

## Suffering – A Lesson in Response

\_\_Prayer\_\_

There is nothing I like more than to talk about the Joy of the Lord and to talk about all the great things that have happened to me since I became a Christian. God is good all the time! In many churches the emphasis is on life and joy in Jesus. This is good! It is also great because no one hears what they don't want to. It talks about all the good things in Christ. Is this needed? Of course, but there is an aspect of this approach that causes me some concern... Real people have, real suffering, real sorrow and real hurt. As much as these people need to hear the joy of the Lord, when this is constantly preached, there is an emptiness to it, resulting in people feeling disconnected from the reality of the message.

Today I want to talk to anyone here who has been hurt and to those who will be hurt in the future. I want to talk to those who have no answers. I want to talk to those who need Jesus and love him, but have not been able to feel the Joy of the Lord.

There is a reality that some people our community will experience tragedies and suffering over the next year. I don't think it would be unfair to say that one or more of us may experience a share of that suffering.

My sermon this morning is addressed to how to respond in faith to calamities and hurts that have and will occur.

I think many people may need a perspective shift on whom we are and why we are here. When we think of life from our view, we have limited years, we have expenses, we have a life to live, families to take care of and so on. Many have said you only get one life so you need to live it to the fullest. Because of this perspective we see covetousness, competition and elitism. Don't believe me? Who has ever heard the saying: "He who has the most toys when he dies wins..." I think what we need to do is try to imagine Gods perspective.

Gods Perspective: Imagine God if you will thinking about the situation of mankind...

I have put people on the earth to be my family

They have sinned against me and fallen out of relationship

I love them and so will create a restorative plan to bring us into right relationship

I am truth and justice so just forgiving sin is not possible because it goes against the very nature of who I am

I need a sacrifice for atonement – yes that's it something to make us at one with each other again.

There is no sacrifice good enough so I will have to send my son so that through his blood a new covenant will be established. My son will have to take on their sin as a replacement for them. A propitiation or replacement sacrifice for them. No one other than the Godhead can atone for the sin of mankind. I will use animals as a placeholder until my son's blood is spilled.

The life of each person is a proving ground, an opportunity for them to get to choose me.

Life is about choice. I cannot override the choices of mankind or their choice will mean nothing.

I will test and prove my children worthy and then they will spend eternity with me.

I will give them a purpose to share the good news of who I am and lead them and guide them, but I want them to choose to want to serve me.

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I am reminded of Timothy's mission to the church in Thessalonica when the Apostle Paul sent him from Athens.

1 Thess. 3:1-3

### **1 Thessalonians 3:1-3**

New International Version (NIV)

**3** So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. <sup>2</sup>We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, <sup>3</sup>so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them.

**My first point is that we need to be encouraged and build a trust in Jesus so that when trouble comes, we will meet it confidently and with the assurance of our faith.**

In 2 Corinthians there are at least two places where Paul relates his own experiences in suffering with God's purposes. In the first we see Paul struggling with questions about why if he is a faithful servant of the Lord is he appointed for calamity. Are we prepared today to look at the answer the Lord gave to Paul?

How far down was Paul actually in his depression regarding the circumstances of his life:

### **2 Corinthians 1:8-9**

Amplified Bible (AMP)

<sup>8</sup>For we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about the affliction *and* oppressing distress which befell us in [the province of] Asia, how we were so utterly and unbearably weighed down *and* crushed that we despaired even of life [itself].

<sup>9</sup>Indeed, we felt within ourselves that we had received the [very] sentence of death, but that was to keep us from trusting in *and* depending on ourselves instead of on God Who raises the dead.

So...

**Why was Paul crushed beyond his strength that he despaired for his life?**

This was so that he might learn to put NO confidence in himself but rather to put all of his trust and hope in God. Paul was taken right to the brink of death with nowhere else to turn except to God, the one who raises the dead.

Ever felt circumstances crush you? I have but just like Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:10

### **2 Corinthians 12:10**

English Standard Version (ESV)

<sup>10</sup>For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Let's ask another question...

**What is God doing in the troubles and calamities of our lives?**

He teaches us not to tie our joy and happiness to our circumstances but rather to our faith. He teaches us not to rely on ourselves or in the persistence of a comfortable living arrangement. He is showing us that we need to not trust in the things that will pass away, but on him who is eternal and always reliable.

**So if this is true, do I even have the right to speak to the calamities and sorrows in your life?**

It has never been nor ever will be my intention to minimize the tragedies that have occurred or will occur in your life. You as the sufferer are far more knowledgeable and intimate with the things you have endured. But I do have the Word of God, revealed by Jesus the Logos to us that gives me all I need to know.

### **2 Timothy 3:16**

New International Version (NIV)

<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

So with this in mind, when I read that

### **Romans 8:28**

New International Version (NIV)

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who<sup>[a]</sup> have been called according to his purpose.

