

The Rev. Billy Cerveny:

How are we doing? Anybody go on spring break this week? No, I got a couple hands in the back. I just got back last night. We were in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Which is, if you've not been to Jackson Hole.

God lives in Jackson Hole. It's the most beautiful place on the planet. And took my kids out there. My wife, we had to go on a family ski vacation. It was wonderful. And then on Thursday, we left to come back home. And we, you know, as you can imagine, repacking a family of five. We had five giant duffel bags.

It was a huge hassle getting all the bags in the back of the suburban were loading things in. Everybody's stressed to get to the airport on time, and I said, my phone starts buzzing. Your flight's an hour delayed. I'm like, okay, we got a little more time and we start driving towards the airport. You're out. Your flight is two hours delayed.

Your flight is three hours delay. I get to the airport and it's clear that we're going to miss our connection in Dallas. We didn't know what to do. I go to the lady and I'm like, okay, what do we do? I'm just trying. You know, these people have a lot of power at the gates, right? You know, and we're you're inside and you want to, like, turn your body inside out and throw your head again into the tarmac.

You have to be really calm and sweet because they can ruin your life and ruin your trip. So, I was very calm and sweet and then basically said, look, if I were you, I want you to stay with an overnight. So, I called my friend up and said, guess who's coming back for dinner? After six days of being in his house, I go back to his house.

We spend the night, we have to repack everything. We're getting everything loaded back up. We're getting everything in the car, I get everything. Everybody in the in the in the in the Ford Explorer or whatever it was. And we're driving towards the airport and my phone start buzzing. Your flight's an hour away. Okay. I get there and all I'm saying is my flight's two hours late.

It's three hours delay. At this point, I am like my internal climate is just boiling because I'm so frustrated. You've been there. You know what I'm talking about. My kids are hungry. I'm my wife doesn't. You know, we're all just trying to figure this out. I broke a tooth when I was out there, so I had a toothache.

The lady at the at the place, I'm like, look, just get me out of Jackson and get me to Dallas. So, I get on the plane. We finally get on the plane at least a couple hours already, and it won't move because there's this car that won't pull it all this time. I'm praying. God, please, please listen. I just want to get my kids home.

Please. We're tired. I need to get home. I gotta work and all this kind of stuff. And every time I prayed it got worse. It got worse. I told the stewardess, said, I'll get out, I'll pull the plane off. This off the runway. That's how angry I am. So, we ended up. We get to Dallas, they put us up in a hotel room in Dallas at midnight.

We wake up at five in the morning, catch a 6 a.m. flight the whole time. I'm praying, Lord, get me there. We finally got there on like three hours of sleep. The reason I'm telling you is stories is that whole time I'm in that moment, I'm praying. I'm trusting in the Lord. And every time I prayed, my situation got worse.

I don't know if you're anything like me, because actually, I know you're a lot like me because you're going to relate to what I'm about to say that when it goes, be it past a minor inconvenience and you're in a situation like that and you're praying to God and it doesn't get better. What's the one thing you ask at the end of it?

Why? Like, why now? Of course, I knew why. Like the flux capacitor or whatever was broken on the airplane. But I mean, why me? Why in this moment, God, why is it that that you're allowing this to happen? And it. The more I pray, the worse it gets. And I know that it's. This feels like first world problems, but it is what it which it is.

But it really tells us something about our heart that when things get move beyond just a minor inconvenience and they move into this, this painful place, these struggles and the things we

suffer with, all of a sudden, they become existential questions, right? We turn to God and we ask why? Why are you allowing this? And the more painful it gets, the louder our hearts scream.

And we all do. Why is it that we ask why? Like what is it that we're trying to why? What I think from a from a pure worldly perspective, and I think this is true of just all people, Christian or non-Christian. A life when pain or tragedy comes into our life, it's a violation. Doesn't it just feel violating it feel like this is not the way it's supposed to be that I have?

This is shattering, this seamless narrative that I'm supposed to be building, this narrative that that I would design, it would be a lot more fair than this. The narrative that I design is the situations that I want to come about, come to pass and land at my feet. But when things are unfair or it unfolds in a way that I don't want or things don't seem to make sense, they don't have any meaning.

Those experiences don't just hurt, they cause this existential crisis. And I look out at the world, and I realize what's happening when I'm hurting. Is it smashing? My illusion of control is revealing the control that I thought I had, I don't have, and the reason it smashes my illusion of control over my life is because guess what? If I were in control, do you know how much pain I would allow into my life?

