

# Why Lord, Why?

## Slide 1 |

I grew up in a family of mathematicians. They love numbers and they love maths. When I ask them why they love maths so much, they tell me it is because they can be 100% confident, they have the right answer.

You can work on a maths problem for ages, and if you're not sure whether you've worked it out right, you can check to make sure you followed the right formula to come to the right conclusion.

Many people can become very mathematical or formulaic in their understanding of how life operates.

Sometimes this formulaic or mathematical way of thinking can creep into our understanding of how God relates to us, or why life turns out the way it does.

We can begin to use formulas to answer all the WHY questions that seem to arise in our lives.

'Why did this go wrong?'

'Why did it have to happen to me?'

'They are such a good person, why did something so bad happen to them? Surely they don't deserve such bad luck.'

When we struggle to answer the 'why' questions, it is very easy to fall into a formulaic way of understanding how faith and God work.

We fall into a trap of over-simplifying things until it becomes an easy to explain formula:

*If I do good, follow all the rules, and not do anything too evil or wrong –  
God will bless me and I'll escape His judgement of pain and suffering.*

**Transition |** That is what is going on in today's Gospel passage, which is what we will concentrate on today. There is an enormous amount we can learn from all the different parties who were involved in this remarkable incident.

There are examples to follow, and examples NOT to follow.

## Slide 2 | What do we learn from Jesus?

The passage opens with Jesus walking along.

Now Jesus was not just mopping along, on a Sunday walk. He had just escaped a violent confrontation with the Pharisees – so violent that they had picked up stones to throw at him – yet his father had protected him.

Then we read that Jesus saw a man who had been blind from birth and whose disability had forced him to beg from others.

The first thing we learn from Jesus is that even though he could have been completely rattled by the previous violent confrontation, Jesus's focus was still on noticing a person who one else would normally notice.

How much do we notice people who society shuts away and hides?

Secondly, we learn that Jesus knew his purpose in noticing the blind man. Jesus knew he was on a mission from his Father. His mission was to fulfill the work His Father had purposed him to do.

Are we also aware of fulfilling the mission God has for us?

Thirdly, we learn from Jesus that he carried out God's assigned tasks with a sense of urgency. *"We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us."*

Lastly, we learn from Jesus that God's mission impacts everyone around us *"While I am here in the world, I am the light of the world."*

Every encounter Jesus walked into had purpose.

Jesus was constantly looking for how "the power of God was going to become evident in this person's life."

### **Slide 3 | What do we learn from the blind man? (v6-7)**

As we get to know this man who had been born blind, we learn three significant things from his life and how he responded to Jesus identity.

Firstly, we learn that the man was obedient, following Jesus instructions exactly as he was told.

This humble man obeyed – even though he probably did not understand 'why' Jesus had chosen this method of healing.

Secondly, we learn from this humble man, that although all his life he had been physically blind, he had spiritual eyes to see Jesus' divine origin. When confronted by the Pharisees, he had the boldness to declare, *"if this man were not from God, he couldn't have done anything."*

Thirdly, we learn there is no need to over complicate our understanding of how God relates to his children he says, *“God ... is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will.”*

Perhaps it was this simple faith which gave this humble man a desire to believe in the one who had noticed him and healed him.

#### **Slide 4 | What do we learn from the disciples? (v1-5)**

Let's now see the encounter from the perspective of the disciples. In many ways we can be a bit like the disciples - they continually asked questions of Jesus as they followed him along the dusty roads of Galilee.

Unfortunately, the first two things we learn from the disciples, is what NOT to do.

As soon as the disciples noticed that Jesus had paused to consider the blind man, they regarded the man's disability as a theological dilemma.

And in doing so, they reveal a theological mindset or paradigm, that many Christians even today, often fall into.

The disciples asked Jesus “why was this man born blind? *Was it because of his own sins or his parent's sins?*”

Now, before we come down hard on the disciples, it is very easy to understand why they thought sin was the explanation for all sickness and physical disability.

When we read the OT law, we see God very clearly delineating between righteous behaviour and sinful, rebellious behaviour. He very clearly describes the consequences for rebellion and disobedience to His righteous law.

By the time the Jewish rabbis had interpreted and further clarified God's law, adding hundreds upon hundreds of clarifications and additions, a very clear distinction had been made separating the righteous from the wicked.

