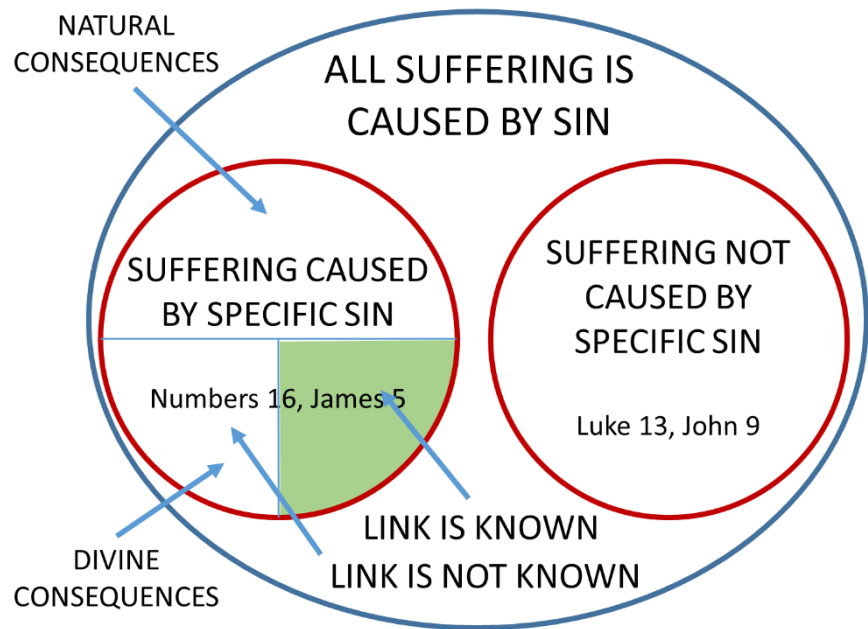


Play [video of blind children in Tibet](#).

Did you catch what the woman on the street said to the blind children? She said, “You deserve to eat your father’s corpse”. Even the 17 year-old boy was convinced that his blindness was caused by his sin—but from an earlier reincarnation of himself—due to bad karma. That was an option that the disciples certainly never considered!

If you recall from last week, the disciples had a very narrow view of suffering and sin. Compared to all of the possible causes of suffering, they only understood a small sliver of the total. They believed that suffering was caused, that the suffering had a divine cause and that the precise divine cause was knowable by Jesus. They were far from the actual truth. But then again, they were light years ahead of Buddhists.



All people throughout the world and throughout history have struggled with the topic of suffering. And most of them get it wrong most of the time. As Christians we must have a Biblical

theology of suffering. if we don't, we can't take comfort ourselves and we will never be able to comfort others.

There are six scenes to this drama. Let's take them one scene at a time.

Scene One—the blind man, Jesus and his disciples

1 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.

You can only imagine how big of a deal this healing was in the town. The formerly blind man perfectly summarizes the importance of the healing in verse 32. *Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.* This is a unique healing in Scripture. There is more than one resurrection from the dead but there is only this one example of a blind man receiving sight. I am not saying that one or the other is more difficult or important, but the fact remains that this is the only healing like this in all the Bible. God meant for it to stand out and make a statement. And it did make a huge statement, which brings us to scene two.

Scene Two—the man and his neighbors

8 The neighbors 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."

The first people to notice were "the neighbors." I love the fact that the ESV translates this word as "neighbors." Do you know what this Greek word actually means? It simply means "neighbors." My Greek is really rusty but this is a word I don't even remember ever learning. Maybe it was not immediately the talk of the entire town but the neighborhood was all abuzz.

Don't see their questions as a type of neighborhood trial. The trial before the Pharisees would come later. Their questions were simple and honest. "How were your eyes opened?" It was so amazing that many simply did not believe it. They thought it was just someone who looked the former beggar not the actual man himself. John records that "He kept saying, 'I am the man.'" Of course their eyes knew it was him but their heads told them it was not possible.

The real trouble started in verse 13.

Scene Three—the Trail before the Pharisees

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."

I don't see malice on the part of the neighbors. I don't get the impression they wanted to punish the man by taking him to the Pharisees. They were simply confused and shocked so they turned to the people they thought could help them. They were in the category of miracles so they needed input from the religious experts.

