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JOHN 9:1-15

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Lord, as we learned last week, you're Jehovah-shalom, the God of peace. When I find that there's busyness or tension, it tends to crowd out that peace in my life. So I ask, Lord, that you would give me a greater understanding of what that peace looks like in my own heart. I know that part of the fruit of the Spirit is peace (love, joy, peace) and that comes with supernatural quality that we all need. So I'm asking that you'd rain down your peace today in our hearts. I pray that you would take away the nature of our being that tends to be troubled. I pray that you'd provide us with that supernatural peace that we need to experience you in a new way, a peace that passes all understanding. So as we start this year, Lord, we're asking you to rain down peace in our hearts and in our lives, and then give us the ability to share that peace with other people. Many people today are really struggling. We know you provided us with significant answers. So, Lord, help us as we try to introduce that to people in conversations. It might be hard or difficult or awkward. We know you've given us solutions and that solution is in Jesus Christ. So we ask for you to demonstrate that in our lives in very practical and personal ways. In Jesus' name, amen.

Usually when we think about the word 'theology' at least some people think academic, they think a class about theology. They view theology as being rather practical or academic. One of my goals as a pastor is to help you see how you might use theology in very practical ways in your life. Theology is simply truths that we believe. 'Theo' is God; 'logy' comes from *logos*, which is a word of God or word about God. I hope that isn't just meaningless talk as we are just interacting, but it's something that we believe in our hearts. Theology is very practical, I would suggest, and it helps us in the good days and the bad days to know how to think about life.

Today we're going to look at some theology because the disciples ask Jesus a theological question. Jesus is going to answer their question and we're going to learn more about that. They're actually asking a difficult question about a baby who was born with a birth defect. As you might imagine, that can be rather stressful. Can I use the word tragic? Certainly challenging if you're a parent and you have a child that's born with a birth defect.

As you know, I understand this personally. My granddaughter, Lenna, was born four months ago with a birth defect. Her lung. There are three lobes on your right hands side and two on your left to make room for your heart. That's why there's only two on this side. But there's three on that side on her right hand side there's a problem cyst in her lung. So I've learned a lot over the last several weeks.

They had to watch her very carefully to decide whether they were going to do surgery in utero. Did you know they could do that today? I mean at the CHOP hospital in Philadelphia, you don't go there if you're planning a normal delivery. If you're a normal delivery, you go somewhere else. But at CHOP every labor room has a little window so as soon as the baby is born the baby goes through the window into the place where all the machines and medical devices are there. And then there are 150 ICU rooms. Everybody goes to an ICU room then afterwards. Not everybody, but most of the babies go into the ICU room (where my granddaughter went, of course).

She didn't have to have in-utero surgery. But what they can do today is during pregnancy they can open the mom up, take the baby out, do surgery, put the baby back in. I don't know if you realize that. That's what they can do today. It's amazing. Now my granddaughter didn't need that. But my granddaughter did have to have surgery at six weeks. Four-hour surgery on her lungs. That is a really little baby to work on at six weeks old. She'll have to have another surgery at one year old. Now she's doing great. You wouldn't know she has a problem at all. She's delightful, happy, a lot of fun responding now at four months. So we had a great Christmas as they came and visited us for Christmas. Her name is Lenna. You can be praying about Lenna.

But when I look at the story today and I understand this story or I read the story about a baby that was born with a birth defect, I can identify with the problem that the parents must have experienced in this situation.

The disciples are asking an academic question. Before I get too far, I want to read the passage so you understand the passage that we're going to look at and then I'm going to make some comments about it. So if you would stand with me while I read God's word. Let me read this passage. This is from John 9:1-15. If you have your own Bibles, I encourage you to look at your own Bible and read along. This is actually a two-part message. Next week we're going to look at the blind spots the Pharisees had. That's in 16 and following. Today we're going to look at this part of the story in John 9:1-15.

It says – *As he (Jesus) went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

*But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”
“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.*

He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

"Where is this man?" they asked him.

