We're in the Gospel of John, and we're up to chapter 9 (the whole of it). And today is Part A of a 2-part series (separated by about 4 or 5 weeks).

And because we're doing the whole of chapter 9, I thought I'd read it myself, to help it to hold together.

John 9:1

9 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.
[2] And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

[3] Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. [4] We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

[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.

[8] The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who

used to sit and beg?" 9 Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him."

He kept saying, "I am the man."

10 So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight.

And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said

again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?"

He said, "He is a prophet."

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who **opened** his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."

22 (His parents said these things 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.) 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner."

25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not
know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind,
now I see."

26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How
did he open your eyes?"

27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and
you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it
again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

28 And they reviled him, saying, "You are **his** disciple,
but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God
has spoken to Moses, but as for **this** man, we do not
know where he comes from."

30 The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing!
You do not know where he comes from, and yet he
opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen
to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and
does his will, God listens to him. 32 Never since the
world began has it been heard that anyone opened
the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not
from God, he could do nothing."

34 They answered him, "You were born in utter sin,
and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

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."

40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these
things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"

41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would
have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your
guilt remains.

Jesus has just revealed Who He is. He's not only the Son of God – He is God, the Son (that's what it meant when He said, "before Abraham was, I am.")…

You might remember how last week, we talked, about how it is right for us to worship Jesus. He is **not** inferior to God – He **is** God (the Son)… Well, today's Bible reading, is sandwiched between this revelation, and the response of the Blind man (who can now see), who in V38, worships Jesus. Why does he worship Jesus? Well, it's not so much about the curing of his eyesight. It is because it has been revealed to Him that Jesus is the Son of Man. The blind man believes; and worships.

Now, Chapter 9 records the opening of the Blind man's eyes, but the key message, is more about the opening of Spiritual eyes. (God-willing) In about 5 weeks time, we're going to get to Part B, which will be about Spiritual sight Vs. Spiritual blindness, and the willingness to see Jesus for Who He truly is (The Christ – The Son of Man)…

Today's focus, is on "God's purpose, in suffering".

It's almost 17 years ago, but last time I preached on John 9, in the week leading up to the message, I attended a suicide intervention course.

And in the introductory session, we each had to share our thoughts on suicide. They gave us a series of statements that

we had to rate, on a scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". And one of the statements we had to rate was: "Suicide is wrong."

I think I might've been the only person in my group who strongly agreed that suicide is wrong.

Most chose the <u>undecided</u> option, because they felt that <u>in some</u> circumstances, for instance, if a person is in a lot of pain, then the one who is suffering, might believe that killing themselves would be better for them… And, who are we, to tell them that it's wrong?.....

Now, because my answer was radically different to anyone else's, I was asked "Why? Why do you strongly agree that suicide is wrong?"

And I said:

"As a Christian, I believe that my body is not my own – my body belongs to God. And whether we recognise that or not, (even if you're not a Christian) your body belongs to God.
……

And we've all seen, numerous times, when a person who suffers a great deal of pain themselves,
They are:

- *going through horrible times;*
- *in terrible circumstances*

And we've seen:

- *the way that they conduct themselves; and*

- *the way that they bear the load,*

*And **in** <u>their</u> pain, they have become a source of:*

- *hope for others;*
- *inspiration for others who are doing it tough.*

And so, 2 different people can be:

- *under the same pressure as each other;*
- *suffering the same amount of pain;*
- *under the same horrible circumstances,*

and they react in completely different ways.

- *One may become bitter;*
- *while the other radiates love.*

- *One may feel utter hopelessness,*
- *while the other embodies hope.*

- *One may curse God, and*
- *the other glorifies God…..*

I said, "Our bodies are not ours – they belong to God, and even in pain, we can become a source of hope for others.

Now, I don't know how they took that. They politely didn't argue with me. Mind you, this was 17 years ago. Things would probably be different today, because VAD (Voluntary Assisted Dying) (Euthanasia) is now seen as "a right" (people don't like you telling them that their "rights" are wrong). – bumping off the sick and the elderly, is now part of our "health-care" system (apparently)….

