom of David Wood. She yelled out David's name, so people were wondering, "Why is that lady so passionate about one of the campus pastors?" I'm going to tell David that his mother is yelling in church.

We have a lot of questions, but let's be honest. With all kidding aside, those three questions really aren't that important. They don't impact our lives. They're fun to ask and they're fun to get an answer. But let's face it, a lot of you have come here today with lots of questions. These questions gnaw at your soul, questions that are with you when you go to bed and when you wake up, questions that have been there for a long time. These are questions for which there seem to be no answers.

Our text today brings out three questions that I think are so important that I don't think they can go unanswered. These are three different types of questions that aren't exactly connected. After all, there are a lot of moving parts in this story. There are a lot of



people talking, a lot of interactions, a lot of questions along the way. So let's walk through each of these questions, seeking to ask God what His answers are.

Why is there suffering in the world?

Our story opens with Jesus leaving the temple and passing by a man blind from birth. Verses two and three continue, *"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.'"*

In these first three verses, the question is this: "Why is there suffering in the world?" That's a question that's not just asked of Christians. In fact, if you were to look up the "most-asked questions" on Google, one of the top questions is: "Why is there suffering?" or "Why is there evil?" We've all asked this question one way or another. We've encountered a hopeless situation or a person who is suffering helplessly and we've asked, "Why, God? Why is this happening?"

The man Jesus sees who was born blind must have experienced great struggle and sorrow in his life. He had never had a "normal" day. He never had the hopes or dreams others could have. People would see his pitiful situation and ask, "What happened?" They wanted an answer to that question. I find three plausible answers, but in my mind, only one is true.

Suffering is a matter of consequence

The first answer is the one the disciples propose: suffering happens as a consequence of something. They saw the suffering of this man and asked, "Who did something wrong? Who sinned?" In this case, they believed there could be various sinners in the mix: the man himself or his parents.

In their day there was a strong influence of Greek and Roman thought, including the idea that an individual could pay for future sins through a process whereby the gods gave them disabilities in advance. They would have thought the gods knew this man would be an evil man, so they gave him blindness. Maybe the goal of the gods was to prevent him from doing the evil he was capable of, or maybe it was designed to remind others not to mess with the gods themselves. In Eastern religions, this idea is called karma. If you do something good, good things will be the result. If you do something bad, bad things will happen to you.

Let me note here that this is the default that many in our day also resort to when they see suffering. If someone receives a bad diagnosis or encounters a bad situation, they instinctively wonder if it's related to something they did or were doing. While that might make us feel better, it implies that we are all gods. We're the ones who determine what happens to us. The idea that we have this kind of control is a form of idolatry. Of course, there is some truth to this idea. We do actually make decisions in our lives that have consequences. Bad decisions bring bad consequences. But we have to be honest, there are a lot of things that happen to us that can't be traced back to something we ourselves have done.

So here's a man about whom Jesus will say that his suffering was not caused by his sin, or even more plausibly that it was punishment for something his parents did. Maybe during her pregnancy his mother might have done something wrong, like not eating right or something else to damage her baby in utero. Maybe his father abused his mother and the trauma impacted the baby. Still, Jesus' response implies that much of the suffering in our world does not come directly as the result of an individual's sin, even though that would be a helpful explanation for us.

Suffering comes through the confluence of circumstances.

So if this suffering was not a matter of consequence for something, could it be a confluence of circumstances? Maybe it's not karma, but rather it's a matter of chaos. The chaos theory is a philosophical theory that says because we live in a world of chance where there is no order, there will be moments when good things happen to us. But let's face it, in a world of chaos, a lot of bad things can also happen.

In the first explanation, we believe we're gods in the sense that we determine the patterns of our lives, thus we're the ones who gain the rewards or suffer the due penalties for our choices. In this second explanation, there is no God, so we're on our own. This is like sitting at a craps table in a casino, rolling the dice with every decision and in every situation in our lives.