"I don't know," he said.

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 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."

You may be seated.

Let me just point out that this guy is not a theologian. He does not have answers to very many questions. Right? He doesn't know the theological answers to the questions or even information about Jesus. He doesn't have the answers, but he does have a testimony. The testimony was: I was blind, but now I see.

I want you to know you don't have to have all the answers in order to share Jesus Christ with other people. You just need a testimony. You need to be able to say here's where I was in my life, I found Jesus, He changed my life, and now here's what's happened in my life. Here's what's different. That's a testimony. You don't need to have a seminary degree to share that message with other people and you certainly do not need to know a lot, as this guy demonstrates. Well let's go back through the story just a little bit at a time and try to understand what's happening in this story and how we can apply it to ourselves.

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked this question. They asked a question which demonstrates their very simplified theology. Their question was – "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" In other words there must be some sinful reason or some cause that this happened. They must have done bad things because a bad thing happened to them. "Who did the bad thing?" they're asking. Was it the man himself? Maybe God knew about the bad things he was going to do so he was given blindness. Or they're saying maybe the parents sinned? It's very possible in those days, as it is today, that two people who have relations outside of marriage contract sexually transmitted disease. One of the results or consequences of that could be blindness. Maybe that's what he's referring to. Was it his parents who sinned or maybe it was that they just sinned in some other way and this is God's judgment on them.

The disciples had a very simplified theology that had to do with this idea that if something is wrong then it must be something that somebody did wrong. If there's a challenge or there's some kind of suffering then we've got a problem. Somebody's done something wrong. I don't think, by the way, that this is something just back for that time.

There's a lot of people today who believe that, wow, if I just do a bunch of good things, good is going to come back to me. Or if I do bad things, it's going to come around and bite me. Some people call that karma or something. As Christians, we don't deal with that karma issue. That's not how God set up the world.

They're asking a question here and the question we're going to look at is I think very helpful for us today because we're going to broaden it beyond a baby that was born blind. We're going to look at all kinds of problems that we have, bad days that we have, tragedies that we experience, loss of relationship. You had hope in this marriage relationship and it failed. Or your child goes away and is upset and isn't talking to you. Or maybe there's financial loss or there's physical pain, some kind of suffering that exists. Are bad circumstances God's way of judging me? I think that's the kind of question that's behind the disciples' simplified theology. God is going to broaden that.

As Jesus Christ speaks to them He's going to complicate the things a little bit. He's going to help see how more complicated it is than just looking at sin. Let's just address a couple issues first.

We do know that some sin results in consequences, bad things that happen to us. We know that. If you text and drive and you have an accident, sometimes there's consequences that we have for such things. If you don't take care of your body, you're more prone to get diseases or be sick or just lack wellness in your life. There are things that we do that result in problems. So there is a direct connection sometimes between our actions and the things we do and the results. If you are a negative, critical, harsh person, then no wonder the relationships are damaged sometimes. So there is a direct connection sometimes between wrong behavior, foolish, or sinful mistakes that we make and the consequences of those things.

But that's very different than asking the question, does God judge us for those things? Because I want you to understand something. It's very important to understand the holiness and the wrath and the justice of God. Those are very real things that we learn about in God's word. But we have to understand that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He died to satisfy the wrath and the justice and holiness of God. He died to take away the sin and its consequences or the judgmental kind of consequences that exist. Some of the consequences we live with, of course, because of the mistakes that we make. But there's no judgment that God has for the believers. Because when God looks at us, He looks at the righteousness of Christ. That's what He sees. The righteousness of Christ. Otherwise we'd all be lame and blind and dead if we got what we deserved. We don't get what we deserve and that's what the psalm says.

