

## John 9:1-41

“What did he do to deserve this?” That’s what Jesus’ disciples want to know. The man sitting at their feet begging is blind. He was born this way. What a horrible misfortune! To be struck with blindness while still in your mother’s womb is a great evil. The disciples understood the relationship between cause and effect. Something caused this man’s blindness. Better said, someone caused it. The choices are obvious: either this man or his parents. And thus the question: “What did he, or they, do to deserve this?”

It must have been an awful sin. The greater the effect results from a greater cause. This is true in life and in society in general. A misdemeanor offense results in a light sentence. But a serious felony results in a greater punishment. This man, being born blind, was given a severe punishment to bear. Some great and terrible sin, therefore, must have been committed.

Our brains think the same way. *What did I do to deserve this?* We often mutter such words, or at least think them, when something in our life goes wrong. When someone suffers a brutal hangover after a night of excessive drinking, he knows full well what he did to deserve his punishing hangover. What about when a child is afflicted with cancer, or when a tornado destroys a family’s home? Are they correct in asking: “What did I do to deserve this?”

I’m sure the blind man in our text asked himself this question most days of his life. The answer, however, lay with God. The blind man did nothing to deserve his blindness. God did this to him. Wait a minute! Is God the cause of evil? No, but what we often see as evil is actually a great blessing. God blessed this man with the evil of blindness so that the works of God might be displayed in this man. Had this man not been born blind, there would have been no mighty work for Jesus to perform.

Let’s broaden this out even farther. Multitudes came to Jesus throughout His ministry afflicted with all sorts of evils: sickness, paralysis, leprosy, demon possession, and so forth. Think also of the storms which terrified the disciples on the Sea of Galilee that Jesus stilled. Think of those who died and were raised to life by Jesus. All of these evils - diseases, storms, death - demonstrated the mighty works of God as Jesus healed them, drove them out, calmed them, and raised them. These signs were blessings for those who saw in Jesus someone greater than just a worker of miracles.

Did you ever consider that God sends afflictions into your life to remind you that He has power over every evil affliction? Do we mutter, “What did I do to deserve this?” when a debilitating illness lays us flat, but fail to give God glory when He removes it from us?

There weren’t very many giving glory to God when Jesus healed the man who was blind. Certainly the Pharisees were not. It angered them that Jesus healed the man. We’re not told that the crowd of onlookers glorified God. Not even the man’s parents were jumping up and down thanking God. They were afraid, for if they gave glory to God, they could be ousted from the synagogue. The one who did give glory to God is the blind man; but not at first. At first all he knew is that a man by the name of Jesus cured him of his blindness. And now more evil came to him. This man who was healed was belittled; he was mocked; he was excommunicated from the synagogue. He surely left the Pharisees wondering, “What did I do to deserve this?” Nothing. He did nothing. God did this to him...all of it. God blessed him with evil on top of evil to save his eternal soul from death. For had this man not been ill-

treated by the Pharisees after he was healed, he would not have seen Jesus for who He truly is: his dear Lord and Savior.

God uses evil as a great blessing within the lives of those He loves. Are we to take credit for the blessings God sends our way? When some great blessing comes to us, are we right in asking, "What did I do to deserve this?" Of course not! Every blessing comes purely by God's grace. Then why should we ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" when bad things happen? Because such evils are actually blessings for us who are loved by God.

The greatest blessing in the blind man's life was the evil of being born blind; and then also being roughed up by the Pharisees for being healed. For through all this evil in his life, he was brought to know and love Jesus as the One who came to heal his sin-sick soul.

As He was hanging on the cross, did Jesus utter the words, "What did I do to deserve this?" Such evil came to Him...evil that you and I deserve. We are the ones who committed the great and terrible sins for which Jesus suffered terrible punishment. We are the cause. But the effect landed upon Jesus.

But even more...God's great mercy is the cause of Jesus' sufferings. For this great evil - that Jesus the Son of God suffered and died for us sinners - is the most profound and wonderful blessing. We should endure the evil punishment that our sins deserve. The truth that God sent His Son to endure this evil for you and me is unthinkable. But this He did. What did we do to deserve the great evil that fell upon Jesus? Nothing. It was God who caused this. It is purely by grace.

Who are we to decide which things in our life are blessings, and which things are evils? In fact, what we see as a blessing may instead be a great evil. And what we see as evil may be a blessing. Someone lands a great job which requires him to work every Sunday morning. Is this job a blessing from God? If he uses his job as an excuse to stay away from God's house, it is certainly a great evil.

A child is afflicted with cancer. Is this an evil in her life? The child I'm thinking of had a father who was not a Christian; but she was. Through her affliction, and eventual death, her dad was brought to Jesus, for the pastor came to her bedside often with the Gospel. After her funeral, her dad desired to become a member of the church. Her cancer, evil though it was, turned out to be a tremendous blessing.

Jesus, we're told, as He was passing by, saw the blind man. The blind man did not see Jesus. But Jesus took notice of him. He saw his blindness, this great evil, and He made it a wonderful blessing for him. Jesus takes notice of you, my friend. He is not blind to the evils in your life. He knows what you are enduring. He knows also that many times you and I complain about all the evils in our life. We see our struggles clearly, but as with the blind man, we do not see Jesus. Our eyes are closed as far as He is concerned.

The blind man did not have to see Jesus for Jesus to heal him. And so with you. Jesus comes today with healing for your body and soul. He comes with forgiveness, life, and salvation. Our eyes have been turned away from Him. He is not angry. He has mercy in His heart. He places His word of absolution in your ears. He forgives you, and you are forgiven. He draws you to His Supper and opens your eyes to His salvation for you in bread and wine. Through the great evil that came to Jesus on a cross, these blessings are given to you, and they are yours.

If God can make that great evil which happened to Jesus into such a wonderful blessing for you, can He not make any evil in your life a blessing as well? He can, my friend, and He does. Amen.