



Night is Coming

Summary and Goal

Jesus demonstrated His power to heal, restoring sight to the blind. In doing so, He emphasized the urgency of offering the hope of the gospel to those in darkness because the night was at hand.

Main Passages

John 9:1-4

Session Outline

1. Don't Miss People (John 9:1-2)
2. Our Suffering Isn't Wasted (John 9:3)
3. Night is Coming (John 9:4)

Theological Theme

Judgment is coming, and all will stand before the Lord on that day. Christians have the light of Christ dwelling within us—the Holy Spirit—and we are called be children of light as night is coming.

Christ Connection

Christ is the light of the world, and He alone has the power to transfer us from darkness to light. He commanded His disciples to spend our days proclaiming that light to the world.

Missional Application

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is coming back soon, which means we must live with a sense of urgency to impact the world with His boundless gospel.

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30-31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God's people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve ("the disciple Jesus loved," 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24-25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of "the disciple Jesus loved" with Peter in 13:23-24; 18:15-16; 20:2-9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3-4; 8:14-25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John's Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1-4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John's lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas's confession of Jesus as "my Lord and my God" in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter's martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1,14,18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John's Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

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Session Plan

Night is Coming

? For Further Discussion

How is time management a spiritual issue? How does both a lack of urgency and a hesitancy to change impact your relationship with God? How does it impact your ability to live out God's mission?

Introduction

- ? What is one regularly occurring task that you often put off instead of doing immediately? What is it about that task that makes you procrastinate?
- ? In general, what are some reasons people might give for putting things off until tomorrow?

In today's text, we will read about Jesus traveling with His disciples, as they came upon a man who was blind from birth. While the disciples took the opportunity to ask questions, Jesus met the man where He was. He would demonstrate His deeper purpose, even in the man's suffering. He would also remind the disciples that there was a day coming when darkness would be upon them. The cross loomed long over Christ's ministry and He didn't want His followers to miss any moment they had to minister with Him.

1. Don't Miss People (John 9:1-2)

It is interesting that in seeing this blind man, the disciples' inclination was not to interact with him, but to inquire about him. We can't assume too much about the situation, but they seemingly did not make any motions to help or minister to him. Jesus would eventually bend down and heal him (vv. 6-7). They only had questions and, it seems, very little compassion.

- ? Why did the disciples assume the man's blindness was the result of some sin on his parents' part?
- ? What do you notice about the disciples' interaction with the blind man? What was lacking in their interaction?
- ? Has there been a time that you were hesitant to minister or interact with someone that you felt led to care for? Were you obedient to meet them, or did you pass them by? Why? What did God teach you through that experience?

2. Our suffering isn't wasted (John 9:3)

Jesus' response to the disciples about this blind man should cause us to pause and reflect on our own pain and suffering. As believers, Jesus was clear that suffering isn't so much a matter of "if" but "when" (John 16:33). The brokenness of this world means that there will be suffering regardless. But hearing these words from Jesus means that suffering isn't wasted. This is true even when physical ailments are not healed as we would hope and suffering isn't eased in the way we would like. When our circumstances aren't "fixed" according to our own definition, God can still be glorified in our struggle. He can still demonstrate His mighty works through our life.

- What is your response to Jesus' statement about the man? What does this tell us about God's character?
- How do Jesus' words in verse 3 affect your perception of your own suffering?
- Where are you currently facing the reality of suffering in the world? How does this verse speak into that reality?

3. Night is Coming (John 9:4)

Jesus' response took a bit of an ominous turn in verse 4. Having told the disciples that the man's blindness was a means for God's glory to be worked in him, He also gave reason for urgency. He would soon work in this situation by healing the blind man and restoring his sight. Jesus would demonstrate the kind of work He had in mind.

- What are the "works" that God wants us to accomplish before the night comes?
- What was Jesus referring to when He says, "night is coming" (v. 4)? Read verse 5 to help you answer.
- What do these verses teach us about time and our management of it?
- Do you live as though Jesus truly is the Light of the world or is He just good news in times of need? How has this impacted your sense of urgency to have gospel conversations with those around you?

Conclusion

- How are you encouraged by this passage when it comes to suffering? challenged?
- How might your use and view of time need to change in light of this passage?

? For Further Discussion

Do you feel a sense of urgency to share your faith with those who don't know Jesus? If not, what do you think has contributed to that? How are you challenged to step out more?



Expanded Session Content

Night is Coming

Introduction

- ❓ What is one regularly occurring task that you often put off instead of doing immediately? What is it about that task that makes you procrastinate?
- ❓ In general, what are some reasons people might give for putting things off until tomorrow?
- ❓ How is time management a spiritual issue? How does both a lack of urgency and a hesitancy to change impact your relationship with God? How does it impact your ability to live out God's mission?