Let's say a husband and wife find out they're pregnant. They're wondering if the baby will be healthy. Will the baby even live at all? They're rolling the dice, hoping, wishing, praying and believing, but they know inherently that there's no rhyme or reason to what the outcome will be. In other words, there's no reason why bad things happen to good people; it's just the confluence of random circumstances. This explanation, which assumes there is no God, leaves us hopeless in the face of suffering. We can't get mad about it, because it just happened. We can't explain why it happened; we're simply caught up in a flawed and broken world with no way out.

Jesus is telling us this also is not the right way to understand suffering. Notice how He responds to the disciples in verse three: *"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."* Listen carefully because this is so helpful in our moments of suffering. If you don't believe you're God and if you believe there is a God, then this is where you must land. "I have a God and He is sovereign. He's sovereign over the good times and the bad times. Yes, He is even sovereign over the ugly times."

The blindness of this man was not a surprise to God. Jesus didn't say, "Whoa, We messed up that one." He said, "This happened for a reason."

God wants to point people to Jesus Christ.

You will never get beyond your suffering unless you know that God has a reason for you to suffer. You will be filled with dread, hopelessness and grief. But Jesus tells us there is a reason for suffering. It's not the confluence of circumstances. It's not simply a matter of consequences, although that can happen. Many times the reason why we suffer, why we deal even with lifelong ailments, why there are birth defects and other struggles, why bad things happen to seemingly good people, is God wants to point people to Jesus Christ.

Let's face it. If our world was perfect, if we had no trouble or sorrow or suffering, then we would have no need for God. Suffering comes into our seemingly normal lives, then we throw up our hands and ask, "What do I do with this?" When tragedy strikes, "Where do I go with this?" We can be filled with hopelessness and grief. But the Bible tells us there is a purpose for it.

I'm indebted to John Piper for this quote: "The implication of [suffering] for your life is profound. No matter what mess you're in or what pain you're in, the causes of that mess and pain are not decisive in explaining it. What is decisive in explaining it is God's purpose. Why is that mess, why is that pain, why is that suffering there? There are causes. Some of them are your fault, perhaps, and some are not. But those causes are not decisive in determining the meaning of the mess or the pain."

What is absolutely decisive is God's purpose. It was not that this man sinned or that his parents sinned, but that the works of God might be displayed in him, as the text says. Piper then says, "If we confess our sins and hold fast to Jesus as our Rock, our Redeemer and our riches, God's purpose for your mess and your pain will be a good purpose."

Let me repeat that. For those who are struggling with suffering and difficulties and turmoil in your life, the Bible says that God's purpose for your suffering, your mess, your pain is a good purpose. *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds"* (James 1:2). Why? Because God's got a purpose and a plan.

It's like what God told Joseph to tell his brothers: what man intended for harm, God intended for good (Genesis 50:20). Therefore, it will be worth everything you must endure. Did you hear that right? If you are a Christ follower, God is promising that if you will walk with Him through your sorrow and suffering, it will be worth everything you have to endure. Make this your creed this week

You might respond, "But I haven't seen it yet." You're forgetting there's a whole long thing called eternity. We are living in but a short time period. It may feel like a lifetime, but in the broad scope of forever and ever—in infinitely eternal time—Jesus says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, what God has prepared for His people" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

So you who are suffering and struggling, I don't want to diminish it in any way, shape or form. What I want you to do is take that suffering and hold it up against the backdrop of Christ. That's why Paul can call them *"slight momentary afflictions"* in comparison to the exceeding riches God has prepared for us (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). We know this to be true because God said so. Sufferers should hold on to Romans 8:28: *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*

Here's a man who was born blind; his life had never been normal. He had never seen his mom or dad. He had never seen his friends. He had never experienced what it's like to be a regular kid growing up. In those days he would not have been educated in any way, so there was no way for him to read or write. He had struggle upon struggle upon struggle.

