

Mortal Combat: Jesus vs. The Blind

John 9:1-7,13-17,34-41 (NIV)

¹ As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided. ¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." ³⁴ To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." ³⁸ Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." ⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" ⁴¹ Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Imagine you're expecting your third child with your spouse. You're in for your 20-week ultrasound. So far, everything has gone normal, just like the previous two pregnancies. And what do you see? They show you a spot on the ultrasound, possibly water on the brain. You wait 7 weeks to find out what that is, 7 weeks of not knowing, of hoping it's nothing. Then a doctor tells you that your unborn child has holoprosencephaly (ho-lo-pro-sen-sef-ali), or HPE for short, a disorder where the brain has not divided into two hemispheres. The doctor tells you to terminate the pregnancy because of the burden this child will be to your marriage, your family, your finances, your emotions. This is a pitied life, a miserable existence, if the child even lives. What do you see as the doctor announces that?

This is what Harry and Danielle Short, members here at Light of the Valley, went through a little more than 18 years ago, a scenario probably not too different from the day when the parents of a certain man in first century Jerusalem realized that their baby boy was born blind. Years later, Jesus encountered this man and we heard what people saw with him: "As [they] went along, [Jesus] saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" (verses 1-2)

When seeing someone with a physical defect, a disability, people see God paying them back for what they did wrong. It was what Harry saw. He didn't thank God for giving him a son with HPE; he questioned God, wanted to find out who was to blame. What did I do wrong, God, that you would do this to me? I just want to be a good dad and raise this kid, bring him up in the Church. You give healthy kids to meth addicts who don't even want them, but you do this to me?

Isn't that what we see when life doesn't go according to plan, if you've had a miscarriage, difficulties in getting pregnant, or couldn't get pregnant and then you see healthy babies never given the chance to see the light of day, women getting pregnant who don't want kids? Is this what you see if you've never gotten married, that what's so wrong with me that God didn't give me a spouse?

The world sees the man born blind, sees an unborn child like Timmy with HPE, and pities them. They'll have such a disadvantaged, cursed life, never being complete or whole. They'll never get to see what I see, all the colors, the changes in the seasons, all the life of this world, the food he eats. The blind man will never see his mom or dad. Timmy would never get to have his dad coach him while he plays tackle football. You never get to know the joy and blessing of having kids. You never get to be complete without being married. These lives are seen as less than, a burden, something "bad" to get rid of.

But what does Jesus see? What did he see as he looked at Timmy in the womb, at that man in Jerusalem who was born blind, at you when you can't get pregnant, aren't married? He tells us: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (verse 3) God didn't look at this man and see that he got what he deserves for some sin that he or his parents did; no, Jesus saw the man's disability, his deformity, not as a burden, but as time to get to work. So, Jesus spit on the ground, made mud, put it on the man's eyes, told him to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash. "So the man went and washed,

and came home seeing.” (verse 7b) He could miraculously see for the very first time! Jesus gave sight to the blind, just as was prophesied about the Messiah, the Christ!

What’s more is that Jesus found that man later, after he had been kicked out of the church by the Pharisees. He showed the man the one who cleanses him from all his sins, clothes him with perfection, makes him a part of the family of God, gives him eternal life with God. He once was lost but now was found by Jesus, was blind but now can see Jesus. The formerly blind man sees his Savior, the one who makes him complete. Through what Jesus did for this man, he saw seen the works of God displayed in his life, and so did we!

By the grace of God, Danielle and Harry saw something different when “Doctor Death” told them that their child’s life should end immediately. They saw a life that was a gift from God. Harry demanded that the doctor leave. Danielle was determined to do whatever was needed to be done so that they could have their boy. There was little hope that Timmy would see the light of day. In fact, when he was born, he wasn’t breathing. Harry and Danielle had to wait an hour with no updates before someone came back with their son. The worst was feared, that they would never get to hold their son while he was alive, never get to take him home. Then he was placed before them alive! They called in Pastor Glende, and Timmy was immediately baptized. Timmy not only saw the light of day, but he saw the Light of God. He was born again by water and the Spirit. He was washed clean of his sins. He was clothed with the perfection of Jesus. He was adopted into God’s family. He was made an heir of eternal life. He saw his Savior!

It’s been 18 years since seeing these works of God displayed in Timmy’s life, but it hasn’t been easy for the Short family. Harry and Danielle have had more daily responsibilities and challenges in raising Timmy than most parents ever experience. Diapers still need to be changed every day. Timmy’s full grown but still needs to be lifted up and carried. In turning 18, Harry & Danielle had to go to court to buy Timmy back as their child as he’s by law considered an adult. Timmy suffers from seizures, which his parents are powerless to stop. Timmy gets frustrated when he can’t communicate his needs. Harry still will not get to coach Timmy as he plays baseball or football. Seeing the works of God displayed in their lives did not make their lives easier, just like the formerly blind man being kicked out of his church by the Pharisees for believing that Jesus healed him on the Sabbath day. In fact, Harry reached a point where he was so angry at God for what God did to him that he left church for 3 years. His anger blinded him.

Maybe you have had those times of spiritual blindness as well, that you were so angry with God for the “bad” things that he brought into your life, that he didn’t take away, that you were done with him. Maybe you took a similar church hiatus, that the display of God’s works in your life didn’t make it any easier, that it didn’t make it easier to have kids, find a spouse, have a happier life.

Yes, the struggles are still there for the Short family as they still were for the formerly blind man, but they also marvel at the works of God being displayed in their lives. Harry and Danielle told me that Timmy has been a light to others, that God has used Timmy to shape them, to get them to focus on what’s important, to draw them to God to get them through all the difficulties of raising a son with HPE. They see every holiday through the eyes of a child as Timmy continues to exude joy. Complete strangers are drawn to him, drawn to his joy, to his laugh. As I’ve gotten to know Timmy, teach him how much God loves him, how God does everything for him, I’ve seen God’s works displayed in his life as Timmy, in his way, tells me and others that Jesus lived perfectly for him, died on the cross to take away all his sins, and that because of God Timmy will get to be in heaven. We see Timmy as God’s miracle in their lives, not a burden to be gotten rid of.

Can you see the works of God being displayed in your life even when something “bad” comes your way? Can you see it with the inability to have kids? Can you see it with the single life that you have? Can you see that your life is one of grace, a complete gift from God? Can you see that God did not bring you into existence to make you miserable, but instead brought you into this world for moments like these where you see God’s grace, where your spiritual blindness was removed and you saw someone you loves you more than anyone else ever has, ever could? Can you see a God who has made you complete right here and right now all by what he has done for you, how he lived perfectly for you, he died on the cross to remove all your sins, made you a part of his family, and has given you the inheritance of an eternal life with him? Can you see God’s infinite love for you today through your baptism, through his Word, through his Supper? Can you see that your life right now is truly and honestly displaying the works of God?

Yes, some people remain blind in this mortal combat of Jesus vs. the blind, just like the Pharisees did. They can’t see it. Others, though, you and I, we have our eyes opened by God to see our lives, even with disadvantages and disabilities, lives that didn’t go according to plan, as a display of the work of God, seeing his grace, seeing his love, seeing his forgiveness, seeing how he makes us whole and complete even now and then even more when we go to our heavenly home. In Jesus vs. the blind, Jesus wins, as we get to see the works of God displayed in this blind man’s life, Timmy’s life, our lives. Amen.