Let's look at the scriptures. In Psalm 103:10 it says – *He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.* God does not do that. Now this is really a valuable thing to understand and if we get it, this will help us. Because if we get theology correct, it becomes those things that we say to ourselves when bad things happen or good things happen. When a tragedy strikes or things aren't happening the way we'd like, the things we say are really important and we have God's truth speaking into us. It helps us address those lies that we tend to say. "Oh I'm unworthy" or "God's trying to get back for this" or whatever. So we need to know and understand the truths of God's word because God does not judge us with actions and consequences like that.

I've talked to many people who believe this in one form or another that sometimes parents will say, "I've ruined my child." Just this week I was talking to a parent. Their child is eight years old. They're having trouble with them. "I think the problem happened at two years old when we were very busy in our lives and didn't give her enough attention." I'm saying look, you've got to

understand life's more complicated than that. Certainly the things we do with our children affect them in the future, but the point is there's something deeper going on and often it's more complicated than just to imagine that happens.

Or one lady I was talking to was telling me how she just believes God doesn't love her. "Where's God when problems come into my life?" Underlying that is this idea that if I'm serving God and I'm doing the right thing and I'm obeying Him, then good things should come into my life. Well the reality is sometimes that is true. So when we do obey God and we follow His desires, He directs our paths (and often directing our paths way from problem areas in our lives). So that's partially correct. But to assume that every time we serve the Lord He's going to give us some kind of good thing, we're missing the point of what service is all about. We're servants. We don't do this for reward and punishment, we do this because we love God and we're serving Him no matter what happens in our lives. So it's much more complicated than that. And that's what Jesus wants to communicate to His disciples. *Who sinned, this man or his parents, that this bad thing happened to him?*

Let's look at Jesus' reply. Jesus answered – "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned*" that caused this problem. So in this case, the problem doesn't have to do with sin. We can't look for who to blame in this situation. But rather He says, "*but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*"

God is displaying His works and working out His glory and His grace in life continually. That's what makes our world a beautiful place. But let's go back. It's not just a beautiful place, is it? It's a very broken place. Our world is broken. That's because sin came into the world, and when it came into the world, we have things like weeds and disease and all kinds of problems in our world. So we live in a broken world with all kinds of stressors and challenges. Not all because you or I particularly sin, but those people around us sin or those people before us have sinned or whatever. So life is complicated by sin. So there's this brokenness.

I tend to think that if we emphasize the brokenness, something good happens in our hearts that we develop more compassion for people. Because if I recognize my own brokenness and my own pain and my own struggle that I'm dealing with, I can certainly be more passionate about somebody else who's struggling in their lives and it gives me more humility. Compassion, when I recognize the brokenness in our world and then also humility.

I say that because I think that the disciples may have been a little embarrassed when Jesus gave His answer to say it's not his parents or he sinned. Oh really? I think sometimes we are very quick to judge. Aren't we? Oh look at that person. Their business failed. They must...and then you fill in the blanks. So we judge people by their business or their finances or by their children or we make judgments. I think if we recognize that we live in a broken world it increase our humility. Brokenness is an important part of this equation and to recognize that it exists. But God is in the business of restoring and redeeming our world. So whenever we look around, we see His works displayed.

When a blind man meets the light of the world, we see a miracle takes place. When a hungry person receives the bread of life, a miracle takes place. When a thirsty person receives the living

water, there's a miracle that takes place. When the lost sheep finds the good shepherd, there's the miracle that takes place. God is in the business of doing miracles. I would suggest we want to spend a lot of our time looking around at the goodness of God, what He is doing in our world, the great things that He's doing, and the beauty that He's created and the beauty that He's doing around us. If we spend our time on the brokenness, yes, we learn compassion and humility, but it also lead us to places in our hearts that we don't want to spend our time on a real negative place. So we must recognize that God is the solution. He is the light of the world, as said later in the passage, but He is the one who brings His beauty into the world.

Back to the psalms. Just to illustrate this idea. Psalm 147, the whole twenty verses is a beautiful psalm. I'd encourage you to read it. But just listen and let the song (that's what it was, a song) impact your heart.