The man arrived in verse 13 but verse 14 is where the action really starts. *Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.* As soon as you read that, you're supposed to think, "[Dun, dun, dunnnnn!](#)" OK, here comes the real drama. So the man explained what had happened to him and immediately the Pharisees were divided. Half were convinced Jesus was a law-breaker since he healed on the Sabbath but the other half were impressed by the miraculous sign.

Their division raises an important point. While it is true that Jesus did miracles—at least in part—to prove that he was God, is a miracle sufficient in and of itself? In this case, the Pharisees were right to take stock in the miracle as proof that Jesus was not a "sinner." But in the last days in which we are living, we must be extremely careful when it comes to such things.

For example, Jesus taught, *if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect* (Matthew 24:23-24).

One prominent mark of false prophets is their ability to perform great signs and wonders. Most of what we see today in charismania is not just false prophets but also false miracles. Some claim that they have raised people from the dead. This is not to say that miracles are bad or that Jesus did not use them to substantiate his own deity. However, Jesus also warned of their danger.

Let me lay out a proper understanding of signs and wonders.

1. Miracles alone are not sufficient to save.

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus said, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" Some people will not be convinced no matter how many miracles are performed. Think about the Israelites. What did they wake up to every morning? The first thing they saw then walked out of their tents was a layer of manna on the ground. Then they looked up and saw the pillar of cloud over the Tabernacle. At night they would go to sleep with the pillar of fire as sort of a divine nightlight. Their clothes and sandals did not wear out during the forty years in the wilderness. Every single day of their lives was a living miracle but despite all of this, they were in continual rebellion.

2. Miracles are meant to help with belief.

In John chapter ten, Jesus said, *If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*” (John 10:37-38) And John 2:23 says, *“Many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name.”* Finally, we have Jesus’ answer to the disciple’s question. *“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.* The purpose of the man being born blind was so that the works of God would be put on display. Miracles, signs and wonders are meant to help you believe but are not sufficient to make you believe.

3. We must not demand or expect miracles.

In Matthew Jesus taught, *“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah* (Matthew 12:39).

This is what concerns me about far too many Christians. They not only seek out the miraculous, they are essentially demanding it. When they attend a worship service they have an expectation that “God will show up”—that signs and wonders will be manifested.

So there are plenty of abuses within the charismatic realm but is their demanding much different than ours? When God does not answer our prayer according to the way that we wanted it to happen, we can feel a tremendous sense of disappointment. I have talked with dozens of Christians over the years—and those who have left the church—who were mad at God. They say that God let them down; that God disappointed them somehow.

Now when they were praying the prayer they did not feel like they were making demands on God. It just felt like a prayer. But their disappointment at the lack of answered prayer shows that they actually did make a demand on God. The expectation was that the prayer would be answered. In reality they had a silent demand on God and God did not deliver the goods.

4. Real miracles can be accomplished by false prophets.

When Aaron threw his staff on the ground before Pharaoh, do you remember what happened? *“Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts”* (Exodus 7:11). In the end, Aaron’s snake devoured the snakes of the Egyptians, but nevertheless they performed the same miracle. Some say it was sleight of hand. Obviously, humans cannot do supernatural acts like this but demons can. Although by the power of God, Aaron’s snake prevailed over the Egyptians, I believe that this was a real miracle. This was a pivotal time in Israel’s history and Satan would have been throwing everything at Moses and Aaron. And as I already noted, Jesus said that false prophets and false Christs will come in the last days and perform great signs and wonders. These are not fake miracles, which is why they have such power to deceive people. They will be genuine miracles.

So the Pharisees who said, *“How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?”* were right in the case of Jesus. But if you and I encounter alleged miracles, we ought to be very skeptical and cautious. This is not to say that miracles, signs and wonders have ceased. I don’t believe the Bible teaches that. Some of you do, and that’s fine. I do believe they are possible today. Some of you speak in tongues in your private prayers. I believe they are possible but I am extremely cautious, because genuine signs will be manifested to deceive and lead you astray.

5. Most alleged miracles are fake.

This is another reason I am very cautious about the miraculous. Most of what goes on in churches and healing centers is as fake as a \$3 bill. Whatever you do, don't ever get caught up in that nonsense. It pulls you in emotionally but it is very dangerous.

Scene Four---Interrogation of the Parents

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."

