

The sermon

Intro

Events happen. Responses follow. Responses vary.

The recent bombings in Israel. Some viewed Hamas as heroes. Others called them terrorists. Some cheered on Hamas. Others condemned their attacks. Some Americans have mobilized for the Palestinians. Other Americans stand behind Israel.

My goal isn't to offer opinions on international conflicts. My point is to show that events produce diverse responses. This morning we see Jesus instigating diverse responses. This morning we learn that...

BIG IDEA: Jesus Came to Provoke a Response

Body

READ 9:1-7

Point 1: A wrong conclusion about God's purpose (9:1-7)

As Jesus was walking, he noticed a man blind from birth.

Flawed theological logic

Jesus' disciples share the logic of their day: *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* (9:2). If a person is blind, it must be a judgment from God against their sin. Or maybe his parents were awful sinners and God punished them with a blind child.

God's purpose

They think like Job's friends. A faithful person can't suffer. Job experienced the loss of wealth, loss of children, and physical affliction. So Job must have sinned.

Jesus corrects their flawed logic: *"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him"* (9:3). Sin isn't the cause. We don't know how old the man is. At the very least he's 13. He's old enough to give legal testimony. He could be 40 for all we know. God made this man experience blindness, likely for decades, so that one day Jesus would heal him.

Viewing God

Sometimes people don't believe because bad things happen in their lives. This happened to me or my loved one so God can't be good or his promises can't be true or God can't be real.

Was God unkind in his dealings with this man? Some would conclude yes. By Jesus' own admission the man did nothing to deserve being born blind. His blindness was simply the consequence of God's choice. God wanted to display his glory.

So one way to look at it is God chose for this man to suffer through blindness for years. Another way to look at it is God chose to use this man's blindness to bring him to faith in Jesus.

Was God good to this man? Yes. Yes. Yes. Jesus gave him sight, forgave his sins, died for his sins, and he'll dwell with Jesus forever and ever. God gave him better than he deserved while placing a hardship in his life so that God would be glorified. This isn't far off from how God deals with us. Does God put us in hard places? Yes. Does God show us mercy? Yes. Does God treat us better than we deserve? Yes. It all depends on your perspective.

Healing

Jesus acts in a way that would horrify me. He mixes spit with dirt to make mud. Puts the mud on the man's eyes. And tells him to wash his eyes in a pool. The man follows Jesus' instructions and comes back seeing. Miracle.

Application

- 1) A person's hardship may be God's punishment on sin (1 Cor 11:27-30; Heb 12:5-11; Jas 5:14-16), but not always (see Job and this blind man).
- 2) A person's hardship may be for the display of God's glory.

God might make a man blind from birth to show his power to heal. God might give you an affliction so that God's power to sustain your joy is on display. God might set you free from drugs or alcohol or depression to show his ability to fix sick human hearts.

Some experiences may not be pleasant for us, but God does these things to reveal his glory.

So we shouldn't jump to conclusions when we see a brother or sister experiencing physical or financial hardship. God may have a purpose other than judgment.

How can we tell if our hardship is because God wants to display his works or because of our sin? If we are engaging in persistent, unrepentant, known sin, we should ask ourselves if God is disciplining us.

READ 9:8-12

Point 2: People are talking (9:8-12)

People noticed. Apparently he wasn't begging for money anymore.

A blind person couldn't support themselves. They had two options. Be supported financially by family. Or beg for money in the neighborhood.

Word got around. *"Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"* Opinions were divided. Some were convinced. Others were not. The man born blind spoke up: *"I am the man."*

The people wanted to know how. Jesus put mud on my eyes. I followed his instructions. I could see.

"Where is he?" No one knew where Jesus was.

Application

When God does a work in a person's life, people ask questions. When God does a work in our lives, people come to different conclusions. When God does a work in our church, some people want to know about Jesus.

Sometimes God draws attention to himself through miracles: sight, ability to walk, cancer gone, etc. Sometimes God draws attention to himself through the miracle of transformed lives: free from substance addiction, relieved of a filthy mouth, released from hatred, free from selfishness with a new and bizarre concern for the well-being of others, etc.

As for miracles, we should pray for them. We should call on God to do the impossible for his glory. We should do so with expectation. God is able. God may purpose to show his glory. We should do so with submission. It may not be God's will.

A miracle will get people talking. Sometimes the miracle that gets people talking is the change of heart that comes when we're born again. What are people saying about us?

READ 9:13-17

Point 3: Mixed conclusions (9:13-17)

The Pharisees, the supposed experts in law interpretation and application, had some questions.

How did you receive your sight? He answered, ***“He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.”*** This created division.

Some Pharisees said, ***“This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”*** Other Pharisees concluded, ***“How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?”*** (9:16).

On the one hand, Jesus was a Sabbath breaker. Jesus must be a sinner.

Sabbath

Why was Jesus views as a Sabbath breaker? There’s a 2nd century Jewish document called the Mishnah, which reflects the Pharisees’ practice. There’s a section about “the primary categories of labor prohibited on Sabbath.” One activity is kneading dough (https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Shabbat.7?lang=bi).

Jesus didn’t knead dough, but he did knead mud. So Jesus worked on the Sabbath.

Another section of the Mishnah said that “administering a remedy is prohibited on Sabbath” unless it’s a life-threatening situation (https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Yoma.8?lang=bi).

Jesus administered a remedy and the man’s life wasn’t in danger. So Jesus worked on the Sabbath.

Another view

On the other hand, Jesus did a sign. And sinners can’t do signs. The idea is God doesn’t act for sinners and it looks like God acted for Jesus so Jesus might not be a sinner after all (9:16).

The Pharisees asked the man born blind for his assessment. He answered, ***“He is a prophet.”*** Jesus is a messenger sent from God. Prophet is a positive statement.

