

“DON’T BE IGNORANT” (Part 6)

About Suffering (2 Cor. 1:3-11)

INTRO: Repeat: “God is good all the time. All the time God is good.” Ever doubt that? “To date what has been your greatest suffering?” Someone said, “We are all faced with a series of great opportunities, brilliantly disguised as unsolvable problems.” Those problems include sufferings of all kinds. As the greatest follower ever of Christ, Paul was as human as the rest of us. He faced more hardships, sufferings, disappointments than perhaps any one of us will ever face. He also struggled to find endurance and avoid discouragement. Read 1:3-11; 4:8-11; 6:4-10; 11:23-27). Paul doesn’t want us to be ignorant of the sufferings of life and how God can use them to display His grace, grow us to become more like Christ, and enable us to comfort others. The problem of suffering (and evil) is not contrary to the story of the Bible. It’s actually central to it. Let me define “suffering” as painful circumstances allowed by God to change my character and conduct to become more like Christ. Look at 4 truths about suffering:

I. THE SCOPE OF SUFFERING IS UNIVERSAL (v. 4 “in all our afflictions”). *All face* afflictions. None immune. Both lost and saved. Job 5:7; 14:1. They come in *many forms* with *differing intensity*. Some of Scripture’s greatest characters faced great sufferings (Joseph, Job, David, Daniel, Jeremiah, Paul, John the Baptist, and Jesus, disciples). Asaph – Ps. 73:2-14. Nowhere does Jesus promise the good or the godly will avoid suffering – the opposite! The only way to avoid suffering is to die! (Jn. 16:33). *Only the Christian faith makes sense of, gives meaning to, and offers a solution for the suffering (and evil) of this world.* Question: “Why do good (innocent) people suffer?” They don’t! Because no one (not even the best of us is good or innocent). All sinners. All dust. The only One ever good (Jesus) took our bad! (Mk. 10:18).

II. THE SOURCES OF SUFFERING ARE MANY

Question: “Why do suffering (and evil) exist? Either God is not all-powerful or not all-good or both!”

- A. We are fallen and sinful human beings (Rom. 3:23). Others (lost and saved), along with our sinful self, make choices that bring sufferings.
- B. Live in a fallen, sinful and cursed world (Gen. 3:16-19; Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Cor. 4:16-18).
- C. Satan afflicts us, too. Look at Job, Paul, and Jesus.
- D. We share in Christ’s sufferings (2 Cor. 1:5; Ph. 3:10; Col. 1:24)
- E. God allows, even brings, us to suffer for a host of reasons: get our attention, keep us humble and dependent, display His grace and power, develop Christ-like character (Rom. 5:3-5), to enable us to comfort and encourage others (vv. 3-7 “comfort” – encourage 10x’s; 29x’s in 2 Cor.) However our sufferings come, they are never an accident; always divine appointments (Rom. 8:28). To eliminate all suffering (and evil), God would have to destroy our freedom of choice – and us, too.

III. OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING IS CRITICAL

- A. Resignation (Prov. 24:10; Job 3:1-3, 11; Jer. 20:14) – Woe is me.
- B. Resentment (Job 5:2; 9:16-18, 23) – Harbor anger and bitterness toward God, even blaming Him.
- C. Rebellion (Jonah 4) – Fight it, blame others.
- D. Repentance (Psa. 119:67, 71) – if sin-related

ILL: Acts narrative and early disciples (Stephen James, Peter, Paul). A mix of frustration and jubilation... They loved and obeyed God even when He was inconsistent and made no sense, sometimes experiencing great pain, losing people they loved, and their own lives.

- E. Rejoice in it! (Matt. 5:11-12; Jn. 16:33; Acts 5:40-42; Rom. 5:3; Jam. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:4, 8; 4:12-19). Every breaking point can be a making point if rightly respond.

IV. PERSPECTIVE IS EVERYTHING (2 Cor. 12:7-10) – How move to rejoicing?

- A. Suffering is a *gift* (v. 7 “a thorn was given me...”). Not judgment, punishment.
- B. Suffering is a gift for a *purpose* (v. 7 “to keep me from becoming conceited” – 2 x’s). We have to trust something better is coming out of our sufferings. Ex. – surgery, physical therapy, counseling – healing from hurt! God even said no to His own Son (Mk. 14:32-42).
- C. Suffering is a gift for a purpose with a *promise* (vv. 9-10). My grace and power will be there for you. Lean into Me. *The presence of suffering never means God is absent. God of all comfort. Embracing our inability is the gate to enjoying Christ’s ability.* How is that possible? Only if we take the long look (not a moment in time) to trust the God of all comfort that *something better is coming*. After all, God saw His Son suffer and die – only to do something better three days later. He was willing to let His only Son die because He knew – NO DEATH, No Resurrection! He is so good He can bring good out of bad.

CONC: We need a bend-but-don’t-break faith. Remember, one day, “no more pain” (Rev. 21:4). He is preparing us to reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:11-12). Barber shop story ... A. Maclaren said, “All suffering comes with a message from the heart of God.” Return to Asaph (Psa. 73:17ff). Suffering is part of my story and yours. Those who inspire us most are *not* those who pray and get their miracle, but those who don’t receive their miracle but choose to trust and follow Him anyway. When no miracle comes surrender your will to what He wants, saying as did our Lord, “nevertheless not my will but yours.” Something better is coming! No wonder Paul said Rom. 8:18 . . . 1 Pet. 5:10 Between sufferings and glory is his grace.