He says – *Praise the Lord. What a great way to start. Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted.*

The broken-heartedness of life is painful. I'm sure you've experienced broken-heartedness. That broken heart is a consequence of tragedy, disappointment, unmet expectations. I mean it's that brokenness, that brokenhearted experience that gives us that compassion and humility. It says – *He heals the brokenhearted (oh I need that) and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.* And the psalm keeps going like that. We live in a beautiful world if we're able to see what God is doing in it.

I wonder if you've ever asked that question: Why did this happen? When something tragic happens like a baby born blind, the disciples are basically saying why did this happen? That is a really hard question. I ask that question every once in a while. Why? Why did God allow this? Why did this happen? And you know, the only thing I can say is I don't know. I do not know why God did this. Actually I do know that there's lots of different reasons, but to pinpoint a specific one in your situation would be very difficult.

Why does pain exist in our world? Why does God allow suffering in our world? I just want to lay out for you twenty-three reasons. I just want you to see this is complicated. I'm not going to read all these verses. I'm just going to read through the different things. Because the answer to the question why we have suffering is complicated. I encourage you to read all these. Take a picture of this screen, read all these later. It's a great little Bible study that you could do on why Christians suffer.

One: To help develop Christ-like character. See the reality is, pressures in life often strengthen, build something inside of us. So that Christ-like character can come out in the midst of the suffering.

To increase endurance and perseverance. If you're trying to learn how to exercise more or run more, you're going to do more exercise, you're going to put yourself in a pressured situation in

order to do that. Well pressure does that for us spiritually to increase our endurance and perseverance.

To encourage wisdom. When you're faced with challenges and you work them through and God takes you through something, you have some wisdom about life.

It produces humility (which I've already mentioned). When we experience challenges or tragedy in our life, it just reminds us how weak we are.

It provides us the opportunity for rewards, James continues to say.

It proves the genuineness of our faith, says 1 Peter.

It manifests the fruit of the Spirit. You know the love, joy, and peace and so on. Those things are demonstrated when challenges are faced. It's hard to have patience demonstrated if you're not with some annoying person or something that requires patience. So it's the challenges of life that help us develop the fruit of the Spirit.

It provides opportunities for us to witness for Christ. Because when we're under pressure and people are watching, they see the pressure. They see Christ. So we can witness for Christ in the midst of that.

It helps us to learn contentment. Because sometimes we bounce up against these challenges in life. If we're always saying, "I've got to get past this boundary in order to be happy," then we're missing something very important and we learn how to be content in the midst of challenges. We can help others then who suffer because we've experienced something like that and we can identify with their pain.

To rebuke us of pride.

To demonstrate the power of God. That's this passage of John 9 just the first few verses here. To demonstrate God's works. To demonstrate God's power.

To learn obedience to the will of God instead of just wanting my own desires all the time.

To vindicate the character of God before Satan. These are the Job passages where there's some real spiritual information given to us about the battle that's going on beyond just the physical that we often don't realize to vindicate the character of God, to vindicate us before Satan to instruct the believer and the holiness of God's character.

To deliver us from sinful thoughts and actions. Sometimes it's those pressures that we experience that say, "Boy, I want to do the right thing." That's what helps an addict once they hit bottom to do what's right. That's part of it because the pain and the suffering they're experiencing is helping them to change the way they think and act to deliver them from sinful thoughts and actions.

To wean us from earth and fix our hope on heaven. So we're thinking about God and heaven. No just being earthly-minded.

To drive us to God's word.

To create a more unified church. Just a "put one another" verse there. There's fifty "one another" verses. Maybe. I've never counted them all. But that's like pray for one another, serve one another, bear each other's burdens, and so on. Those things happen when challenges take place. So we create a more unified church together when we experience challenges in our lives.

To cause us to depend on God.

Or, obviously because we just realize our weakness, to bring Him glory. That's the whole story of the Bible. I mean you've got Easter, which is all grand, but it came after a tragedy of Good Friday where we had the death of the Savior and the loss of a son for Mary. The disciples left because a loss of a vision. It was in the midst of that challenge that God's glory was revealed through the resurrection of Christ.