Consider these proverbs:

*The wicked are trapped by their own words, but the righteous escape such trouble. (Pr 12:13)*

*An evil person is held captive by their own sins, they are ropes that hold them captive. (Pr 5:22)*

And the words of Eliphaz from Job:

*Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble, reap it. (Job 4:7-8)*

Do you see how it is very easy to create a very neat – overly formulaic – heavily clichéd - understanding of why certain people suffer pain or disability – while other people walk in God’s blessing and prosperity? It is easy to think – well, it must be because of their sin? Or, if not their sin, it must be the sin of their parents.

Even as the world is overwhelmed and fearful of a plague that is rapidly spreading, it would be easy for us to regard this pandemic as God’s judgement for the sins of the people. If the epi centre of the infection begins in one nation, we could begin to say to each other.” Well, I think it must be because of this .....

It is human nature to try to work out WHY something is the way it is.

We want an explanation, that’s why we cry “Why, Lord why?”

But is God’s dealings with us that simple? Can we ever judge based on what we see externally?

Indeed, we learn from Jesus answer to the disciples’ question, sin is not always the explanation for people’s pain, disabilities or suffering.

### **Slide 5 | What do we learn from the blind man’s neighbours? (v8-12)**

Well, Jesus healing of the man’s sight caused quite a significant commotion, all the neighbours gathered – the person who had previously not been noticed, was now the talk of the town.

**Slide 6 |** But they really struggled with acknowledging a miracle had even taken place.

When I was teaching Scripture in High School, the kids would often ask me if I had even seen a miracle. And when I told them I had or showed them a video of a miracle on YouTube, immediately they tried to pull every detail apart, rationalising the miracle until they concluded nothing remarkable had ever taken place.

It is a bit like this when the blind man’s neighbours learned of his new sight. What do we learn from them?

Are we looking for God’s presence and power occurring in our midst, or do we try to find a rational explanation for everything that happens? Do we explain remarkable things – do we just call them coincidences. Perhaps we should heed the words of one of the greatest scientists

*“coincidences are God’s way of staying anonymous.”*

### **Slide 7 | What do we learn from the blind man’s parents? (v18-23)**

When the blind man was brought to the Pharisees, they called the man’s parents. In them we find another example NOT to follow.

We learn how powerful fear can be, preventing us from boldly ascribing worship to God. God is at work all around us, in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones.

Are we letting fear blind us from seeing God at work?

### **Slide 8 | What do we learn from the Pharisees? (vs 13-41)**

From the Pharisees that we learn several very important lessons.

The main priority of the Pharisees was to determine Jesus origin.

If Jesus was a prophet, as the blind man, Nicodemus, and even the Samaritan Woman last week proposed – then he was from God.

But how could a prophet break the Sabbath law?

More so, the Pharisees knew that Jesus spoke of himself as though he was much more than a prophet. Already, before this incident, Jesus had called himself the Light of the World, and had used the name “I AM” for himself. Prophets don’t say things like that.

Yet their stubbornness of heart, their spiritual blindness, prevented them from seeing Jesus divinity.

We learn much from the Pharisees about spiritual blindness.

Firstly, the Pharisees believed they were the only ones in Israel with spiritual sight. That’s why they say, *“You were born a total sinner, and you are teaching us?”*

Do we believe we are the only ones how can rightly interpret God’s word?

It was the Pharisees’ belief in their unique ability to see and understand the things of God, that developed spiritual arrogance and pride, a ‘hardness of heart’, which caused their spiritual blindness.

Secondly, it is their stubborn refusal to acknowledge Jesus' divine origin, which prevented them from discerning Jesus real identity, and discerning God's presence in their midst.

Thirdly, we learn that if we want our spiritual eyes to be opened, we need to be humble enough to admit to our own blindness.

Jesus said "If you would admit your blindness, I would heal you and you would not come into judgment. But your stubborn rejection of Me keeps you in your sins."

**Slide 9 |** So, what have we learnt?

- From Jesus we learnt to notice those who society tends to ignore.
- From Jesus we learn that we too have been given an assignment from God, which should be carried out with a sense of urgency and dedication.
- From the man who was healed we learn humility and obedience.
- From the man's neighbours to learn it is dangerous to rationalise every coincidence or incident in which God's power is manifest – this creates spiritual blindness.
- From the man's parents we learn how fear prevents us from ascribing worship to God.
- From the disciples we learn that God's relationship with his followers can never be reduced to a simple formula
- From the Pharisees we learn the danger spiritual pride and arrogance can have in blinding us from seeing God's presence amongst us.