Zero because what kind of crazy person who had the power to control their life would invite pain into their story? So, I'm asking why? Because I need to know the reason so I can regain control. Or I can figure out what's to blame for this, or who's to blame for this so I can get justice. I'm asking why, so I can at least recapture some sense of meaning and all of it.

Why is this happening? At least I need to make sense of it now. As Christians, we do the same thing. That's just the human expense. But as Christians we do the exact same thing. Except the problem is, for us, this becomes a little more difficult. The problem because we have Jesus, we have the answer right, don't we? And because we have Jesus, God loves me.

And all of a sudden when I'm experiencing this pain, I have to ask this question what's he doing right now? Is he? He's good and all powerful, and he loves me, right. And but this pain is

evidence that something is going wrong and God could stop it. He should stop it. But he's not. What's wrong with him? What's wrong with me?

It leads me to this place. I have to ask this question. If he's not stopping it, is he not stopping it? Because he won't? Or is he not stopping it because he can't? Two very different questions. Because if he won't, if he's not going to stop it, it means maybe he's not as good as it's been promised in the brochure.

Or maybe if he won't stop it, maybe he's good, or maybe he just doesn't like me that much.

Or maybe God is good, but maybe I've done something wrong and I'm not been living right. And he's turning the screws a little bit. Or maybe it's that he can't. And God is not that powerful. But what good is a God like that? But all of these questions as Christians, there's a lot at stake. So, we got to ask why?

Why? And then we come to John chapter nine. We just read, this is a great essay in this. It's a masterclass in how people ask this question, how Jesus responds to it. So, what's going on here? It's at the end of chapter eight, right before chapter nine. That's how that goes. Jesus is starting to reveal more of who he is.

He's debating the Pharisees, and they're having this debate about Abraham, and they're like, are you greater than Abraham? And Jesus turns into memory, says he goes before Abraham I am. And they pick up stones and they lose their minds. And the reason they lose their minds when Jesus says that is he's playing with the divine name, God's name, which was Yahweh, which means I am, that I am.

And when Jesus says, before Abraham I am, he was taken, that divine name and applying it to himself, which is a huge no in the synagogue circles of those days, and he was claiming divinity, and they picked up stones to kill him, and he leaves. And chapter nine Jesus is walking with his disciples. And it says, as he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.

And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned? Was it this man or his parents that he was born blind? Hear what's happening there? So, there's walking by this guy and they encounter this pain and tragedy they see in this guy, and it's not even their own pain and their own tragedy. And once the first question out of their mouth, why, why, Lord, they're still asking why.

And they're good Jews. And the way they think about it is God is a God of rules. He's a God of covenant. He's a God of promises. You keep the promise. You get the cookies, you break the promises. You get the ruler on the back of the hand. So, they're thinking to themselves pain and suffering. It's a moral issue.

This dude had done something to his parents, had to have done something. And this is why he's in this situation. There's a punishment in play. Somebody. And what does Jesus say to him? He's like, no, no, he's like, time out. None of that. This happened. The reason this happened was that the works of God might be displayed in him.

And then Jesus does something really weird. This is the weirdest. One of the weirdest miracles in the Bible is he stoops down and he spits on the ground. He spits, he spits on the ground, and he begins mixing it with the with the dirt in the dust. And he makes mud. That's a lot of spit. Think about it.

And he takes it, and he scoops it up, and he goes to the to the blind man, and he wipes it on his eyes, right? Wipes it on his eyes, and he says, go to the pool of Siloam and wash. And verse seven says, so he went and washed and came back seeing. There's a couple of things I want you to see here.

This is kind of cool. And I want to unpack a few things. The first thing I want you to notice is what Jesus is doing here. He's restoring sight to a blind guy. Now, we've read these passages so much, we just kind of read over it, right? Here's Jesus. He's restoring. That's what Jesus is such a Jesus thing.

He heals the blind. But I want you to slow your roll because we've read this a lot. If you were a Jewish person and you're in that moment with that experience, it's not just such a Jesus thing,

it's actually such a messiah thing. Because in the Old Testament, all the prophets of the Old Testament, and especially in the book of Isaiah, you see Isaiah 35, Isaiah 42, the calling card, the sign of messianic validity is it says that he would heal the blind.

He would heal the blind. You remember when John the Baptist was in prison and he lost. He was losing faith in Jesus and he forget. He sent a messenger saying, are you really the guy that we were supposed to wait for? Or do we need to wait for another dude? What does Jesus say to him? Tell him that the lame can walk, and the blind can see, and to him says, proof you are the Messiah.

