

WE HAVE A PART IN GOD'S BIG STORY

Introduction

The principle of sowing and reaping is central to understanding the process of character formation and spiritual transformation in Christ.

*Sow a thought, reap an action;
sow an action, reap a habit;
sow a habit, reap a character;
sow a character, reap a destiny.*

It is important we sow thoughts that are true and to that end we have been thinking about four key thoughts:

God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

The two most important duties in my life are:

- 1) to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength; and*
- 2) to love my neighbor as myself.*

I will give an account to God for my life.

God loves me more than I can know.

Through Job's life experience we identified another key thought:

God can do with me whatever He chooses to fulfill His purposes.

This was God's answer to Job's accusation that God was wrong for allowing Job, who had lived an upright life, to suffer evil.

The truth of the matter is that because

God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

He rightfully and justly

...can do with Job (me) whatever He chooses to fulfill His purposes.

Transition

We encounter this fact in the ministry of our Lord Jesus. Please turn with me to John 9. The Gospel of John was written by the Apostle John, one of the inner three of Jesus' disciples. John stated very clearly in John 20:30-31:

John 20:30-31

*³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but 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.
(English Standard Version)*

John included in his biography of Jesus Christ those signs which would lead the readers of this book to conclude that Jesus is the Christ, that is, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament to come and deliver God's people. The prophet Isaiah was one through whom God had revealed the coming of a Messiah. Isaiah predicted that in messianic

times the Messiah would give sight to the blind.¹ Here, in John 9, Jesus takes the initiative to heal a man born blind, but what really makes this miracle stand out is that in the previous chapter Jesus had proclaimed Himself to be the "Light of the world." (8:12). Let's pick up the story with John 9:1

Story

John 9:1-7

¹As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ²And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

(English Standard Version)

An interesting element of this incident is that Jesus initiated contact with this man. There is no record that this man knew Jesus was present or that he cried out for mercy or healing. Jesus initiated this encounter.

The disciples posed a theological question to Jesus. The disciples seem to have believed that sin directly causes all suffering. If this is true, how could a person be born with a handicap? Did this man sin in his mother's womb (as some rabbi's taught was possible) or had his parents sinned? Jesus answered that neither this man nor his parents sinned. Instead the problem existed so that God could display His glory in the midst of this man's difficulties.

This man's situation was an occasion for Jesus to do the works which the Father sent Him into the world to accomplish. This man's blindness was the occasion for Jesus to manifest that He is the light of the world both physically and spiritually.

Another piece of information we need to keep in mind is that this occurred on the Jewish Sabbath. By making clay with His spit, Jesus was violating the Rabbinic regulations against kneading clay on the Sabbath. This violation of Rabbinic tradition became the point of controversy with Jesus' enemies. Jesus sent the man to wash in the pool of Siloam which means Sent and the man went home seeing!

John 9:8-12

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He 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." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

(English Standard Version)

¹ Isa 42:1-9, 61:1-2 Septuagint; Luke 4:16-30.

People had a hard believing that the man who could now see was the same man who used to sit and beg. When they asked him how it happened he gave them a simple account that Jesus made mud, put on his eyes and told him to go and wash it off and when he did, he could see. Its interesting to note that at this point in the story he referred to the Lord as *the Man called Jesus*.

John 9:13-17

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵So 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." ¹⁶Some 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. ¹⁷So 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."

(English Standard Version)

Since this miracle was so unusual, the people brought the man to the Pharisees, who were highly respected in religious matters. To the Pharisees, healing and making kneading clay violated the Sabbath Law. Since Jesus "violated" the Sabbath, some of the Pharisees concluded that Jesus could not be from God. Others were so impressed by the miracle of the man's healing that they believed God had to have done it through Jesus. So the Pharisees were divided in their opinion.

We need to understand the intensity of this incident and it is in relation to the keeping of the Sabbath as practiced by devout Jews. To illustrate how seriously devout Jews took the law to keep the Sabbath holy listen to this:

"In 167 B.C. Antiochus' army put a stop to the Jew's sacrifices. The people of Jerusalem, under the leadership of Matthias, revolted and then fled to the desert. Their hiding place was soon discovered, and the pursuing soldiers demanded that they repent and surrender.

The Jews refused to give in, but they also refused to fight because it was the Sabbath. They would not block the entrances to their caves or fight in any way. Approximately 1000 men, women and children died without resistance, because they considered the Sabbath sacred."

The death of 1,000 people resulted from the sincere conviction that the Sabbath should not be violated. Although this event happened nearly two centuries before the healing of the blind man in John chapter 9, it does give us a feel for the intensity of the conviction of devout Jews that the Sabbath could not be broken. As a matter of fact, the intervening years between the days of Matthias and Christ did not weaken this conviction, but strengthened it.

The sect which especially set out to protect the Sabbath was the Pharisees. In the light of many pagan forces at work to corrupt the purity of the Jewish faith, the Pharisees took upon themselves the task of keeping Judaism pure of foreign and pagan influence. As a result, the Pharisees were separatists (the word Pharisee means separated). Initially devout and well-motivated, this sect became more and more rigid and legalistic. The central issue for the Pharisees was the preservation of the Sabbath.

“The Jerusalem Talmud contained 64 pages, and the Babylonian Talmud 156 double pages, with specific rules on observing the Sabbath.”

The Pharisees succeeded in turning the Sabbath rest into a burden, rather than a blessing.