Jesus came by and told him, "For this moment you have endured this suffering. For this very moment you have endured a lifetime of pain and sorrow." Notice in our text that after this man was healed, he didn't talk about his old way of life. He didn't complain about how bad it was. Why not? Because the miracle made all that suffering worthwhile.

Christian, we will suffer in this world, but the moment we see Jesus, just as this man did, it will make whatever pain and sorrow we face in this world worthwhile. So grab on to this truth. Hold on to it. When suffering comes, hug this truth. If you don't, you will either make yourself a god, or you will say in your heart, "There is no God." What a foolish thing to do. Why is there suffering? Because God wants to use it to point people to Jesus.

Maybe you're suffering right now. Maybe you're without hope. I want you to know that I empathize with your suffering and I call you with every fiber of my being to turn to Jesus. Turn to Him and you will find its purpose.

How does Jesus save people?

After they asked the question about this man's blindness, the second question that comes is one that's in the text, but we wouldn't see it unless we really dug into it. The question is, "How does Jesus save people?" The reason why I say it's not explicit in the text is that Jesus is giving a blind man the ability to see. If we just read the story and knew nothing else about what's written in the Bible, then we'd assume this is the limit of what Jesus did or can do. But I think this is more than just descriptive of what took place in that moment for that man, but something that is prescriptive for all of us.

When I go through the Bible, I see one characteristic that's used to describe us in our sin and that is that we are "blind." We find this in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, plus Jesus said it explicitly. We are blind. Not only are we blind, we were born blind. You're probably thinking, "Hey, I've got 20-20 vision. I'm good." No, the Bible tells us that all of us are born in spiritual darkness. We cannot find our purpose in this world and we cannot find our Creator. Because of this, we're at enmity with our God. We live in darkness, whereas He is the light. Jesus has already told them that He is the light of the world (John 8:12). He says it again here in verse five: "*As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*" What does light do? Light brings light to darkness.

⁶ 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 ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Not only do we get a description of what Jesus did on that day, we get a prescription of what He does with us as blind sinners.

Jesus seeks us out.

The first thing Jesus does for this man, and for us as blind sinners, is He seeks us out. Verse one says, "*As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth...*" This isn't happenstance; Jesus does everything on purpose. When Jesus sets his eyes on this man, He knows the man's name, He knows the man's struggles and He knows the man's sins. He knows everything about this man. He's God and He knows it all. He could walk right by this guy, but He doesn't. He not only knows what the man had done, but he knows the very presence of this man would cause His disciples to ask questions. He stops when He sees this man, creating an opportunity.

Just like He sought this man out, Jesus seeks you as well. He knows your name, He knows where you're from, He knows the struggles you've had, He knows the sins you've racked up. He could walk by you, but He doesn't. That's why the Gospel of Luke says, "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10). Jesus desires to find you and bring you close to Himself.

The first thing that happens in our salvation—and in this man's miracle—is that we are sought out by Jesus. The blind man wasn't looking for Jesus. He couldn't have gone looking for Jesus. He was where he was, then Jesus came looking for him. I want you to know today that God came looking for you.

Jesus has to do something.

The man wasn't healed just because Jesus walked by or because Jesus stopped where the blind man was. He had to do something. What we read in our text is that He did a pretty gross thing. Ironically, this is something all mothers tell their sons not to do. I have three sons and I've heard my wife say repeatedly, "Don't spit and don't play in the mud."

This is exactly what Jesus did. Why? Scholars have asked this question for years. Let's face it, in each of the other miracles Jesus did, He never did anything like this. When He turned the water into wine, He simply willed it to happen. There's nothing that says He did anything physically that even touched the water. In healing the nobleman's son, He did it from a long distance. He wasn't even in the same vicinity with the boy. When He makes the bread and fishes multiply, it doesn't say He made them out of stones or grass or something. He simply multiplied what was already there.