We often assume we will have another chance. We think tomorrow will be another opportunity to get our hearts right, mend a relationship, make an important decision, or get rid of a sinful habit. Even for the planners and Type A personalities, there are still things that get put on the back burner. Often this isn't with ill intention or malice. We simply fail to see the value in what we are putting off. We fail to see the need to make the time for it. But the Bible teaches us over and over again that God is looking for immediate obedience from His people. The call to obey isn't a call at our earliest convenience or when we accomplish everything else on our list. This is a critical time in the life of Jesus' church, calling for urgency and audacious faith in making disciples.

Session Summary

In today's text, we will read about Jesus traveling with His disciples, as they came upon a man who was blind from birth. While the disciples took the opportunity to ask questions, Jesus met the man where He was. He would demonstrate His deeper purpose, even in the man's suffering. He would also remind the disciples that there was a day coming when darkness would be upon them. The cross loomed long over Christ's ministry and He didn't want His followers to miss any moment they had to minister with Him.


This text infuses hope into the hopelessness of this world. Where we see pain and suffering, God desires to work in and through us. Jesus declared His light in the darkness around Him and He calls to join Him in that mission—bringing sight to the blind while there is still daylight.

1. Don't Miss People (John 9:1-2)

 Why did the disciples assume the man's blindness was the result of some sin on his parents' part?

When we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, or when those close to us are in pain, it is normal for us to want answers. When something tragic happens, we look for explanations. Why? What caused this? It was no different for the disciples. As they were walking along with Jesus, they came upon a man who had been blind since birth. In their day, people with physical abnormalities or disabilities were generally outcast. This blind man was likely begging. His situation was pitiful to the disciples as they passed by him. So they looked for reasons that would have led to his disability.

In Jewish tradition, people assumed that individuals born with physical ailments suffered because of sin in their lives or the lives of their parents. Though this was a false assumption, this was likely to avoid charging God with inflicting evil or pain on an innocent person.¹ The disciples were merely reflecting the views of their culture, but Jesus saw this man's condition differently. They saw only two possible explanations for his suffering, but Jesus had eyes to truly see.

 What do you notice about the disciples' interaction with the blind man? What was lacking in their interaction?

It is interesting that in seeing this blind man, the disciples' inclination was not to interact with him, but to inquire about him. We can't assume too much about the situation, but they seemingly did not make any motions to help or minister to him. Jesus would eventually bend down and heal him (vv. 6-7). They only had questions and, it seems, very little compassion.

We must be careful to not imitate the disciples in this way. There might be someone who walks into our church who doesn't "fit the mold," or someone with a disability that makes us uncomfortable. Whoever it might be that we find on our path, we should be careful to meet them where they are instead of seeking to deem them worthy of receiving help or not. We should always use discernment, and always be wise in our interactions, but we always have the opportunity to meet people with grace.

Suffering for Sin?

This wasn't the only time Jesus was asked a similar question about sin causing suffering. In Luke 13:2, 4 some people asked Jesus about others who had died in tragic circumstances. Jesus' response to both was that the people did not suffer because of their own sin. But Jesus also reminded them, if they themselves did not repent, they would also experience death. Suffering is not always tied to a specific sin, but without repentance we will be left in the ultimate suffering of eternity apart from God.

- ❓ Has there been a time that you were hesitant to minister or interact with someone that you felt led to care for? Were you obedient to meet them, or did you pass them by? Why?
- ❓ What did God teach you through that experience?

2. Our Suffering Isn't Wasted (John 9:3)

The disciples assumed the man's condition was a result of either his parents' or his own sin. It was the only explanation they had for his circumstances. But Jesus was quick to clarify that it wasn't this man or his family's sin that caused his blindness. Jesus said this man had been born blind to prepare him for such a time that the work of God may be displayed through him. This man wasn't blind because of sin, but in order that God's power would be mightily demonstrated through his life and in his body.

- ❓ What is your response to Jesus' statement about the man? What does this tell us about God's character?


Jesus would say the same thing about Lazarus two chapters later. After Mary and Martha came to Jesus, desperate for Him to heal their brother, Jesus responded by saying, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). A few days later, Jesus miraculously raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the tomb four days. Lazarus had suffered and those closest to him had grieved deeply for him. But God knew all the while that He would raise Lazarus back to life. He knew that He would use Lazarus to demonstrate His glory and power. This did not negate the suffering. Jesus knelt down and wept with Mary even as He knew that He was about to raise Lazarus. But it did bring even the suffering and grief of death under Christ's lordship and power to redeem. Nothing is outside of His purview—nothing is out of reach for Him to buy back for His glory and our good. This is the God we serve. He is, indeed, a God who is acquainted with a deeper grief than we will ever know—having sacrificed His own Son that we might be reconciled to Him.

