

As he 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 work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the work 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 Having said 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. ... ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore 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 do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided.

¹⁷ Finally 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.” ... ³⁴ To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out. 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.” (John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39)

Every Deliverance Begins with a Disaster

Have you ever been in a car accident? What was the first thing you did afterwards? Didn't you make sure that everyone was all right? If everyone was, even if your car was totaled, the first thing you felt was probably relief. When I was in college, one of my cousins was coming home for Christmas from his college with three other students. The driver fell asleep on the highway. They hit a semi that was parked by the road. The other three kids were all killed and my cousin went to the ICU with a serious head injury. When I went to up to the hospital, he was lying there in a coma and his sister said to me, “That’s my Christmas present lying in there.” In spite of how terrible the accident was, she was grateful to God that her brother was still alive. I think we can all understand that feeling. Whether it’s a car accident or a house fire or a surgery – if we come out OK, we’re thankful because we know God has rescued us. But if you stop and think about it, to be rescued means that we had to go through something scary. We had to be in the car accident or the house fire or the operating room. And sometimes, with our relief comes permanent and hard changes. My cousin never fully recovered from that accident. He was never able to complete his engineering degree. But even with the consequences, we still rejoice when God delivers us. This morning, we see that same reality in our gospel lesson. We see that **every deliverance begins with a disaster.**

I.

In a sinful world, disasters have to happen. But God makes them all work for our good. **Every deliverance begins with a disaster, but God uses disasters to deliver us from blindness.** Jesus and his disciples encountered a man who was born physically blind. For him and his parents, that was a terrible disaster. When my wife was pregnant, I never cared whether we got a boy or a girl. My only prayer was that the baby would be healthy. I imagine that this man’s parents prayed the same thing. But God sent them a baby who couldn’t see. In that time and place, it was truly a disaster. There were no schools for the blind. There was no such thing as Braille. There were no laws that required accommodations for people with disabilities. A blind man in Jesus’ day could not farm or work and so his chances of marrying and having a family were slim at best. Since there was no social security, blind people either had to get support from their families or they had to beg, which is what this man did.

And the question that Jesus' disciples asked reveals the attitude most people had about this kind of disaster. They asked, **"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"** Most people at that time assumed that if your child was born with a birth defect, you must be guilty of some sin. Or the child himself must be guilty of something – even some future sin. Why else would God single out your family? That made their lives even harder. There was always a suspicion that these people had some guilty secret.

It's a good thing we don't live in a world like that, right? Or do we? Many times when people suffer an unexpected tragedy, they ask, "Why me? What have I done?" People often try to make some kind of deal with God to undo whatever tragedy is looming in their lives. Part of that deal making is an assumption that if we were better people, things like this wouldn't happen to us. So maybe if I promise to be a better person, God will rescue me or my family. Sadly, even some churches have fallen into this kind of thinking.

Certainly, there are consequences for our sins and sometimes, God allows those things to interrupt our lives. If I drink and drive and then have an accident, all the difficulties that I face are a wake up call from God. They should lead me to examine my life and to repent of my sins. But that does not mean that every bad thing that happens to us is God turning us over his knee. When the disciples asked who sinned, Jesus answered, **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."**

Neither one sinned. But God did allow this terrible tragedy to happen—a tragedy that they had to live with from the time he was a baby until he was a grown man. God allowed it so that Jesus could come, when the time was right, and heal him. There would be no question about the miracle, because lots of people knew this man before they ever heard of Jesus. This miracle could be no trick. It could not be mistaken for a natural improvement in the man's condition because he was born blind. Jesus did something that caused the whole city of Jerusalem to talk about him. Like every one of his miracles, this one pointed to him as the promised Savior. God allowed this man and his family to suffer so that the gospel would be preached.

That is always God's priority. You see, God is constantly thinking about eternal life. He's constantly focused on the fact that the entire human race is born slaves to sin and on the fast road to hell. God's number one purpose in all that he does is to proclaim the gospel. He makes sure that his elect – the people he has chosen to come to faith – will hear that gospel. Sometimes, we have to suffer setbacks, because God sees that that's the best way for the gospel to get out there. Sometimes, things don't go the way that we think they should in this life, because we can't see the big picture of how God is working to spread that gospel message and rescue sinners from hell. In this man's case, God sent a disaster so that Jesus could publicly rescue him. Every time God rescues us from the disasters that come in a sinful world, it should remind us that Jesus came to rescue us from the greatest disaster of all: the disaster of sin and unbelief, the disaster that we would make of our lives if it were all up to us, the disaster of us sinners gleefully running to hell.

