

## **God's Work in Healing and Suffering**

### **I Am the Light of the World**

At the beginning of the Gospel, John called Christ “the light of men” (1:4). In 8:12, we learn where John first heard the term *light* used in reference to Christ. The term came from Christ Himself as He addressed the Pharisees in the temple court near the place where offerings were put (8:13, 20). Historically, the Pharisees were aware of the messianic prophecies about light found in passages such as Is 42:6 and Dn 2:22. Therefore, speaking in terms the Jews would understand, Christ witnessed that He fulfilled these prophecies. However, Christ does not stop there. He followed His words “I am the light” by quickly adding “of the world” (Jn 8:12). By adding this phrase, Christ testified that He is the fulfillment of God’s plan for Jews and Gentiles alike (Is 49:6).

The second mention of Jesus as the “light of the world” occurs in Jn 9:5. This teaching prepares people for the healing of a blind man. Again, it is addressed to the Pharisees. Soon after calling Himself “the light of the world,” Christ offered proof of His power over blindness, fulfilling Is 29:18; 35:5. Christ, the light of the world, brought light into the blind man’s darkness.

If symbolism is involved, it is most likely that the blind man symbolized all sinners, who languish in darkness until the light (Christ) shines in their lives. The brilliance of His glory will open your eyes!

*Siloam. which means Sent.* Reminds the reader that Jesus is sent by the Father and the blind man was sent by Jesus—wordplay that brings the story together around the theme of sending

Lydia was a collage student. She was a good student, a talented musician with a great sense of humor, and she was very easy to talk to. For all of these reasons, Lydia had a bright future. Yet one thing seemed to dominate Lydia’s life. She wanted to see.

Lydia was born blind. For years, she sought healing for her blindness. She prayed that God would heal her. She visited the healing services of various churches and famous faith healers. But she always came away disappointed. Often she was told that God would heal her if she just had enough faith. She longed to have the faith the healers commanded. Outwardly, she remained confident that God would heal her. Inwardly, she wondered why God had not healed her.

Lydia’s story raises many questions about miracles and the pursuit of miracles. Clearly, the Bible teaches that God heals people either through providential care or through a miracle. However, this story will also show from Scripture that God often calls His people to endure suffering and loss in order “that the works of God might be displayed” (9:3).

### **Suffering and Healing**

Jesus healed many people during His ministry in Galilee. He did not do miracles for every person He met. Scripture tells us, “He did not do many mighty works there [in Nazareth], because of their unbelief” (Mt 13:58). When some people demanded miraculous signs, Jesus rebuked them (Mt 12:39; 16:4; Jn 6:26). He did not perform miracles on demand.

The apostle Paul testifies that Jesus specifically told him He would not be healed of his “thorn” in the flesh (2Co 12:7–10). Paul explains that the Lord let him suffer in order that Paul might remain humble. Several Old Testament examples show that God has even caused illness among His people. He caused Moses to have a leprous hand to demonstrate His miraculous power to Pharaoh (Ex 4:6–7). In Nu 12, God caused Miriam to have leprosy because she spoke against her brother Moses. In Nu 21:4–9, the Lord sent poisonous serpents among His people to punish them. He healed many, but many also died. And who could overlook the example of Job? He, too, suffered great loss in his family, health, and fortune. In this case, the Lord allowed Satan to test Job’s faith through suffering and ill health (Jb 1:6–2:10).

In view of these examples, it is too simple to say that God wants His people to enjoy perfect health. 1 We should not expect miracles on our terms. All these things are subject to God’s greater purposes. He allows suffering and brings healing where and when He wills.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

. (Jn 20:30–31).

### **The Man Born Blind**

No story shows God’s use of suffering and miracles more clearly than the story in Jn 9 of the man born blind. When the disciples saw the blind man, they asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (v 2). Jesus’ answer gives us a peek behind the scenes, a look at God’s purpose in Jesus’ miracles. “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents,” said Jesus, “but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (v 3). With these words, Jesus frees us from the notion that all physical conditions, sicknesses, or sufferings come as punishment from God. He introduces us to the great truth that God works His will and good purpose through our suffering and loss.

Take some time to read the rest of this story in Jn 9 to see how it all works out. Notice that Jesus does give sight to the man, but that is not the end of the man’s suffering. The Pharisees interrogate him. They throw him out of the synagogue. But in the midst of this new suffering, he testifies that God is at work through His Son, Jesus (vv 32–33). The man comes to know Jesus as the Messiah and the Savior (vv 35–38). The story shows how God works through suffering and miracles for this greater purpose—that the works of God might be displayed (v 3).

### **The Work of God**

When faith healers told Lydia that she did not have enough faith, they did not point Lydia to “the works of God,” but to her own works. They failed to encourage her to trust her Maker and His greater purpose above all earthly blessings. To be frank, they sinned against her, treating her like an unbeliever rather than as a dear child of the heavenly Father. They failed to see that God works through physical conditions, loss, and suffering as well as through miracles. They directed her away from the point of Jesus’ own suffering and miraculous resurrection: her salvation from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Do not be blinded by popular notions about miracles or suffering. Trust your Lord. Look for His blessings in the midst of all circumstances, and seek opportunities to glorify “the works of God” through Jesus, your Savior. Know that God works in your life right now whether you see 20/20 or are totally blind. Certainly pray for miracles. But also praise the Lord for working through more than miracles, for working through suffering, pain, loss, and even death.

On the cross, Jesus suffered in complete weakness to remove your spiritual blindness. At your Baptism, He washed your spiritual eyes and cleansed your soul. Through His suffering, He grants healing and all the blessings of heaven. Though now you may live in weakness, as did Job and the apostle Paul, the power of almighty God rests upon you and works through you. His “grace is sufficient for you” (2Co 12:9). God saves you and sustains you through Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives physical and spiritual sight—**faith**—to a man born blind, though the Pharisees accuse Jesus of violating the Sabbath and remain spiritually blind. We are all born spiritually blind, unable to see our sin and unwilling to do things God’s way. But through Baptism and the Word, God has delivered us from the domain of darkness through His beloved Son and has enlightened our hearts to know and follow Him.

**Prayer•** I praise You, O God, that though I once was blind, now I see! Lead me as I guide others to the truth of the Gospel. Amen.