So, in that moment when Jesus is healing the blind, it is a messianic miracle.

And that was that was what Jesus was doing. But I also want you to see how Jesus was doing it. He comes and he spits in the dirt. He spits in the clay, and he's turning it into this, in this mud, this paste that he wipes on this. This guy's eyes. That's so weird. It's also symbolic because remember the story in Genesis two, when God, the creator of the universe, when he speaks all things into being, the this is the one creation that God, when he creates it, rather than just doing it with a word, he kneels down and he grabs the clay with his own hands and he begins to fashion the first man,

and he breathes life into his nostrils. And here we are in the book of John, where we have the same hands that made man out of the clay in an act of creation. It is the one of the first acts of messianic recreation. Recreation. Can you see? It's beautiful. The other thing I want you to see here is this.

First is how he was doing it. First is what he was doing. But when Jesus was doing it, Jesus was healing on the Sabbath. Now we know this is the Sabbath was a holy day back then, and it was one of those days that you're not supposed to work. That's why Chick-Fil-A is closed today. Just so you know.

That's why you always want it today. Because it's closed. But it's a Sabbath. It's a holy day. The Pharisees were militant about this. They were militant about following all the laws. In fact, they

were so militant about following these laws. They created these things called fence laws. We've talked about this before. And the fence law was a law outside of a law.

The idea was we don't want to break the law. So, we're going to create these out external laws around it to keep you from even getting close to breaking that first law. Let me give you an example. You're not supposed to work on the Sabbath. So, one of the things you're not supposed to do, you can't make mud and you can't make bricks, because that will be working.

And the fence law, what it would say is that you can't do anything that resembles that, lest you might accidentally find yourself working. So, if you were to spit, you could spit on a rock. But if you spit in the dirt, guess what? You're making mud and making muds like making bricks. So, you're breaking the Sabbath. And also, you're not allowed to heal someone on the Sabbath unless it was a life-threatening disease.

It doesn't matter if it's a miracle or not, because it was like practicing medicine. So that was working. And you certainly can't go bathe yourself because, you know, not allowed to do that on the Sabbath. Here comes Jesus. What's he doing? It's almost like he's doing it on purpose, because he is, and he's breaking all three. He's kicking the pile and the guy's healed, and the people are blown away, and they take him to see the Pharisees.

And instead of these Pharisees having this amazing celebration about the miracle that has been in front of them, do you hear what the Pharisees do? What's the first thing the Pharisees do? Why?

Why are you? Why are you healed? Who did this? How are you healed? When did he do this? Today. What do you think he could do? This? This? This miracle was not meeting their theological criteria. And in that moment, it frustrated them. It broke. It shattered their illusion of control. It shattered their narrative. So, they put the miracle.

They put the man, they put Jesus on trial. And then they excommunicated this guy. They drove him out of the temple. They drove his family out of the temple. This formed the formerly blind man as it says in the scripture, the artist formerly known as a blind man, and he's kicked out.

Now, when you see this, John, chapter nine, what we just read, it's a portrait of the human heart.

Everything that we talked about in the beginning, about what happens when we when we experience pain and suffering. We've been to cry out why it's all in here. Left to ourselves, we are either going to feel like we have to justify ourselves to God. What did I do wrong? What can I change? How can I make this better?

Or we're going to feel like God. You have to justify yourself. To me, to us. God, what are you doing? God, you better do it this way. The way that I demand. It's got to look. The outcome has got to look like this, or it can't be valid. That's what we do. But Jesus is the Savior and he meets us in that place.

He doesn't say, stop doing that before he will meet us. So what does he do? What does? How does Jesus meet us in this place? In a few ways. And the first thing I want you to see is where we see a problem. Jesus sees a person.

What's happening is the disciples see this blind man. They see this blind man, and they want to analyze him. He becomes this theological Rubik's cube that they want to solve. Who sinned? Was it him or his mother? He becomes this caricature of their questions about God. They treat him like a, like a, like a problem to be solved.

The Pharisees encounter the blind man after he is healed, and they see him as a religious and a legal problem, and they rake him over the coals. Who did this? How did he do it? When did he do it? Why did he do it? But that's not what Jesus did, not what he did at all. In fact, the very first verse, verse one, what does it says?

What does it say? It says, as he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. Before that, disciples asked the question before he wipe mud on his eyes, before he spit in the ground, before he. The Pharisees engaged, before his family, got called, before the Jews got stirred up, before anyone, before anything had happened. Jesus saw a man.

