

17. John 9

Mark Wormell

Getting started

How do you respond to someone who asks, 'why does God allow suffering to be so unevenly distributed in this world?'

Observation

1. The disciples ask Jesus a theological question. What don't they ask him, that they may have asked based on their knowledge of what he can do?
2. Where else has John used the metaphor of 'light' to describe Jesus?
3. Were the Pharisees on firm ground in questioning Jesus making mud and healing on the Sabbath?
4. What needs does Jesus see in the blind man?
5. Why did the Pharisees question the blind man's parents?
6. What differences do you see in the attitudes of the blind man and his parents to Jesus and their respective positions in society?
7. Why did the Pharisees fear anyone proclaiming Jesus as Christ?
8. Why does Jesus say he came into the world? (Verse 39)
9. How does this chapter progress the growing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees?

Interpretation

1. What lies behind the disciples' opening question in verse 2? What Bible passages suggest that there is no direct link between individual sins and individual experiences of suffering? (e.g. The Book of Job, Luke 13:1-5).
2. What are the implications of Jesus saying in verse 4 that 'night is coming'.
3. Jesus could have commanded sight for the man born blind? Why do you think he may have used saliva and dust to make mud? What theological insights flow from this? (Consider Genesis 2:7, Leviticus 15:8 and Matthew 8:1-4).
4. What are the implications of some of the neighbours not recognising the once-blind man?
5. Does the fact that Jesus gave sight prove that he must be from God? (Compare and contrast this with Exodus 7:8-13).
6. What progress do you see in the once-blind man's relationship with Jesus? What brings this about?
7. In what ways is Jesus 'the Light of the World'? (For example: As the Word who created everything that is, he affirms the goodness of creation (including sight). He brings spiritual light. He destroys darkness.)
8. What do we learn about Jesus in this passage?

Implications

1. What attitudes to sin are displayed by the disciples, the Pharisees and Jesus in this passage?
2. How have you experienced the Light of the World in your life?
3. Neither the neighbours nor the Pharisees rejoice that the man can now see? Where does rejoicing at the works of God fit within your spiritual life?
4. What in this story makes you want to love Jesus more than you did before?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thank God for his acts of creation and re-creation.
2. Ask God to ensure that his Holy Spirit always encourages us to rejoice at the works of God.
3. Ask that our family and friends, and the whole world may receive and believe in the Light of the World.

This passage raises the issue of the relationship between sin and suffering/punishment, both at the beginning (verse 2) and the end (verses 39-41). Pastorally this is a very significant issue. Many people, including people who have been Christians for many years, almost intuitively, ask the question, when something goes wrong, 'what have I done to deserve this?' The disciples asked their question before Jesus had died and been raised. They were still working out what type of Christ/Messiah Jesus would be. They did not understand that Jesus would die for the sins of the world (despite what they heard at John 3:16). Therefore, they did not know that Jesus would take the punishment for all our sins (past, present and future). We now know that, given God's acceptance of Jesus' atoning death on the Cross, nothing that goes wrong for us now is the direct consequence of something we do wrong. We are forgiven. We are redeemed. We are justified. We are adopted. All these are present realities. But it's often hard to remember these life changing truths as we deal with the challenges and disappointments of this life.