- ❓ How do Jesus' words in verse 3 affect your perception of your own suffering?

Jesus' response to the disciples about this blind man should cause us to pause and reflect on our own pain and suffering. As believers, Jesus was clear that suffering isn't so much a matter of "if" but "when" (John 16:33). The brokenness of this world means that there will be suffering regardless. But hearing these words from Jesus means that suffering isn't wasted. This is true even when physical ailments are not healed as we would hope and suffering isn't eased in the way we would like. When our circumstances


aren't "fixed" according to our own definition, God can still be glorified in our struggle. He can still demonstrate His mighty works through our life.

A text like this can open the door for more questions about suffering and brokenness in the world. Sometimes we can get caught up in trying figure out the details about what God causes, what He allows, and the meaning of it all. We could probably spend the rest of our days wrestling with those questions to never find an answer that fully satisfies. But there are a few things we can know for sure. We live in a broken, fallen world. Sin, suffering, and pain are a result of that. And yet, we serve a God who can take anything—brokenness, evil, pain, suffering—and use it for His good (Gen 50:20). If anything, this should deepen our longing for the life to come—when all will be set right by God.


 Where are you currently facing the reality of suffering in the world? How does this verse speak into that reality?

3. Night is Coming (John 9:4)

Jesus' response took a bit of an ominous turn in verse 4. Having told the disciples that the man's blindness was a means for God's glory to be worked in him, He also gave reason for urgency. He would soon work in this situation by healing the blind man and restoring his sight. Jesus would demonstrate the kind of work He had in mind.

 What are the "works" that God wants us to accomplish before the night comes?

A few chapters earlier, Jesus made clear that He only did as He was instructed by His Father in heaven—the one who sent Him. In John 4:34, when offered food, Jesus said that His "food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Throughout John's gospel we see Jesus reminding people that He didn't have His own agenda, only His Father's (John 5:30; 6:38; 14:31). He was given a mission during His ministry on earth—to share the good news of the gospel. He demonstrated in word and deed that He was the Messiah who would rescue and redeem God's people. That mission ultimately took Him to the cross. As we follow in His steps, we are to follow the path He laid for us and the call He has given us—to spend our lives making disciples of Him.


 What was Jesus referring to when He says, "night is coming" (v. 4)? Read verse 5 to help you answer.

Jesus referred to Himself as the light of the world in John 9:5. When He came to earth, He made the invisible God visible, and He brought spiritual sight to a world that had previously lived in darkness. But when He died on the cross, it seemed like night had come. Through the Holy


Romans 8:18-25

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Spirit, Jesus' light now shines on us—we shine for God in a dark world that desperately needs His light. However, Jesus' warning in verse 4 still holds true. The words “night is coming,” from John 9:4, should drive us today more than ever before. Judgment still lies ahead, when every person will stand before Him. Just as Jesus urged His disciples to be committed to continually leading the lost into the light, so He urges us. The call and the command remain.

 What do these verses teach us about time and our management of it?

We all think we have more than enough time. In the same way we procrastinate with small things, we often assume there will be time for us to get around to bigger things later. But Jesus made sure to emphasize that we don't have endless amounts of time. He would say later in John's gospel, when the people were disputing that He would die, “The light will be with you only a little longer. Walk while you have the light so that darkness doesn't overtake you. The one who walks in darkness doesn't know where he's going” (12:36). Our call is to lead others to repent and believe while they still have the opportunity. That opportunity will not last forever. We have the light of Christ within us as the Holy Spirit resides in us as believers. We have the light in us. Let that sink in. Why would we be hesitant to share with those who are stumbling in darkness? The truth is, if we do not fully rely on Jesus—if we do not truly need Him—we won't feel a great need to share Him with others.

 Do you live as though Jesus truly is the Light of the world or is He just good news in times of need? How has this impacted your sense of urgency to have gospel conversations with those around you?

Conclusion

As we reflect on Jesus' and the disciples' interaction with this man who was born blind, we are reminded to not too quickly move on as the disciples did. We don't want to miss the people and opportunities to which Christ leads us. In pausing with Jesus to meet the man in his circumstances, we remember that none of our suffering is wasted—God is glorified even in the midst of our pain. Jesus made it clear that the night is at hand and our time is more limited than we think. The gospel must create a sense of urgency to share His hope with the broken world around us.

This isn't a text that mitigates suffering in the name of "it will all work out" or "it must be God's will." But it does remind us to cling to the hope that, for those who are in Christ, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28). This is a text that reminds us that nothing is wasted in God's economy—He can redeem anything, anyone, and any circumstance for His glory. What if we spent less time looking for an explanation and more time asking God to work through us in the midst of broken circumstances? What if we allowed the urgency of the gospel to declare God's purposes in our brokenness?