Application

So what we have here is manmade interpretations of Scripture prevented some of the Pharisees from considering the evidence.

Sometimes it’s incorrect, manmade assumptions that prevent a person from believing in Jesus. God is loving so there can’t be a hell. There’s good in humanity so I can’t have a sin problem. All religions lead to God so Jesus can’t be the only way to God.

Wrong conclusions are one factor that prevents people from believing. Lies are prized over God’s word.

False understandings need to be corrected with the biblical evidence!

Point 4: Intimidated eyewitnesses (9:18-23)

Doubt was the default response. So the Jews questioned the man’s parents.

They answered, ***“We know that this is our son and that he was born blind”*** (9:20).

But when questioned about how he can see and who gave him sight, they go silent: ***“Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself”*** (9:21). They’re reluctant to speak because there’s an agreement in place whereby whoever confessed Jesus to be the Christ (= the promised Jewish Messiah) would be removed from the synagogue. Intimidation breeds silence.

This indicates there was a growing belief that Jesus was the Messiah. And a growing opposition against Jesus from the religious establishment. Being thrown out of the synagogue had religious and social implications.

Think being kicked out of a church that was abandoning the gospel and imposing false doctrine. Right beliefs were being excluded. You couldn't worship with your friends and family. Your friends and family would look down on you. Your friends and family would fear being associated with you. You'd be branded an unbeliever. That's why they didn't speak.

Application

One way the gospel is opposed is by intimidation. Some people fail to believe because of intimidation. Maybe it's family members shaming you for believing the Bible. Maybe it's peer pressure on teenagers to be like everybody else.

Intimidation is one factor that prevents people from believing. Self-protection is prized over Jesus.

Intimidation needs to be faced head on with confidence in Jesus and his promises!

Point 5: A conclusion with consequences (9:24-34)

The Pharisees bring the man born blind in for correction: ***"Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner"*** (9:24). Their proof? He violated their Sabbath rules.

Answers

- 1) I'm not sure whether he's a sinner. But I'm sure he gave me sight (9:25).
- 2) ***"Do you also want to become his disciples?"*** (9:27)

The Pharisees reject this invitation by pitting Jesus against Moses. They've sided with Moses. Jesus hasn't. In reality they've pitted their interpretation of Moses against Jesus.

They don't know where Jesus came from (9:29), but they're sure he isn't from God.

The man born blind corrects the Pharisees.

- 3) ***"You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes"*** (9:30).

You guys aren't as sharp as you think.

- 4) ***"We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, God listens to him"*** (9:31).

The man born blind uses their own conclusions against them. God doesn't listen to sinners. So if God listened to Jesus he can't be a sinner right?

- 5) No one has ever been able to open a blind man's eyes (9:32), but Jesus did.
- 6) So there's no way he could have done this if he wasn't sent from God (9:33).

Jesus is from God!

The Pharisees don't assess his logic. They simply dismiss him: ***"You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?"*** (9:34). He's out of the synagogue.

Application

That's stubbornness in face the evidence. Sometimes minds are just made up. No amount of logic will get through. Scripture isn't penetrating wrong interpretations. Think the stubbornness of a Jehovah's Witness who won't concede Jesus is God despite the Bible's testimony.

Beware. Beware of opposing God by clinging to irrational, false conclusions! How do we know we're in a bad place? When we won't let God's word speak to a matter.

That's bad convictions. On the other hand, there's good convictions. The man born blind chose Jesus despite the consequences to himself.

Point 6: How am I responding? (9:35-41)

Jesus catches up with the man born blind: *"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"* (9:35).

He doesn't recognize Jesus because he hasn't encountered Jesus since having sight.

Realizing Jesus is his healer, he says, *"Lord, I believe"* (9:38).

Jesus states why he came: *"For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind"* (9:39).

The Pharisees recognize they're the blind. Ironically Jesus responds, *"If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains"* (9:41).

Meaning

What's going on? Last week we had Jesus saying, *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world"* (3:17), but here we have Jesus saying he came for judgment.

The answer is Jesus did not come for judgment in one sense, but he did come for judgment in another sense. In John 3:16-21, Jesus came on a rescue mission. Dying on the cross to save the world, sinful mankind, we who were condemned already. The Father *"gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (3:16). So Jesus came to save sinners.

On the cross the Father treated Jesus like he was a sinner. If we believe, God treats us like we lived Jesus' perfectly obedient life. If we trust in Jesus, not in ourselves, Jesus has taken the punishment in our place.

The first half of today's statement speaks to that saving mission. Jesus came to bring sight to the blind. Meaning spiritual sight to condemned sinners. Some, when confronted with Jesus, see their sin and turn to Jesus for salvation. They believe.

On the other hand, Jesus did come to bring judgment. Meaning those who think they see become blind when confronted with Jesus. Jesus' ministry produces blindness.

If you recall our first advent message spoke about the Pharisees who saw themselves as well and righteous. Not as sick sinners who needed to be saved from their sins. Here the Pharisees are those who think they see when in fact they do not.

When confronted with the gospel some who are blind come to their senses and see their sin and their need for a Savior. Others, when confronted with the gospel, think they already see and reject Jesus, confirming themselves in their blindness.

So Jesus came to bring sight and blindness. There's two categories of human. Those who see and those who are blind. Which are you?

Conclusion

Whenever we hear God's word (his instructions, his actions) we always respond. For good or for bad. Sometimes we see and accept God's correction. At other times, thinking we already see, we disregard God's word and remain blind to what God is showing us.

The right attitude to God's word is learner. We're in need of knowledge, in need of correction, in need of wisdom, in need of God's comforting promises like forgiveness of sins. Jesus came to give sight. Do you see?