

Any way you slice it, the guy got a raw deal.

The hand he had been dealt was a bad one - blind from birth.

He never looked into the face of his mother and father, never saw them smile, never saw them laugh. He never saw a sunrise, fresh winter snow, or the first blossoms of spring. From birth he saw nothing.

But blindness doesn't just take away everyday joys. It makes all of life more difficult. In Jesus' day there was no modern medicine, no seeing-eye dogs, no braille, no government sponsored safety-nets for healthcare and income. The best this man could hope for in life was to have friends and family guide him to a busy street, a community pool, or marketplace where he would sit all day and hope that people felt bad enough for him to throw a few pennies his way – he had to hope that enough people felt bad enough to give him enough money to keep himself clothed and fed.

This was the hand he had been dealt in life – a beggar sitting in the streets, with little to no hope that his situation would change. He would sit in that street every day, hoping he got enough money to feed himself, until he died. That was the best he could realistically hope for as a man born blind in Jesus' day.

Jesus and his disciples are walking down this blind man's street and the disciples ask a natural question: Why did this guy get such a raw deal? Was it his fault? Was it some sin he committed while he was still in the womb? Was it his parents fault? Did they do something to tick God off that he gave them a son born blind – a son who would never be able to provide for himself, let alone them in their old age? There was no doubt about it, this guy was suffering in ways that most people don't – why?

Jesus' answer is important: God didn't allow this man to be born blind as a punishment. No, by allowing the consequences of sin to cripple this guy in such and obvious way God was setting the scene to show his power, his love, his work. This wasn't punishment, this was an opportunity for God to teach that man, to teach those disciples, and to teach us something important about our Jesus.

And what was that lesson? This, this blind man is exactly why Jesus had come. This is why the Son of God was born of the virgin Mary. Jesus says, “**As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me**... this, this man, this opportunity is why God the Father sent me,” Jesus says.

You see, this is not how God wanted it to be. God was not sitting around in eternity, before he created the world, scheming about all the ways he was going to let sin destroy his creation. No, when God created Adam and Eve they were not blind. This is not how God wanted it to be. Not for this man born blind, and not for you or me.

God didn't want you to have to know what it is like to suffer, what it is like to hurt, what it is like to grow old, what it is like to watch your loved ones suffer and die one by one. That wasn't God's plan, but that is the reality, and you know why... not because of God, but because of sin – the devil's sin, Adam's sin, Eve's sin, your sin, my sin.

Sin is why all of us were born into a world of suffering. All of us suffer in so many and different and frustrating ways. Sometimes we suffer because of our sins.

Sometimes you can draw a pretty straight cause and effect arrow for the suffering in your life: if you cheat on your spouse and she finds out, your family is going to fall apart; if you gossip about your friend behind her back and she finds out, she might not want to be your friend any more...

Sometimes, like this young man, we suffer because of sin in general. When Adam and Eve sinned they not only ruined themselves, they ruined all of creation, so that nothing in this world works exactly the way God created it to work. When an earthquake devastates an entire city, the only specific sin we can connect that too is Adam and Eve's sin when God's perfect creation was ruined. When someone who never smoked a day in their life gets lung cancer, a kid wrestles with asthma, an old person develops Alzheimer's, or a man is born blind, we can't say it's because of one specific sin, it's because of sin in general.

This is not how God wanted it to be. He didn't want us to bring this heartbreak on ourselves. He didn't create the world to be this way.

But this is exactly why Jesus was sent.

Why was this man born blind dealt such a bad hand? Sin - sin that God has hated since the beginning; sin that God would use as an opportunity; sin that would help Jesus show us why he had been sent.

Jesus sees this man helpless against the consequences of sin, he spits in the dirt, makes a little mud, rubs it on his eyes, tells him to go wash in a pool (interestingly enough, in a display of divine irony, in a pool named Siloam, which John makes sure to remind us means “Sent”), and this consequence of sin is miraculously undone. A man born blind washes the mud off his eyes and as the water drips from his eye lashes he cracks open his eye lids and for the first time in his life, he sees.

This is why Jesus had been sent – to do the work of his Father; to undo the consequences of sin.

So we have this blind man – a man who is keenly aware of how helpless he is against the power of sin in his life. Every day of his life his blindness preached a crystal clear sermon: you are not in control of your life. You cannot fix yourself. You cannot save yourself. He was a blind man humbled before Jesus, desperate for help.

That is one blind man... but he's not the only blind guy in this amazing account from John chapter 9.

This miracle of Jesus, understandably, caused quite a stir in town. People see this guy walking around like normal and they are confused because he looks an awful lot like that guy they had seen sitting in the streets begging all those years.

They ask him, “Are you that guy who was blind?”

“I am.”

They ask, “Well, how did this happen?”

“This guy they call Jesus put some mud on my eyes, told me to wash, and now I can see.”

The crowds aren't sure what to make of this so they take him to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of their day, people they respected, to try and make some sense of this miracle.

And here we meet the other blind people in John chapter 9. Although, instead suffering from physical blindness, they were spiritually blind.

John makes clear in the ensuing encounter that the Pharisees were dead set against giving Jesus credit for doing the work of God. They grill this guy, they drag in his parents and question them. They don't want to believe that this guy was born blind, that Jesus had done this miracle, and when they can't discredit the miracle they try to discredit the doer of the miracle – how could this be the work of God if it was on the Sabbath day, a day on which God himself had told them not to work?

They end their questioning of this man born blind by saying, “Give glory to God by telling the truth. We know this Jesus is a sinner.”