In this case, He takes a foreign object, saliva and dirt, then applies it to the man's eyes. Why? Some scholars believe He's inviting a larger discussion with the Pharisees about the law. Later in the text, the Pharisees get all ticked off at Jesus, saying He was a sinner who couldn't be from God, because He broke the Sabbath." Now, Jesus didn't break the Sabbath. If you look at what it says about the Sabbath, He was accused of breaking the law that applied to kneading bread.

You're thinking, "Time out. There's no bread, no kneading—what's this about?" Well, since the time of Moses, the Pharisees had added laws of their own. When the law said not to knead bread, it meant people weren't supposed to do food preparation on the Sabbath, so their day would be free to spend in worship and rest. The Pharisees had expanded this to say people weren't even supposed to make mud. When Jesus made mud, they equated this to the original law by implying that Jesus "kneaded" the mud like someone would knead bread. In other words, Jesus was intentionally showing the absurdity of the Pharisees' man-made rules.

In addition to this, scholars speculate another possible reason why Jesus did this. At the time John was writing his Gospel, Greek and Roman philosophy had infiltrated Christianity. They taught that anything to do with the earth, including our flesh, was evil. Knowing that might be a struggle for the church, John records this action of Jesus so we would know that our flesh and everything else in the material world is created by God for a good purpose. Many pagan philosophers believed only the spirit and spiritual things could be good. But here's Jesus doing something very earthy to accomplish something good.

Those are two very plausible answers and I don't disagree with them. But can I add one more? In my study, as I reflected on this story, here's what I came up with. You're welcome to wrestle with this yourself and disagree with me. I think Jesus chose something very dirty, very gross, very defiled if you will—the art of spitting and making mud—because there's nothing valuable or beautiful in that. He took something that is despised—mud—and made it beautiful. You say, "Well, does He do that anywhere else?" I would turn your attention to the crosses on the side walls here. The cross was something atrocious and defiled. In fact, the Bible tells us that any man who hangs on a tree is cursed (Galatians 3:13). The cross was a symbol of the world's greatest shame and reproach, but it was there that Jesus did for us what He did for the blind man. He took that which was defiled in the world, what was gross in the world, and made something beautiful of it. Just as He did on that Good Friday, He took that which was ugly and shameful and made it the beautiful symbol of our redemption that we adorn our churches with. This means violence, shame and execution is now something we lift up. We wear it around our necks as a beautiful thing precisely because Jesus took that which was cursed and made it a blessing.

Could it be that Jesus was using this as an opportunity to show that He, as God, can take the worst things and transform them into something beautiful? When we understand what Jesus has done, we will see that in our salvation He took that which was ugly, broken, blind and even dead and He gave us new life in Himself. If that doesn't give you goosebumps, if that doesn't move your heart, something's wrong.

We have to obey.

Now, did that make the man see? Look at the story again. Even with the mud on his eyes, the man was still blind. So we read in verse seven that Jesus told the man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." So the man obeyed Him.

By the way, that wasn't the closest pool. If I have the picture right, there are four other pools which are much closer to the entrance of the temple than this one.

When Jesus comes seeking us, He has already done something else Himself—He went to the cross. Now we still aren't saved, any more than the blind man was healed. We're not saved until we obey Jesus. When Jesus told the man to wash in the pool, we read *"So he went..."* He obeyed. *"He went and washed and came back seeing."* It was only after his obedient steps that this man saw.

Some of you here may never have bowed the knee to Jesus. You have never obeyed His call. What is God's call for us in salvation? "I came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10. God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for you. Now what is your part? You are to do one thing—turn from sin and therefore turn to Christ. If you have never done that, then you will not experience new life in Christ. Your spiritual blindness will remain. Until that man washed his eyes, he wasn't able to see. Did the man heal himself? No. Do we work out something to save ourselves? Likewise, the answer is No. We have to receive what has been accomplished for us.

This man, by faith, had to walk to that pool, or probably had someone led him there; it would have been a half-mile journey, which might have seemed like an eternity for a blind man. All the while he was probably wondering, "Why in the world did this man tell me to do this?" But he was willing to obey Jesus. He didn't have a theological framework for this. He didn't understand it. He had a lot of questions. But he obeyed.