The parents essentially pled the 5th amendment. I am not sure if Jewish Law had such a clause as pleading the 5th, but they did all that they could not to incriminate themselves. They don't show the courage of their son but we can't conclude that they were without faith. It's too early to tell. Their son barely knew anything about Jesus other than what he has heard, "the man called Jesus" so his parents may not have known much either.

Scene Five—Courage and Excommunication

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.

This is one of the best parts of this story. The man had tremendous courage and truly did "school" the Pharisees. The man repeatedly replied with wit and sarcasm. The fact is that he simply told it like it was. I just love his courage. There is nothing quite like this in the gospels. The only man who handles the Pharisees better was Jesus himself.

Let me challenge you in a particular form of courage—baptism. Baptism does not save you but it is a symbol that you have been buried in the ground with Christ—that's why we practice immersion. Immersion into the water symbolizes immersion into the ground at death. And when you come out of the water, it symbolizes your resurrection and new life in Christ.

Our baptism services—coming up on August 7—is always a highlight of my year. But baptism requires some courage. Yes, it takes courage to share your testimony in front of others, but the real courage is saying to the watching world—and at Jersey Valley where we do the baptisms, there are always other people watching—that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. Many of you have taken that step of obedience but many have not yet had the courage to do so. While we were not legalistic about it, we recommend that children be at least eleven years old before they get baptized. You only get baptized once in life so you want to make sure they fully understand what they are doing. But beyond the factor of age, what would prevent you from being baptized? If Christ is your Savior, there is absolutely no reason not to be baptized. An unbaptized believer is an oxymoron in the Bible. Such a person simply does not exist. So if Jesus is your Savior, what is holding you back?

The man showed amazing courage but he suffered mightily for it. This scene ends with the short phrase, “and they cast him out.” This was not merely sending him home but rather a permanent removal from Jewish religion and life. He was banished, blacklisted, something that humanly speaking, would have been extremely difficult to deal with. This was the precise verdict that his parents had wanted to avoid for themselves. His courage had cost him, as courage often does.

Scene Six—the Blind Man Finally “Sees”

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.

Why was the man 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.* Karen asked me a great question last Sunday after church. It’s a good question and one that I am surprised no one else asked. Karen wondered if I really meant to say that the works of God were displayed in the man through his blindness when the healing was the real power. She is absolutely right. Giving sight to the blind man was the ultimate way in which the works of God were displayed in his life. As the man himself said, *32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.* But unless he had been born blind, this miracle from God would not have been displayed. The suffering had to come prior to the miracle. That was the overall message from last week—that the works of God are displayed through our personal suffering. They are displayed even if you do not receive the miracle you are asking for. Many times the works of God are displayed in you because there is no miracle because you show God’s power and love through your suffering not because your suffering came to an end.

But even greater than the granting of the man’s physical sight was the granting of his spiritual sight. When Jesus announced that he was the light of the world, he proved his ability to heal spiritual blindness by healing the man’s physical blindness. Jesus announced in chapter eight that

he was the light of the world. But in that chapter, all he received in return was abuse, threats and attempted murder. Not one person eyes were opened.

And what makes this man's story so uniquely powerful is that he was *born* blind. Jesus healed other blind people but they all had lost their sight. At one time they could see but then became blind. But the man who was born blind perfectly illustrates our spiritual condition. You and I were born into spiritual darkness and blindness.

When Jesus found the man later he asked the most important question you will ever be asked: "*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*" There is a right answer and a wrong answer to this question and your life and your eternal destiny depend on your answer. Once the man knew that this was Jesus he immediately replied, "Lord, I believe" and began to worship Jesus right there. Especially in times of political upheaval and personal suffering, the question of belief in the Son of Man is infinitely more important than what happens to our physical bodies.

Last Sunday I told that that I was disturbed that FBI Director Comey announced his conclusion about Hillary Clinton on the day after the fourth of July. I'd like to finish with a story of another preacher who mentioned a heated political topic from the pulpit.



