

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on March 19, 2017 at Victory of the Lamb on John 9:1-7; 13-17; 34-39

**Series: Like Us In Every Way
Today's Focus: Our Weakness**

"Open(ed) To Seeing the Works of God"

In the name of Jesus Christ who says, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). My question is, "Are you open to seeing how?" Let's begin with a short prayer before we turn our attention to a story from the Bible that I can't wait to share with you today. So we pray, "Lord, open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in your word. Amen."

As he [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 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. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

So you heard what happens here, right? Jesus and his disciples were probably passing by the temple where they saw this man who had been blind his whole life. He was probably a beggar. And that was a pretty tough place to be in. There were no government programs to take care of him. So the disciples saw this poor guy's tough situation in life and they want to know, "Who sinned here, Jesus? There's gotta be some specific sin that caused this man to be born blind and have to suffer like this, right? Help us connect the dots." The disciples think it seems reasonable using their brains (It's not just we modern people who like to think that everything must have a nice, tidy, rational explanation!) that every specific suffering must be able to be traced to some specific sin.

You ever think like this? Now maybe you recognize that's just not right. After all, you know that Christians don't believe in karma. Remember when Pastor Mike Duncan was here a couple weeks ago and he talked about what the Hindus in Nepal believe? He talked about karma and their caste system—how if you end up in the lowest rung of society, the lowest caste, it's because you must have been such a bad person in a past life. In other words "you get what you deserve" is the underlying principle of Hindu belief. That's karma. Karma says if you do bad, bad will happen to you...and one of the worst things that could happen...is you'll end up being a Christian.

What a monstrous thing to believe—karma! But have you ever thought in a moment of weakness, "I wonder if God is punishing me in allowing me to suffer like this because of something I did"? Or, "I wonder if the reason God's letting my loved one struggle so much is because I just don't have a strong enough faith"? Or, "I wonder if the reason God isn't listening to my prayers is because he must be angry with me"? Or, "I wonder if the reason my kids have turned out the way they have is because of my failures as a parent"? "I wonder if...I wonder if...I wonder if...I'm getting what I deserve"?

Do you recognize the decoy here? The disciples sure fell for it. How often don't we? I know that I myself can easily fall into the trap of thinking that when I'm doing good, then God ought to do good to me. You know what I'm saying? I've worked hard. Things have been going well. Life is good. Must be because I've earned it, right? And it shows you how blind I can be! When I think like this I find myself oblivious to the blessings of God right under my nose. And you want to know how to recognize this problem in your own life? You'll know it if, when things go wrong, you tend to get angry, point fingers, blame God or despair. But when things are going right it's because you think, "I've worked so hard. I've made smarter decisions than most. I deserve it. And I expect God to continue to bless me as long as I keep it up."

How blind we all are by nature to the ways and works of God, aren't we? Our eyes are shut. We cannot see. Who wants to bear a cross?! Even now because we all carry around the weakness of our sinful nature, we all have certain blind spots to the works of God. And so sometimes we don't have a clue of just all that God intends to do to his glory through our human weaknesses.

But you heard what Jesus said, ³**"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."**

In other words Jesus is telling us, "You can't always connect the dots between sin and suffering. Don't play that game. God can use suffering to strengthen faith. God can work out suffering for his glory. God can use weakness to display his power in a person's life. And in every case, human weakness is an opportunity for the works of God to be displayed. The real question is, Are you open to seeing *how*?" ⁶**After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.**

Now if the story ended here how wonderful this would be! I could just say Amen and wrap up the service early and send you out into the lobby to enjoy the goodies at the Victory Café. Because the works of God were so evidently on display. The man who was blind could now see. This was the greatest day of his life! And yet there's a more pervasive blindness in this story behind the scenes. The story continues because there's a blindness behind the blindness. Just like last week in John chapter 4 when Jesus met the woman at the well, there was a deeper thirst beneath her thirst for water. Do you see it here? The story continues...

¹³**They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."**

¹⁶**Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."**

But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

¹⁷**Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."**

The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

Now that’s a pretty good answer under the circumstances, isn’t it? This man who’s getting interrogated by the religious leaders (who should’ve been rejoicing with him!) just responds by sharing his story. Based on his own experience he concludes that Jesus is at the very least a prophet. Much like last week again we heard the woman at the well say to Jesus, “I can see that you are a prophet” (John 4:19).