- ❓ How are you encouraged by this passage when it comes to suffering? challenged?
- ❓ Do you feel a sense of urgency to share your faith with those who don't know Jesus? If not, what do you think has contributed to that? How are you challenged to step out more?
- ❓ How might your use and view of time need to change in light of this passage?

Prayer of Response

Pray and thank God that He uses all things for His glory. Ask Him to help you assess your use of time that you might live in light of urgency of the gospel.

Additional Resources

- *Evangelism* by J Mack Stiles
- *What is the Gospel* by Greg Gilbert
- *Turning Everyday Conversations Into Gospel Conversations* by Jimmy Scroggins

For Next Week

Session Title

- Finding Our Way

Main Passages

- 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Session Outline

1. The Wise Perspective (1 Corinthians 1:18-20)
2. Saved through Belief (1 Corinthians 1:21-23)
3. God's Wisdom Versus Worldly Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24-25)

Memorize

We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.

- John 9:4

Daily Readings

- Monday - James 1:5
- Tuesday - Proverbs 1:7
- Wednesday - Colossians 3:16
- Thursday - 1 Corinthians 1:26-30
- Friday - Colossians 2:6-8
- Saturday - Proverbs 2:6

Extended Commentary

John 9:1-4

9:1-2. John wanted his readers to focus on the blindness of the man described in the first five verses. The disciples, wrapped in Old Testament legalism (Exod. 34:7), concluded there were only two possible explanations for the blindness: either his parents had sinned or the man had sinned. The disciples saw neither the man nor his parents but an opportunity for theological discussion. They displayed no compassion, only curiosity.

Many Bible students are amazed to discover that the Old Testament contains no story of the giving of sight to the blind. The only New Testament example outside the Gospels is the encounter between Ananias and Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9. But when we examine the ministry of Jesus, there are more instances of the healing of blind people than any other type of miracle (Matt. 9:27-31; 12:22ff.; 15:30ff.; 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; Luke 7:21ff.).

9:3. John 8:12 forms a foundation by which we understand the events of chapter 9: “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” The light of life did not fix blame but offered grace, so Jesus rejected the alternatives of the disciples. In this man’s life, hurting was the preparation for healing. Jesus’ words to the disciples in chapter 11 offer insight: “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s son may be glorified through it” (John 11:4).

Comparison of John 5 and 9 leads us to the conclusion that sin may result in sickness on some occasions, but we should never assume an essential connection. God can bring glory to himself through healing as in both of these accounts by John—or through not healing, as we learn later in the New Testament from the struggles of the apostle Paul. The focus is not on the comfort of the creature but the exaltation of the Creator.

9:4-5. The contrast between blindness and sight now moves to the contrast between night and day. Jesus was the sent one, and the disciples assisted him in his work. But this will soon end when night comes. Night probably refers to the difficult days of the passion week, particularly the cross. If we had only this text, we might conclude that the disciples could function in God’s work only so long as Jesus was with them in the world; then all would be darkness.

Interpreters tiptoe around the possible meaning of these verses. The clue may lie in the hermeneutical principle of progressive revelation. The Lord had not yet explained the role of the Holy Spirit in illuminating their future ministry. At this point he focused their attention only on him, his divine mission, and their involvement during the short period of earthly ministry. Later in this Gospel he explained that light would shine again after the resurrection and the ascension as the Holy Spirit reproduced the light of the world through them.

Carson expresses it this way, “This does not mean that Jesus stops being the light of the world once he has ascended. It means, rather, that the light shines brightly while he lives out his human life up to the moment of his glorification. Throughout that period he is the light that exposes the world, judges the world, saves the world. Those who enjoy his light will be engulfed by darkness when he is taken away (12:35)” (Carson, p. 362).

Though we must take it as application, not interpretation, it is possible to see in these verses an emphasis on the urgency and brevity of our own time of ministry. Through the Holy Spirit the light now shines on us. Darkness will soon overwhelm the world when the Lord’s people and the Holy Spirit are taken out of the world. So night is coming again as we are reminded in a familiar hymn written in 1854 by an eighteen-year-old Canadian girl, Annie Louise Walker. The hymn does not contain much gospel, but it focuses on the time limitations of service.

Work for the night is coming, work through the morning hours; Work while the dew is sparkling; work ‘mid springing flowers. Work when the day grows brighter, work in the glowing sun; Work for the night is coming, when man’s work is done.²

References

1. *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
2. Gangel, Kenneth O. *John*. Edited by Max E. Anders. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.