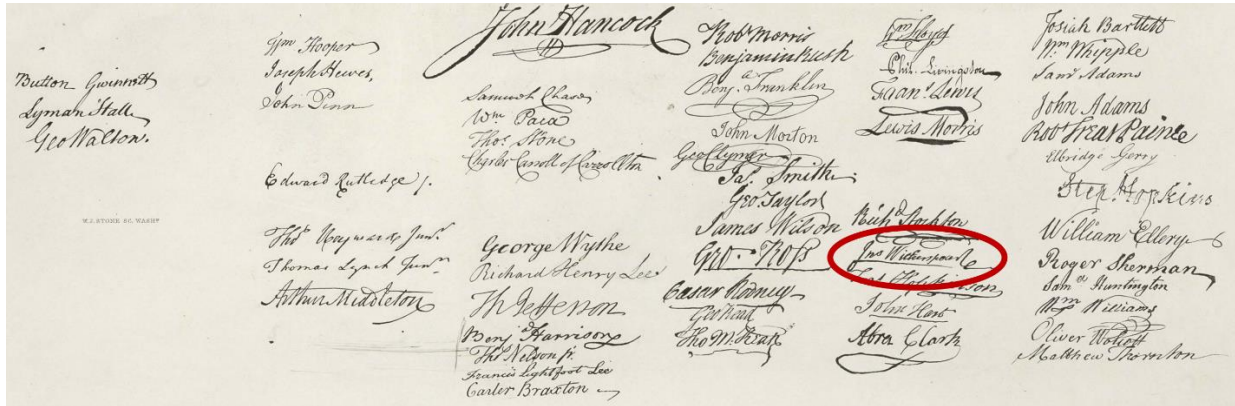
John Witherspoon was the president of what is now known as Princeton University. There is a statue of Witherspoon on the Princeton campus. He was also a pastor. All throughout this life he refused to allow politics into his pulpit. But one Sunday in the Spring of 1776, he preached a message called *The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men*. To this day, this very sermon is credited with helping the people get behind the independence movement from England. A fellow pastor told him that America was not yet ripe for

independence. In reply he said, "In my judgment, sir, we are not only ripe, but rotting."

In the second half of the sermon, he wrote...

You are all my witnesses, that this is the first time of my introducing any political subject into the pulpit. At this season however, it is not only lawful but necessary, and I willingly embrace the opportunity of declaring my opinion without any hesitation, that the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature.

There is not a single instance in history in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage.



A month after preaching this sermon, he was elected to the Continental Congress and two weeks later he became the only pastor to sign the Declaration of Independence. So imagine what these days must have felt like. A war with the most powerful nation in the world lie just around the corner. People were looking to Witherspoon for answers and for courage. In this sermon that strongly encouraged political independence, his opening topic was personal faith in Jesus Christ.

In the first place, I would take the opportunity on this occasion, and from this subject, to press every hearer to a sincere concern for his own soul's salvation... Suffer me to beseech you, or rather to give you warning, not to rest satisfied with a form of godliness, denying the power thereof. There can be no true religion, till there be a discovery of your lost state by nature and practice, and an unfeigned acceptance of Christ Jesus, as he is offered in the gospel. Unhappy they who either despise his mercy, or are ashamed of his cross! Believe it, "there is no salvation in any other. There is no other name under heaven given amongst men by which we must be saved." Unless you are united to him by a lively faith, not the resentment of a haughty monarch, but the sword of divine justice hangs over you, and the fulness of divine vengeance shall speedily overtake you. I do not speak this only to the heathen, daring profligate, or grovelling sensualist, but to every insensible secure sinner; to all those, however decent and orderly in their civil deportment, who live to themselves and have their part and portion in this life; in fine to all who are yet in a state of nature, for "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The fear of man may make you hide your profanity: prudence and experience may make you abhor intemperance and riot; as you advance in life, one vice may supplant another and hold its place; but nothing less than the sovereign grace of God can produce a saving change of heart and temper, or fit you for his immediate presence.¹

Let me close with Jesus' vital question. Do you believe in the Son of Man? If Christ is your Savior, then do not be surprised at these things. The Bible tells us that it will eventually get worse before it gets better.

Do not be afraid. God's providence and purposes will prevail. These things are happening that the works of God may be displayed in you. God has always used suffering, including political upheaval, to bring about the salvation of men and women.

Do you believe in the Son of Man? If not, then today could be the day of your salvation. Turn from your sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation.

Rich Maurer
July 17, 2016

¹ <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/sandoz-political-sermons-of-the-american-founding-era-vol-1-1730-1788--5>