To increase our passion, which we've mentioned already. Challenges do that in our lives. They give us a greater sense of compassion for other people who are challenged.

Now I share those twenty-three things with you just to say this. This is a complicated question. When somebody says to you, "Why am I experiencing this? Why am I suffering?" That's why I say I don't know. My guess is that's twenty-three things. There's probably seventy-seven things that I haven't written down there that you could probably add to this list. Why? I don't know why. But it's not as simplified as the disciples are asking. And I do know that.

So their idea that "well who are we going to blame here, who are we going to judge here, who sinned, what's causing this problem" in such a simplified way is a misunderstanding and is going to lead to some problems in their lives. So Jesus is expanding their thinking.

There's a lot of things I don't know. Let me tell you some things I do know. I do know that God has a plan. I do know that. I know that God's goal isn't always our happiness. That's revolutionary for some people I know, because some people believe that that's God's purpose in life is to make them happy. When you say it that way it sounds kind of foolish. But some people act as if that's how they live. And I know that life is complicated.

Well one of the things I like to do is ask the question, how does this apply to us? What are we going to do with this information? How is it going to change the way we think? What are we going to say to ourselves? What are we going to do because of this passage of scripture in John 9?

I want to come to this quote. This is John Piper. Now John Piper and David Powlison (two great Christian writers, contemporary people) both contracted cancer in the same year a few years ago. They wrote an article, a really good article, that the title of the article is *Don't Waste Your Cancer*. These two guys are theologians, both of them. *Don't Waste Your Cancer*. They went

through all of the things – how we need to think rightly about tragedy and pain and heartbreak and those things. John Piper writes these words in the midst of all that: “Nothing glorifies God more than maintaining our stability and joy when we lose everything with God. That day is coming for each of us and we would do well to be ready and help the people we love get ready.” Here’s a man who’s been diagnosed with cancer and God is working through him in the midst of that and that’s what he’s saying. We need to be ready. I think we need to be ready too. We need to be ready to face whatever challenge may come in our lives or in the lives of those that we come in contact with.

I’m going to suggest that there are three things that we can do or say when we’re faced with challenges or suffering or tragedy or bad days, if that’s what it is for you. One is that we accept challenges as opportunities. You say opportunities for what? How can you think of opportunity? Well I’ll just give you twenty-three opportunities here. That’s the opportunities. I don’t know what it is that God may be putting before you. Maybe it’s to increase your prayer life more. There’s number twenty-four. We can put that down there. To increase your prayer life more. Because that’s what challenges do. They force us to the Lord to say, “God, I need help with this.” We need to accept those challenges as opportunities for something that God wants to do or is doing or wants to do through us or something along that line.

I would suggest a second thing that we want to do is we want to hold onto our dreams and expectations loosely. Now I think dreams are really great and expectations are helpful. In fact let me just say a word about that. Because I think the expectations and the dreams we have allow us to expand our imagination and God uses prayer many times to do that.

That’s why I encourage seniors to pray. Everybody should be praying, but seniors in particular can have a place in their history in their lives where they stop using their imagination and they only rely on memories. God has given us memories. Memories are a gift for us that we can enjoy. But if we only look at the memories without looking at the dreams or the imagination then it does something to us that’s not good. So prayer helps us open up the possibilities of what God might do. So prayer is really a significant thing for us.

So dreams and expectations are important for us. But we have to be careful how we hold onto those because there’s sometimes when our dreams and expectations are not part of what God has in store for us. The difference between those, that space in between, is called disappointment. If you have a significant amount of disappointment then it’s probably an indication you need to realign your dreams and expectations, which God wants to do in your life. Ooh. That’s hard because of the dreams and expectations that mean a lot to you. God has a different path or a different life than maybe He is calling you to live than you expected.