***If** I was talking to Christians, I would have added this:*

Even when we suffer (no matter how bad life is), for Disciples of Jesus, while-ever we continue to draw breath, we have a very good reason to bear witness to the goodness of God, because no matter how bad things are, in Jesus Christ, we have a hope that goes way beyond this life.
It is:

- *a future hope;*
- *an eternal hope;*
- *a hope that is much more than "wishful thinking";*
- *a sure and certain hope.*

Jesus saw a man who had been born blind, and His disciples asked Him, ""Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" …. Isn't that interesting –

These days, it would be more likely for an accusation to be hurled at God: "What did this poor innocent baby do to deserve this?" Whereas in **their** culture, it was automatically assumed that his blindness, was due to someone's sin.

Either the blind man was being punished because of some guilt, or his parents were being punished by giving birth to a blind child that they're going to have to look after. Even the Pharisees – when the (no-longer) blind man speaks a bit of sense to them, they retaliate with: "You were born in utter sin, Who do you think you are, to try and teach us?"

Anyway, Jesus answered His Disciples,

3 …"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

And of course, the works of God **were** displayed in Him. As the blind man himself said:

32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.

It was obvious that Jesus could do what He did, because He is from God.

I want you to cast your mind back to when this blind man was first born. Imagine this beautiful little baby, normal in every way, except his eyes cannot see. Imagine the desperation of the parents, as over the weeks, they begin to discover that their little bub is different to other children.

- His eyes are not drawn to movement.
- He doesn't even squint in bright sunlight...

Imagine their devastation when their worst fears for him are confirmed, and they realise that their little boy is completely unable to see.

Now, imagine this child, growing up, without sight. And this man becoming a beggar, having no hope of carrying on the family trade. – All he can do is sit on the street, and beg.

He had been dealt a terrible lot in life, but it happened, and he went through it. And he went through it for a reason (even though he didn't know the reason). It happened, so that the

works of God might be displayed in him., and so that God could be glorified. …. So, think of him: for all of those years, wondering "Why me?" … and finally he knew why. God chose him, to reveal the power of His Son.

And I think he might be the first person in the Gospel of John, to worship Jesus…

Now, I want us to think for a moment about "healing" (miraculous healing)… There are a lot of different teachings out there about "healing".

Today, there are some who believe that the miraculous healings (we read about in the Bible), came to an end, not long after the period of the Early church. I do **not** see **any** biblical support for that conclusion, whatsoever.

It is a view that limits God, and stifles faith.

The extreme **opposite** of that, is those who believe that it is **always** God's will for **everyone** to be healed (of every ailment). And some believe, that provided you have enough faith, and provided you get rid of enough sin, everyone can live to 120 years old, because that's the limit of longevity set in Genesis 6.

I'm afraid I don't subscribe to that either. *(I have not seen too many churches {no matter how Spirit-filled they claim themselves to be}, with a row of spritely 119 year olds, living out their final year)…*

The problem is, to have an expectation that healing is always going to happen for me (when I ask for it), doesn't give consideration to the Sovereignty of God.

If a person believes that it is **always** God's will to heal, what happens when a person is **not** healed? Blame… There has to be someone to blame.
And so they get told:

- You don't have enough faith.
  If you increase your faith, you **will** be healed; or

- Someone close to you doesn't have enough faith. **Their** lack of faith is stopping you from being healed. You've gotta distance yourself from them…

Or a favourite false-teaching of the Word-Faith movement:

- It's because somebody has spoken negative words. People don't understand the power of words…

  You've gotta speak it into being, and negative words are stopping it from happening…

Or:

- maybe you've got some sin in your life. You've gotta find out what that sin is – it's a barrier to your healing; or

- maybe you've got an evil spirit. If we can just find which one you have, and cast that one out, then you'll get the healing…

You see: When the lie that "everyone can be healed, all of the time", fails, the only way around it, is to apportion blame.

But, where is the sovereignty of God in this? God is King/Lord. He says what is, and what shall be. Who are we, to claim what the will of God is/is not?

What if it **is** God's will:

- for a person to live with a disability;
- for a person to endure suffering;
- for God to be glorified through our unshakable faith, despite our afflictions…

You see, it wasn't because of anybody's sin:

- that the man was born blind
- that for his whole childhood, he was unable to play like the other children…

It was so that one day, God would receive glory.

What if <u>your</u> affliction is an opportunity for the work of God to be displayed in you?
What if the work of God (planned for you), is not physical healing, but a demonstration of faithfulness and thankfulness **in** your affliction?