But what this also shows is that although the blind man’s eyes were physically opened, there was another blindness remaining regarding Jesus. When it comes to Jesus he’s starting to see, but he’s not yet seeing fully. “He’s a prophet” is a good point to make, but it’s not yet the whole picture. He’s still somewhat blind to who Jesus really is. So the conversation between the man and the Pharisees continues, tensions escalate, and the man keeps insisting Jesus is the one who opened his eyes until the conflict comes to a head...

³⁴ To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

Just heartbreaking, isn’t it? What started as the greatest day of his life soon turned into one of the gloomiest. Inexplicably, he finds himself kicked out of the synagogue and excluded from fellowship in Israel. And here we see clearly on the part of the Jewish religious leaders the worst kind of blindness there is: Obstinate unbelief. A denial of the works of God. Stubborn human pride. Rejecting Jesus. A refusal to repent. Thinking they were seeing clearly when they were as blind as bats. That ever happen to you where you’re so absolutely convinced that you’re right in your own mind, but you’re actually dead wrong? Are any of you blind right now to how your own stubborn pride has been poisoning your relationship with God, destroying your relationship with your spouse, your relationships with your own children or someone in your church family? Today God is giving you an opportunity to see it clearly before it’s too late!

Now there is an element of truth in what the Pharisees said to the man in our story. **“You were steeped in sin at birth”** they said. And in that they were right. The problem was they couldn’t or wouldn’t see how true that was for them as well! So they expelled the poor man from fellowship in their synagogue, but refused to see that by their own hypocrisy and unbelief they had also excluded themselves from fellowship with God.

And that’s the ultimate danger of spiritual blindness, isn’t it? Our story is about a man born physically blind who couldn’t see without a miracle of God. But on a deeper level it’s a story about how we’re all born spiritually blind. We cannot see our need for a Savior without an even greater miracle of God to open up the eyes of our hearts.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

³⁶ “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

³⁷ Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

³⁸ Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

Last week we saw Jesus take the initiative to meet a thirsty woman where she was at, so that he could reveal and then quench her deepest thirst, her need for a Savior. So also right here today we see how Jesus takes the initiative to meet a blind man where he was at in his blindness so that he could ultimately see things from God’s perspective. He goes to the man to help him see that the greatest work of God in his life wasn’t just the gift of being able to physically see. The greatest work of God was being able to recognize his Savior, to see spiritually, so that he could say, “**Lord, I believe**” and worship him. So that he could even begin to believe in a bigger picture perspective of how his whole life story, including his blindness and weakness, could ultimately be used to reveal God’s glory.

Friends, do you see how God can use your story, including your weaknesses, to bring him glory? Through his word Jesus still comes as the Light of the world to open our eyes to the grace of God. He comes to us through sermons that are preached and sacraments that are administered to give forgiveness and peace and the perfect contentment that only comes from recognizing that God is not an dangerous enemy but that he is our dearest friend. More than that he is our loving Father. And that even if we can’t always see this clearly we can trust that he loves us dearly. We can trust him! That’s why Jesus came, became weak like us, and went to the cross for all our sins. Jesus suffered hell so we wouldn’t have to. Jesus was expelled from the fellowship of Israel and executed outside the city in disgrace that we might become members now of his church through holy baptism, that we might enjoy fellowship together as the children of God united in our common faith, that we might worship together without shame in the undying light of heaven one glorious day in the future.



And as far as seeing the bigger picture, until we get to heaven where we will see perfectly, it’s kind of like being a fly in a cathedral. For example, do you know what this is a picture of {show pic}? The Sistine Chapel. Anyone been there? 10,000 visitors a day venture inside to see this stunning chapel covered in beautiful frescoes. Most famous of all is the ceiling painted by the great Michelangelo. It’s hard enough to take it all in I’m sure as one human person walking in and looking up. You cannot see it all at once. But imagine you’re a fly on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. What can you see from your vantage point there as a tiny fly in one spot? Can you see the complete picture? Can you comprehend it from beginning to end? No. Not even close. And so it is even when God has opened our eyes to see what he’s been up to. This side of heaven we will always see in a limited way. But that’s ok. Out of all our stories God is painting a fresco more beautiful than we could ever comprehend with our little brains. We can’t see it all now much less understand all we’d like to know. But by faith we see all we need to know so that we can trust the One who sent us his Son and by whose Spirit has opened our eyes to see His amazing grace. So we pray “Lord, open our eyes to see what wonderful things you are doing in our lives.” Amen.