He saw the person. He saw a human being. He wasn't a theological crossword puzzle that Jesus needed to solve. He wasn't some blight on God's record. He wasn't a curiosity. He wasn't an inconvenience. He wasn't something that was so broken that it repulsed Jesus that he had to hold his nose when he was coming forward to him. No, he was he was a human being and he was suffering.

And it was that very thing that drew him to you, to him. And that's matters for us. You tell you why can you see? See, it matters to us. Because when we are trapped in our pain, when your body is given, how when your heart's not doing the thing that you want it to do, when you're trapped in an eating disorder or you can't get over an addiction, or you have this flaw in your personality you can't get beyond and you feel like God has lost sight of you.

We read a story like this. We realize he's not lost sight of you. He sees you. Remember Jesus saw man. He didn't see his disease. He wasn't a caricature. He saw a man.

There he was. And in that suffering, it didn't repulse him. It drew him towards him. Isaiah 61. What does it say? Behold, the spirit of the Lord is upon us. Jesus's job description by the way, I've come to bind up the brokenhearted, declare freedom for the captives. He comes. It's an invitation. It's not an invitation, rather, to wallow in our pain.

This is an invitation to open our eyes when we are in pain and see Jesus in the middle of it. So, when we see a problem, Jesus sees a person. And when we ask why, Jesus shows us where. And let me tell you what I mean by that. One thing you got to notice in this passage is every time the disciples are asking why, Jesus does very little to answer the question, he actually reframes it.

He renames that question and he spits in the mud and he scoops and he puts it on the man's eyes. He creates the mud and he tells him to go wash. And at that moment the man had not asked for a thing. You know what you don't see in that passage? Jesus walking down and the blind man yelling, Jesus, come get me!

Help! None of that. The man hadn't asked for a thing. He wasn't crying out. He no one sent a messenger. Jesus saw the man. He spit on the ground. He knelt in the dirt. He gets his hands

dirty. He touches his face. And later, in the miracle that Jesus granted, this man destroys his life and he loses everything and they kick him out of the temple.

What does Jesus do? It says Jesus came looking for him again. See, when I when I see bad things in my life, when you see bad things in your life and you want to know why I get it, I want to know why. Too bad. I got to tell you, I've been living 57 years and I have never in the middle of my pain.

God is never looked down at me and told me why. The only time that I get the why is when I'm looking in my rearview mirror at this thing that happened, and I got a little time and a little perspective, and I can see what God has done with it. But I have found that spiritual maturity is shortening the time between when I ask God, why am I suffering to when I ask God, where are you in my suffering?

I grow into that question because when I begin to ask, where are you? It's a game changer. See? Because why demands that God gives me a solution. And when I say, where are you in this Jesus? It demands that I come to him with open hands, with an open heart. But it also demand. It requires that Jesus opens my eyes so that I can see him.

You got to see him as He is. You got a desire to see him as he is. Not like the Pharisees who demanded that he sit in this box asking Jesus with open eyes, where are you? You begin to see that you aren't trapped in some spiritual airport, unable to get to your final destination. What you realize is our real destination.

Jesus. He's come to us, Emmanuel. God with us. He's come to us. He sees you. But he doesn't just see you. He's squatting in the dirt. He is tending to you. He's holding your face in his hands. He's taking a knee. It's an intimate thing with Jesus. You so often. I just want relief. That's not bad. We all want relief.

But Jesus will always give you himself before he will resolve your circumstances. Always. And sometimes, like that blind man. We don't realize it until after the fact. He didn't even know Jesus his name. You know who he was? Son of man. What's that?

Why do we suffer? Why does God allow the hurts in our lives? I don't know, sometimes it's because we read the scripture. Sometimes it's because of the sin in our lives. Sometimes it just seems arbitrary. Sometimes it's Satan. And you know what? Sometimes when you're standing in the middle of the storm, God is the storm. He's the one that brought it all.

I don't know why he suffers or he allows us to suffer, but the same God that left heaven. So just so he can kneel in the dirt with that blind man so he can kneel in the dirt. Next to me is the same God that chose to hang on a cross and be with us in our suffering. So, when I asked a question to steal a line from my favorite writer, Tim Keller, when I asked the question, why am I suffering?

I might not know that answer, but I know what the answer is not. When I look at the cross and the answer is not because God doesn't care.

He would give. He gave everything for us. And if he's given everything, what would he not do for you? He would kneel in the dirt and your dirt in your specific dirt, whatever that is. He would take your face in his hands. He would wash you clean as he has on the cross, and he would call you his own.

And he would say to you, you will never be alone. Amen. And this.