The blind man says, “Look, I can't tell you if he is a sinner, but I can tell you he has to come from God because I was blind and now I can see, and only God could undo the consequences of sin with a little spit, dirt, and water.”

But the spiritually blind Pharisees refuse to see the work of God standing right in front of them. They call him steeped in sin at birth and throw him out of the synagogue – he wasn't welcome at church with them if was going to say that Jesus was sent by God.

It is so easy to just chalk this up to those dirty rotten Pharisees doing what they always did – turning a blind eye to the amazing power and work of Jesus right in front of them. But let's take a minute to diagnose just what it is that made them blind to Jesus.

Here's a hint: The Pharisees spiritual blindness has the same root cause as that other man's physical blindness... sin.

The Bible says it clear as day, another consequence of sin beyond all the suffering in the world is this: “The mind governed by the flesh (the mind governed by sin) is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.”

All people born of a sinful mom and dad are born with minds corrupted by sin, minds that are at odds with God – minds that want to stop worshiping the Creator and instead want to worship created things.

The Pharisees are nothing more than the devastating consequences of this spiritual blindness on display.

Unlike the man born blind, they did not realize, they were not willing to realize how much they *needed* God. They were comfortable with how they had always done things in their church and in their lives so when Jesus came and started talking about change (that everything about them physically, spiritually, professionally was not yet how God wanted it to be) they resisted that change with just as much fervor as any good old German Lutheran can resist change. They were too busy finding hope and happiness and peace and purpose in their careers, their reputations, and their relationships to have any time to find those things in God.

They were too comfortable and too busy to realize how much they needed Jesus. They were not humble, and so when Jesus came they were threatened by the change he brought, blinded by sin they were born with, the sin they were comfortable with, and they wanted nothing to do with Jesus.

So, we have this tale of two blind men – the man born physically blind, and the spiritually blind Pharisees.

And Jesus' last sentence tells us, “This is why I was sent. So that those who are physically blind, physically hurt by sin, but aware of how much they need me, will see. And so that those who are spiritually blind, but think they can see, think they don't need me, will suffer the consequences of sin in hell.”

Jesus says, “I am the great water-shed of all history. For judgement I have come. Either you realize how much you need me and you will be saved from the consequences of sin, or you convince yourself that you don't need me, that you can see just fine, and you will suffer the consequences of your sin forever.”

The critical question for us then is: which of the two blind men describes me? Which describes you?

Maybe because of the crosses Jesus has allowed into your life, the sufferings Jesus has used to humble you, to make perfectly clear to you how helpless you are, maybe you find yourself aligning a little more with the physically blind man. You are at a point in your life where you can't wait to get to heaven. The sinfulness of this earth and the incredible suffering it can bring has convinced you that you don't want this earth to be your home. You are desperately clinging to Jesus, praying he will give you the strength to get you through the sin to your real home in heaven.

Maybe some of you here today have a little bit more of that spiritual blindness of the Pharisees than you would care to admit. Maybe your life is just so busy, busy with work, busy with kids, busy with projects, programs, and people, that remembering how much you *need* Jesus kind of gets squeezed out. So, personal family devotions, every day, who's got the time or schedules that allow for that? Church every weekend, and then a second hour of Bible class and Sunday School, you just don't have enough left in the tank for that. Maybe you are just comfortable – comfortable with how much time and money you give to God, comfortable with how much or how little the Word of God is influencing the thoughts and decision and words you say on a daily basis – and so the idea of constantly changing what doesn't line up with God's word in your life, taking every thought and making it captive to Christ, constantly challenging yourself to be more like God wants you to be physically, spiritually, professionally is just asking too much. That's too much change, you're comfortable with where you are now.

Probably a lot of you, like me, are kind of this big ugly mess of both. One minute you are longing for heaven and the next you are blindly chasing after the comforts of this world.

Some very wise Christians a long time ago recognized this penchant in themselves and their fellow Christians to have both the humility of the physically blind

man and the stubborn independence of the spiritually blind Pharisees. The described all Christians as *simul justus, et peccator* – saints and sinners at the same time.

But for all of you, whether you are feeling more like the humble blind man or the arrogant Pharisee this morning, Jesus has a very important message for you...

You are why I was sent. I know how powerful the consequences of sin are.

I know that in one minute, for one season of your life sin will knock you to your knees and make you cry uncle. Sin will make you suffer in some unspeakably painful ways. And when that season comes, remember that man born blind. I came to undo those consequences of sin. And I accomplished what I came to do – which is a whole lot more than just helping this blind man see for a few more years before he died. I came to permanently roll back the consequences of sin by taking them on my shoulders on my cross so that I could guarantee you that one day your suffering will end, that whatever you are going through right now, no matter how long it lasts, no matter how much it hurts, this too shall pass. And one day the blindness you experience in this world will be gone and you will see me face to face in heaven.

In one minute, in one season of life, sin will knock you too your knees, and then in the next minute sin will help you up, give you a little break and try and convince you that you don't really need me, not as much as you thought you did. And when that season comes, when life gets busy and you get comfortable, remember those blind Pharisees. Remember how their arrogance, their pride, their stubbornness did nothing but rob them of the joy and the peace and the happiness I came to give them. Their comfort and their busyness did not undo or remove sin, only I can do that. Remember me. Remember my cross, remember when I put my name on you at your baptism, remember all the promises I have made you in my word. I can give you comfort and peace unlike anything in this world. I can and will remove your spiritual blindness just like I helped that blind man see.

You, you sinner saints are why I was sent. I came to love you. I came to save you. I came to give sight to the blind. Believe in me. Worship me.

God grant us hearts like that man born blind: Lord, I believe!

Amen.