In order to get through life we have to hold these dreams and expectations loosely. Why? Because God may want to do something different. We can’t invest our emotions into our dreams and expectations so much. I think it’s okay to do that, but we do that so much that they rob us of the ability of flexibility to do what God wants to do then we’re going to experience a high level of disappointment. That’s not going to be very helpful in our lives. So we want to hold those dreams and expectations loosely.

And thirdly, we want to focus on serving God in all things. All things. Even the tragedies or the bad days. We want to serve God in everything that happens in our lives. Every situation we're asking, "God, how can I serve you in the midst of that?" That's really what God has called us to do. There is this special place in life in our hearts that God wants to put this peace. And this peace that the Holy Spirit provides for us in our hearts wants to grow.

I describe it this way to children when I'm working with kids. I say that if you're a Christian, God gives you this Spirit, but it's a supernatural quality. It's not just something you develop yourself. So it's like a sponge. He's in there moving around. The Holy Spirit is in your heart moving around. Do you know that? That's my picture anyway. He's moving around and there's a sponge and that sponge is soaking up all of the stuff that robs us of peace. That's what God wants to do inside our lives.

We can experience that peace not just when everything is peaceful outside, but even when the storm is going on. You know all the troubles, the problems that are going on outside. There's some place inside that can be peaceful because God is there. Because it's right where God wants us to be. When we're serving Him in the midst of the challenges and the struggles. Wherever you are today, right now you can experience peace. Don't put off the peace and say, "Oh I'll experience peace when..." No. We experience peace right now. Because peace is experienced when we trust the Lord in our current situation. He wants to do that.

I'm going to be so bold as to say there's only one answer to dealing with these trials, these problems, these bad days, these tragedies. That one answer is Jesus Christ. He is the one and only answer to the challenges we face. You cannot live life. You can try. You can go do all kinds of things to try to bring peace in your life and you'll have limited success. But when you have Jesus Christ living in your heart and you're serving Him, there's something that happens like nothing else. There's one complete answer and that's Jesus Christ. We want to serve Him.

I also want to say that I'm really grateful for you folks because when I go through a challenge in my own life, like my granddaughter Lenna's experience, I know there's a lot of you who are praying with me. I appreciate the family atmosphere that we share, the connectedness that we experience. The knowledge that I can come and I can share a request with you and I can pray. I was texting with a couple of guys independently this week and praying with them, electronically praying with them. God answered both of their prayers and God did some great things in the midst of that. I like being part of a fellowship like that.

It's not just about Sunday morning. If you come Sunday morning you're going to benefit a lot because we try to pack a lot into our hour and ten or fifteen minutes that we spend together. We pack a lot into that time. But it's about connecting with others, in small groups, and with other people outside of Sunday morning that allows us to be part of a fellowship, part of the body of Christ that God has designed. I just encourage you to take advantage of the gift of the church that God has provided for us, that we can enjoy those relationships together.

Yes, we will all experience suffering and pain in various levels this year. But we will know how to think about it. We will know how to respond to that in a way that's different than people who don't. I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities to broaden your theology, make it

deeper and higher so that you can respond well when you're challenged by those questions that say, "Does God love me? Is God trying to get me back for something? I'm no good. Life is worthless." Whatever. Those are the wrong things. God has some things that He wants us to be saying. And that is the broader theology, the right kind of theology. It's very practical in the way we come into our life situations.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I know that talking about pain in an academic way can appear to be uncaring. Certainly the question of the disciples seems to be a little bit uncaring as they're asking it. But I pray that you'd help us to experience compassion for each other and the pain that we're each trying to work through in our own lives. Lord, I know that some people today are experiencing a tremendous amount of broken-heartedness about their pain and so I'm asking that you would heal that. Shine the light of the world into that dark place. Lord, we don't know what this year will entail, but we do want to walk through this year with you and ask you to grow our faith deeper, grow us stronger. We thank you for the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives, to give us the peace that we need. And we're asking you to give that today. Lord, fall down on this room. Give us what we need in order to meet the challenges of this day for each of us. In Jesus' name, amen.