**Footnotes:**

- a. Romans 8:28 *Or that all things work together for good to those who love God, who; or that in all things God works together with those who love him to bring about what is good—with those who*

So when these situations come into your life, you have a choice:

1. You can fear them and suffer
2. You can have faith in Gods promise and endure

What happens when we experience trials and suffering is that we either react in fear or learn to trust God and become stronger in our faith? How many times do we need to go through the cycle before we learn what God intends for us to know? God always answers prayer, sometimes he says no!

I have said this before but sometimes our problems are left with us to solve us not for us to solve the problem.

**Remember I said there were two things Paul was struggling with?**

Well the first we saw in 2 Corinthians 1 the next is in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

**2 Corinthians 12:7b-10**

New International Version (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> ... Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Let's break this out in the context of our lives:

Me: "Lord you are so Good, I believe in you. I am your faithful servant. Please take this suffering away from me."

God : "No!"

Me: "God why aren't you answering my prayer?"

God: "I am, I said No"

Me: "Why God?"

God: "Because my grace is sufficient for you"

Me: "But God that is not fair, your other kids have full health , why am I being punished? Don't you love me?"

God: "When you are weak and suffering; my power is made perfect in you. Have you not considered what this will bring about in your character? How you not consider how when you overcome this, you will be able to help others? And I discipline and teach those whom I love"

Me: "O Lord, you know that my great desire is to know you and the power of your resurrection (Phil 3:10), and if that is true then I will rejoice in my weakness, but God it is not going to be easy, I will have to draw my joy from you and what you are doing and not my circumstances."

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Note: Paul doesn't limit the application of his answer to the thorn in his flesh but rather extends the principle to all weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities...

So what is Christ doing here and now when trouble arises in our lives?

He is bringing about his purpose to manifest the sufficiency of his grace and to show his power.

I hate to say this folks but we don't exist for our own gratification or our own glory. We are told in Ephesians 1:12 that we believers exist for the praise of Christ's glory. If we truly exist for Christ's glory then can we say that we will continue to be faithful and content when trouble hits us? Why does this even matter?

Because: When we are content in our trouble and show faith in Jesus then we demonstrate the strength of Jesus Christ. In our weakness he is glorified.

Note this is not an isolated scripture so if you are looking for other substantiating passages, here you go:

- Jesus said: "Blessed (happy) are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matthew 5:11).
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- Paul said: "We rejoice in our suffering's knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces approvedness and approvedness produces hope" (Romans 5:3).
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- James said: "Count it all joy my brothers when you meet various trials for you know that the testing of your own faith produces steadfastness" (James 1:2).
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- Peter said: "For a little while you may have ... the revelation of Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:7).

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- The writer to the Hebrews says: “God disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11, cf. 2 Corinthians 4:11, 17).
- So here is the \$10 question: What do these two purpose of God with relation to our suffering have to do with each other? In short, What does the building up of faith by our suffering have to do with the demonstration of the power of Christ through suffering?

It is our perspective or response to our troubles that will determine the effect of suffering and how it will affect our lives...

- 1) We can choose to react with bitterness and resentment, curse God as wrathful and mean. Disregard the intent and say something like. “I don’t want to serve a God like that! Or I don’t want any part of a God who would do that!”
- 2) But if we choose to react with hope, faith and trust in God, we have learned to trust God and have established a base of faith in him.

What is a faith that is untested? Will faith endure when trouble comes?

What did Job say in Job 13:15? “Though he slay me yet will I trust him”

Here is the reality check... It is only by the power in Christ that mankind can respond the second way. In order to do it, we need to grow beyond ourselves into the grace of Christ and the perfection of power.

Do you want to walk in power and authority in your walk with Jesus? He can’t give you that if you can’t handle it. You must be faithful. To be faithful means having faith; not when it is easy to do so, but when the chips are down.

So... how are they connected? Our reliance on God, that we can only learn through suffering is the means by which we experience and demonstrate to others around us the grace and power of Christ.

Paul says in Philippians 3:8-11

### **Philippians 3:8-11**

Amplified Bible (AMP)

\*Yes, furthermore, I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege (the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth, and supreme advantage) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord *and* of progressively becoming more deeply *and* intimately acquainted with Him [of perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly]. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish (refuse, dregs), in order that I may win (gain) Christ (the Anointed One),

<sup>9</sup>And that I may [actually] be found *and* known as in Him, not having any [self-achieved] righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law's demands (ritualistic uprightness and supposed right standing with God thus acquired), but possessing that [genuine righteousness] which comes through faith in Christ (the Anointed One), the [truly] right standing with God, which comes from God by [saving] faith.

<sup>10</sup>[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly], and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [<sup>[a]</sup>which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope]

<sup>11</sup>That if possible I may attain to the [<sup>[b]</sup>spiritual and moral] resurrection [that lifts me] out from among the dead [even while in the body].

So if you want to know what Paul meant when he said Philippians 4:11

### **Philippians 4:11**

New International Version (NIV)

<sup>11</sup>I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

I hope there is some clarity.

\_\_Prayer\_\_