

Sermon Outline

Introduction

- in response to suffering, we usually ask 'why?' and 'what caused this?'
- the disciples saw a philosophical problem and Jesus "saw a man."

I) **Their Question: Why was this man born blind?**

Notice what this question says about the wicked presuppositions of the human heart:

- that suffering must have a clear cause and I need to know exactly what it is
- that people who are not born blind are innocent and deserve good from God
- that suffering is retribution: you get what you deserve and it is wrong to try to change it
- that the cause of suffering is a simple, cause-and-effect equation

Conclusion: this wicked and self-righteous understanding of suffering implies blame, inferiority, fatalism and paralysis

II) **Jesus' Answer: "Neither"**

Notice how Jesus' answer changes our hearts and our hands:

- Jesus says 'neither': he completely rejects the retributive understanding of suffering
- Jesus says 'this happened': God never explains the cause of evil and suffering
- Jesus says 'so that': he reframes the problem of suffering from the wicked focus on cause to a godly focus on its purpose
- Jesus says 'we must do the work of God': he responds to suffering by calling his people to use their hands to work for good
- Jesus says 'night is coming': he transforms suffering by taking on the suffering of the cross

Conclusion: Jesus says he is 'the light of the world': he enlightens suffering by giving a true interpretation of it

Questions for Reflection this Week

1. Blaise Pascal said, "Wisdom returns us to childhood." How is Jesus' answer to the disciples a call to be childlike? What difference would this stature make in your response to suffering?
2. Jesus was the Suffering Servant who embraced suffering in order to conquer it. Moreover, God promises to conform his people to the image of his Son. Yet what in your own heart makes you often want to simply avoid suffering?
3. Jesus' promise of partnership with him in working to undo suffering for God's glory is backed up by his promise that nothing can ever separate you from his love. Yet many are fearful and bitter in response to their own sufferings. Why? What in your heart needs to change so that you readily read suffering as a cause for God to show his glory?