Likewise, you don't have to have all your theology figured out. You don't have to have all your questions answered. All you need to do is obey the words of Jesus. He says, "Turn from your sins and turn to Me." If you will do that, you will come away seeing. Some of you today came into this place blind and Jesus says, "If you will obey Me, you can have your sight restored."

What does bad religion do that causes people to stumble?

Why is there suffering? We've answered that. How does Jesus save? He seeks us, He does something for us, then we obey. The third question is found in the rest of the text: "How does religion make people stumble?" What follows in this story are five conversations with the Pharisees and a few other people. We see a conversation with the man who was blind, then with the parents, then again with the man, then with Jesus. Finally, the blind man has a conversation with his neighbors. Lots of conversations. Lots of questions.

The problem we see here is that religion gets in the way. We talked last week about how one of the greatest lies the devil tells us is that religion saves. I want you to know that this church is not a religion. This church is a collection of people who have a relationship with Jesus Christ. We're a family. We don't have all the ornaments and other things that might communicate that this is a body of religion here. Do we have beliefs? Yes. But we believe in a Person. We have a relationship with a Person. Religion can get in the way. Let me show you quickly in this text three ways religion gets in the way.

Religion is all about rules and not results.

It's absurd that the Pharisees would have an issue with all that was happening. They focused on their conviction that Jesus had broken one of their laws by making mud, all the while standing in front of them was a man who, by all witnesses, was born blind and who now could see. We're told he was old enough to speak for himself, so perhaps he was in his 30s. To be an adult and speak on one's own authority as a rabbi would, to be held in high regard in a courtroom, one would have to be a man who had passed 30 years of age. His aged parents came and they told the Pharisees he was of age, so ask him. But the man didn't really know that much. In verse 25 he said, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." The Pharisees were still thinking about Jesus and the mud. Religion will always get in the way of biblical, godly results.

Religion capitalizes on fear instead of faith.

The Pharisees called for the man's parents and said, "We need you to answer some questions here. Is this your son?" "Yep. That's Bobby. He's been our son all his life. Saw him born, saw him raised." "Was he blind?" "Yep." "Was he blind at ten?" "Yep." "Five?" "Yep." "One?" "Yep." "Was he blind when he was born?" "Yep. We've always known him to be blind." "What happened? Who fixed him?" "Don't know. Don't ask."

The text says in verse 23 that these things were said *"because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue."* Therefore his parents said, *"Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."*

I have three sons. If any one of them were born blind, and later in life was miraculously able to see, I hope I wouldn't live in fear. But that's what these people do. They were saying, "Don't get us involved in this thing." They acknowledged he was their son—the child they'd loved and raised and now have seen experience this new life after all those years of suffering. But because of fear, they still had the audacity to refuse to answer the religious leaders. For them, their religion was more important than the results of Jesus healing their son.

Sadly, there are a lot of people in this world who are grabbing hold of all kinds of religion and pushing Jesus away. That's what religion does.

Religion brings judgment instead of leading us to Jesus.

Here's the final reason why religion can cause people to stumble: it brings forth judgment instead of leading us to Jesus. Religion says, "We have the answers. We can get you closer to God." But here's how Jesus responded:

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

This seems to be a bit of a contradiction. In John 3 we're told Jesus said He didn't come into the world to judge the world; now He says He did. However, He did not come to condemn the world. What He's saying is, "I am the dividing line by which people see or don't see. I am the dividing line between people who think they see but who inevitably will become blind."

What He's saying to us this morning is that we're all blind and in need of sight. The only answer is not religion. It's not believing circumstances have made us this way. Rather, our blindness declares with great clarity that we need Jesus. If you find yourself blind this morning, the answer is not in yourself. The answer is not in religion. The answer is Jesus. Jesus is the answer to our darkness and our blindness. Here's the great truth: He came to give us sight. All we have to do is ask.

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