“The scribes drew up a list of forty works save one which were forbidden and which, if done knowingly, rendered the offender liable to stoning, and if done inadvertently demanded a heavy sin-offering in expiation. These thirty-nine works in the technical language of the legalists were called ‘fathers,’ and the subsections of derivative pieces of labour were called ‘descendants.’”

For example, plowing was a ‘father’ prohibited on the Sabbath. Digging was a ‘descendant.’ Dragging a chair on the ground would make a kind of furrow, and therefore was forbidden, but dragging a chair on a hard surface was permitted. Another ‘father’ was carrying a load, and this prohibition was attended by a host of ‘descendants.’ To wear an unneeded garment was prohibited. A tailor had to leave his needle and thread at home, and a scribe could not carry his pen. One matter which caused a great deal of discussion was what a man could do if his home caught on fire on the Sabbath. Nothing could be carried out, but clothing, if it were put on one piece at a time, could be worn outside, taken off, and then one could return for another garment. People must have come from miles around to watch the spectacle as the house of a devout Jew burned down!

Although we have only scratched the surface of the issue, you can easily see why our Lord viewed the regulations of the Pharisees as a heavy burden upon the Jews (cf. Matthew 11:28-30; 23:1-4). Those who were skilled in the Law also were skillful in devising ways to circumvent most of the meticulous rules which they had laid down. Worst of all, these traditions of the Pharisees were so intertwined with the Old Testament Law that to violate these traditions was viewed as breaking the Law of God.

Such was the backdrop for this healing of the blind man recorded in John chapter nine.²

Perhaps now we can better grasp that the healing of this man born blind was rocking the world of these Pharisees. The Pharisees were divided amongst themselves about what to think of Jesus. The healed blind man’s opinion was that Jesus was a prophet like the Old Testament prophets who had performed miracles which marked them out as God’s men.

John 9:18-23

¹⁸The 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 ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹But 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

² Bob Deffinbaugh, *The Light of the World* (John 9:1-41), www.bible.org

was to be put out of the synagogue.) ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

(English Standard Version)

The Pharisees, who in this paragraph are referred to as the Jews, still would not believe that this man had been blind so they sent for his parents. His parent affirmed that he was their son and that he had been born blind, but because they were afraid of being excommunicated from the synagogue, they refused to give an opinion about how he was healed or who healed him. Persecution for being a follower of Jesus already existed at this time.

John 9:24-34

²⁴So 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." ²⁵He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He 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?" ²⁸And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

(English Standard Version)

The Pharisees tried to pressure the healed man to change his testimony about Jesus: Give glory to God was a call to admit his guilt in siding with Jesus, whom they were now clearly rejecting as a sinner and not a prophet much less the promised Messiah.

You have to admire the chutzpah of the healed man; he may have been blind and a beggar, but he was sharp and he wasn't going to be intimidated by the Pharisees. In fact, he gave better than he got. He didn't back down: *I was blind, but now I see!*

When the Pharisees asked him to go over his story again, the healed man became impatient. He basically dismantled their thought process and exposed the fact that they were not seeking the truth; they were committed to their Sabbath laws and to rejecting Jesus. Upstaged by a beggar, the Pharisees could only insult him again and throw him out of the synagogue.

John 9:35-41

³⁵Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

(English Standard Version)

Jesus took the initiative again and found the healed man after he had been cast out by the Pharisees. In this exchange, Jesus revealed to the man that He was the promised Messiah and the man believed Him and worshiped Him.

What did Jesus mean when He said:

“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”

Jesus meant He came to pronounce decisions on the ungodly, like a judge. The blind are those who come to Jesus for salvation admitting their helplessness and inability. Those who see and become blind are those who believe they know the truth and have no need of Jesus. Their self righteousness and arrogance blinds them to the evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Light of the World. Jesus does not condemn them by making them blind; they blind themselves by rejecting Jesus.

Conclusion

The healing of the man born blind is an illustration to us of the truth that:

because God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, He can do whatever He chooses with a person's life in order to accomplish His purposes.

Now there are several points of push back when we think about this truth. For starters, we want to claim that there is some standard of fairness that guarantees to us some basic rights that even God must not violate. But think about it – it is God who made us with the faculty of sight. He could have made us without the faculty of sight. Would He have been wrong to make us without the faculty of sight? Of course not, there was no standard design to which God was obligated to make the human body. Whatever the human body is, it is precisely because God designed it that way. Now we have come to expect that every human being should be able to see. When a person is not able to see it is a hardship; it is very sad. But if the God Who created us decides that a certain person is going to be born without the ability to see, has God sinned or done evil? No, for as the analogy goes, God is the Potter and we are the clay.

Second, this idea that God can do with my life whatever He chooses to accomplish His purposes makes us feel vulnerable if we are not convinced of two things: that God loves me more than I can know and that I am part of God's epoch battle plan to free this planet from sin and death to bring it back to life. Just think what was accomplished through this man who was born blind in order that the works of God could take place in the through his life. Personally, this man experienced a miraculous healing and far greater, he met the promised Messiah. This man was used by God to expose the hypocrisy and misguided nature of Pharisaism that held thousands in bondage. Think about the millions of people who have been healed of the spiritual blindness by reading or hearing of this man's experience. Do you realize that his story has helped untold numbers of people come to faith in Jesus Christ over the past two thousand years? What on the face of it looks like a tragedy has resulted in great victory and expansion of the Kingdom of God!