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (ESV)

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Now, some folk can't accept this. They cannot accept that it could ever be God's will for us to suffer… But, the only way to come to that conclusion, is to read the Bible with a pair of scissors in your hand (and cut out the bits we don't like). You see, the Bible talks a lot about suffering. And if living by the spirit means for us to become more like Jesus, let's not forget that Christ is the Suffering Servant.…

Why would we ever expect, that those who are becoming more like Jesus, would never suffer? In fact, some elements of our character can only develop and be expressed in times of suffering… One fruit of the Spirit is this thing called "Long-suffering". How is that even demonstrated without suffering?

When we get to John 16:33 (ESV), we're going to hear Jesus say:

33 … In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Jesus doesn't promise us an easy life. He promises us "tribulation". The Greek word is θλῖψις (thlipsis) (oppression; affliction; tribulation). It literally means to be crushed…

In the world, you are going to have crushing experiences. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

2 Corinthians 1: (ESV)

- V5 For as we share abundantly
  (we love to hear teachings of abundance, don't we??? Yeah)
  5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

- V6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which **you** experience when **you** patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

- V7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

And it goes on.

That's why 1 Thessalonians says:
5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; (not just in the good circumstances –in **all** circumstances) for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

It is God's will that in every situation of life, we are to rejoice/pray/give thanks. Maybe we don't give thanks **for** our

terrible circumstances, but **in** our circumstances, our faith rises **above** the suffering, because our faith is not for the blessings of this life. Our faith is for Eternal Life in glory…

Now, to understand this, takes a shift of perspective, from having a temporary worldly perspective, to an eternal Spiritual perspective.

The prosperity preachers of today, promise health, wealth and a long life… These things appeal to the flesh (you see). And those who are **not** spiritually minded – no matter how spiritual they claim to be – those who are **not** spiritually minded, chase after these things, and are taken in by these empty promises…

But those who **are** spiritually minded, approach suffering in a very different way.

Yes, we pray for healing. But when we pray, we pray as Jesus taught us to pray: "Yet not my will, but Your will be done"…

And when the healing comes, we give God thanks and praise. We glorify Him, because He's healed us…

But what about when God's answer to our prayer is "No"; or "Not yet"…. You see, this is what it means for God to be Sovereign. He is Lord. He is King. And sometimes our prayers are not answered in the way we want them answered, because in His Sovereignty, He has a greater plan/purpose.

And whether everything is going fine and dandy, or whether we're suffering, the Holy Spirit within us, causes us to praise Him, in every circumstance.

Sometimes our physical and emotional suffering, crushes any natural feeling of praise for God…
Let's remember 7:37, Jesus said:
"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.
38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' "

This is an image of the Holy Spirit… The Holy Spirit within, is an inexhaustible supply of contentment and joy and praise (no matter what the circumstances).

You see, the Holy Spirit helps us to look beyond our current circumstances, and rejoice in who we are, in Christ.

We are:
- forgiven;
- loved;
- redeemed;
- not alone;

And we have a destiny.

We have:
- Salvation in the Name of Jesus;
- Eternal life;
- A place in His Kingdom that is to come.
  A place where there will be no more:
  - suffering

- disease
- torment
- heart-ache…

And so even in our suffering, the work of God can be displayed.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
Sometimes we can get so fixated on things of this world,
we get caught up in our:

- pain;
- sorrow;
- state of discontent;

we become overwhelmed by the things that crush us…

Lord, we cry out to you,
"Be our Saviour".

Lord,
For the sick, we pray for healing;
For the heartbroken, we pray for restoration;
For the lonely, we pray for fellowship;
For the grieving, we pray for comfort.

For the weak, we pray for strength;
For the hopeless, we pray for hope;
For the depressed, we pray for joy.

And Lord, as you provide all manner of healing,
we give you thanks.
You are indeed merciful in the way
you grant to us what we do not deserve.

And in the times that we do **not** receive
comfort and healing in the way we have asked,
Lord, fill us with You Holy Spirit.

Be for us, the streams of Living Water,
flowing from within,
filling us with joy, thanksgiving and praise.

And so Lord,
We pray that in our whole lives –
in the good times and in the bad,
May the Works of God be evident in us,
in the way excel,
and in the way we suffer,
For Your Glory and Praise.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.