Jesus said, **"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."** This man could've suffered in some other way and still served God's purpose. But he was born blind because Jesus was making a point: we're all born spiritually blind. We're all born unbelievers. He alone has the power to free us from unbelief. He does that only through the gospel. The gospel in baptism frees our children from the spiritual blindness they were born with. The gospel in our sharing and preaching frees adults who have remained spiritually blind all their lives. Sometimes, we suffer terrible things so that we, too, can be the instruments that God uses to proclaim the gospel. My cousin knew who rescued her brother. She gave glory to God for saving his life. How many people heard about Jesus in that hospital during the weeks that he was there? How many have heard about him since because of that accident? Only God knows.

That doesn't mean that every disaster in our lives is a call to go knocking on doors. But every disaster forces us back to Christ. It changes our view of what really matters in life. So we stand by the road next to our crushed car and we give thanks to God because we're alive. Or we stand in a hospital room after surgery and we give thanks to God that we or our loved one is getting better – or is going to heaven. Maybe the only people who benefit are our own relatives. But God works through those disasters to point us back to his gospel and his love to build us up in the faith. He sends the disaster so we can comfort and encourage each other.

II.

But it isn't always easy for us to see that. We all have sinful hearts – which means we're often confused about what God is doing. You see that in this man's experience. God gives us an unusual view of how this

miracle affected this man's life afterwards. It was not smooth sailing. This man needed more than the healing. He needed faith. **Every deliverance begins with a disaster, but God uses disasters to free us from hell.**

The real disaster in this man's life was not the physical blindness. It was his unbelief. Jesus healed him physically to show him that he was his Savior. But in the immediate aftermath of the healing, that message almost got lost. The Pharisees called this man in to find out how he was healed. In their minds, Jesus had broken the Sabbath. He had made mud and healed a man. They defined that as a violation of God's command to do no "regular work" on the Sabbath. Why? It seems almost silly. Most of them had already rejected Jesus. Yet, when they grilled this man, he did pretty well, at first. He concluded that Jesus had to be a prophet because this was an incredible miracle. After decades of blindness, he could see.

But then the Pharisees went ballistic and threw him out – which probably means more than just that they asked him to leave the meeting. It probably means that they kicked him out of his synagogue. So the event that brought this man the most joy in his life, suddenly left him an outcast, feeling beaten down and depressed. That's when Jesus came to him to comfort him with the gospel. Jesus asked him, **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** That title comes from the book of Daniel and it referred to the promised Savior. Jesus was asking him if he trusted in that Savior. The man said, **"Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him."** He didn't understand yet. So Jesus said, **"You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."** Jesus told a man who had never seen anything that now he was looking at his Savior. With that gospel message, he put faith in this man's heart. The man worshipped his Lord. Whatever else happened to him for the rest of his life, he knew his Savior. He would enter heaven.

Jesus comes to us in the same way. He allows tragedy and disaster to enter our lives so that he can comfort us with his love. Now, he doesn't physically come to us today. He sends Christian friends and family members to comfort you. He sends pastors to your hospital bed to pray with you and to read to you and to give you communion. He works through that gospel. And just as an aside, if you're going to have surgery, if you're in the hospital, call me. I will come because that's what God called me to do when he called me to be your pastor. And don't say, "Oh, pastor, you're so busy." Jesus was busy, too. But he took time out to find this man. There is no better use of my time than bringing the gospel to you when you need it. You need it when you're suffering from hurt and loss and fear. You need it when you're in the hospital or going to have surgery.

When we suffer, we need Jesus to find us. Jesus finds us in the gospel. Jesus has rescued us from all that this sinful life does to us. The Son of God came into a sinful world, a world where we have to suffer, and he suffered with us. Jesus knew grief and sadness. People he loved died. People he cared about got sick. Jesus didn't live a comfortable life of ease. He knew all about loss and pain and hurt. He felt it all and he carried it all to the cross. There he suffered the worst agony of this life: death and hell. He did that to free us from all that hurt and pain.

The source of all suffering and hurt is sin. When Jesus died, he suffered what sin does to us and he suffered what we deserve for our sin. He passed through it all to free us. Then he rose to show us that we are free. He rose to show us that we are heading to a new and better life, a life where pain and hurt and sorrow will be gone forever. A life where we will never sin again or even be tempted again. A life where there will be no sin so there will be nothing to hurt us ever again. In that promise is our comfort and our strength. In that promise everything that we endure in this life changes from a curse, to a cross that God uses to draw us closer to him.

Every deliverance begins with a disaster. But what matters most is not the beginning, the disaster, but how God brings the ending, the rescue. Jesus loves us enough to send disasters so that he can send healing. Jesus loves to rule our lives so that we only face those disasters that strengthen our faith. Jesus loves us enough to rescue here and in heaven. So when the hurts come, come to Jesus. Come and be refreshed and comforted and strengthened. Amen.