

FBC POWELL, 8-6-17 AM NOTES
"A Biblical Worldview of Suffering"
Various Scriptures
8 in Series, "A Biblical Worldview"

I. Suffering Manifests the Glory of God

Genesis 2:17 (ESV) "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

John 9:3 "Jesus answered, 'It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.'"

Job 42:1b-3 "...I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

Job 42:5-6 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."

Revelation 13:8 (NIV) "...the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world."

II. Suffering Is Designed for Our Sanctification

Hebrews 12:10 "For they [earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He [God] disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness."

"Decades of study, paralysis, pain, and cancer have taught me to say [with] Psalm 119:71 'It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.' I won't rehearse all of suffering's benefits here...Like the way God uses it to shape Christ's character in us (Romans 8:28-29). Or how it produces patience (Romans 5:4). Or how it refines our heart like gold (1 Peter 1:7). Or gives us a livelier hope of Heaven (James 1:12)." —Joni Eareckson Tada

Hebrews 5:8 "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered."

1 Peter 1:6-7 "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

III. Suffering Gives Us Greater Capacity to Enjoy Heaven

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

IV. Our Suffering Fills Up What Is Lacking in Christ's Afflictions

Colossians 1:24 "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 (NIV) "Because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."

V. Suffering Must Be Accompanied by Hope

Hope is the joyful confidence and expectation that what God has promised, He will accomplish in His perfect timing.

Hebrews 6:18b (HCSV) "...seize the hope set before us."

Revelation 21:4 "And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

*A big man running on the lawn:
That's old John Younge with both legs on.
The blind can see a bird on wing,
The dumb can lift their voice and sing.
The diabetic eats at will,
The coronary runs uphill.*

*The lame can walk, the deaf can hear,
The cancer-ridden bone is clear.
Arthritic joints are lithe and free,
And every pain has ceased to be.
And every sorrow deep within,
And every trace of lingering sin
Is gone. And all that's left is joy,
And endless ages to employ
The mind and heart, and understand,
And love the sovereign Lord who planned
That it should take eternity
To lavish all His grace on me.*

—John Piper

Sermon 8: A Biblical Worldview of Suffering

Various Scriptures

Think of your worldview as being like the lens through which you see all of life. This series is designed to enable you to see the world through a biblical lens. It should be the desire of *every* Christian that in *every* area of life, we would see *every* issue through the lens of Scripture. As we saw last week, the Bible speaks to every important issue we will face, every dilemma we will deal with, and thus every decision we must make. That's a big claim, but we have a big God who inspired an inerrant guide so that we are not left floundering here on this fallen planet.

In this message, we will look at a biblical worldview of suffering. A Few years ago, a Barna opinion poll asked this question, "If you could ask God only one question and you knew that He would give you an answer, what would you ask?" The most common response was, "Why is there pain and suffering in the world?" [Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good Why Do We Hurt?* page 8]

The topic of pain and suffering is one that interests most every person. There is no shortage of philosophers who have weighed in on this subject. The atheist Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) is known for his famous "dilemma" regarding suffering. Many have used Hume's work as a "logical proof" that there is no God. Here is a paraphrase of Hume's dilemma: "Is [God] willing to prevent suffering, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is evil. If he is both able and willing? Why then is evil suffering?" [Quoted in Robert Jeffress, *Hell? Yes!* Page 49 from John Stackhouse Jr. *There Is an Answer to Evil, Christianity Today* 28, no. 8 (18 May 1984) page 40] Was Hume correct in his logic? No, he was not, and in this message, we will see why.

In this message, we will see that while we often cannot understand every incident of suffering, we can understand the overarching "why" of suffering. Sometimes even ungodly people can stumble upon truth (an old country saying puts it this way – "Even a blind hog finds an acorn every now and then").

Friedrich Nietzsche was an atheist philosopher, but he "found an acorn" when he said, "Men and women can endure any amount of suffering so long as they know the why of their existence." [Quoted in Charles Colson, *How Now Shall We Live*, page 214]

The Bible is very clear as to the "why" of our existence and from a biblical worldview, it is very clear as to how God uses suffering to accomplish that "why".

I. Suffering Manifests the Glory of God

From a human perspective, suffering came into the world as a result of sin coming into the world. In time, suffering followed sin. The Bible tells us that in the beginning of God's creation, there was no evil, no suffering, and no death. When we read Genesis 1-2 we find a world in which everything was good.

We then see the origin of sin and suffering in Genesis 3. God warned in Genesis 2:17 (ESV): "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

In Genesis 3 we see the first act of disobedience when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and the horrific results that followed. Adam and Eve (who were literal people) truly did die when they disobeyed God. Their spirit (that part of mankind that allows us to know, fellowship with, and worship God) died immediately. Their soul (mind, will, and emotions) was darkened

(Ephesians 4:18) which gave them a distorted view of reality and their body began to age and die.

In Genesis 3 we also see that the results of sin were passed on to their descendants and in the New Testament, all mankind from their conception are seen as being, “in Adam.” That means that we were all born with a spirit dead to God, a soul that is darkened in its understanding, and a body that gets old and is destined for suffering and physical death. In addition to the effects of sin on mankind, the whole creation suffered the consequences of sin. What we call “natural disasters” are the result of sin coming into the world.

To have a biblical view of suffering, we need to ask and answer some tough questions. First, did God know when He created the world and man that man would sin and that suffering would come into the world? Of course God knew! He is omniscient (all knowing). He knew that man would sin and that sin would bring suffering. So why would God create all that is knowing that man would sin and because of that sin suffering would come into every life? Here is a very basic statement that many have never understood. God created the world for the purpose of *manifesting His glory*. In other words, God’s glory is most fully manifested in a fallen world. What is God’s glory? It is the sum of His perfections, His attributes. God’s glory is His power, His love, His infinite knowledge, His grace, His wrath, His holiness, His sovereignty, His justice, and so much more.

As strange as this sounds, in what we would call a perfect world (no sin or suffering), the revelation and display of God’s glory is limited. How would we know the *grace* of God apart from sin coming into the world? How would we know *forgiveness* apart from sin in the world? How would we more deeply know His supernatural *love* apart from experiencing His love for sinners? How would we know His *mercy* apart from needing mercy? We tend to have such limited views of eternity. All through eternity in Heaven where there will be no more suffering, we will be amazed at His glory in saving sinners such as we were, astounded by His perfections such as His mercy and grace that forgave us and cleansed us that we might be fit to spend eternity with Him. Yet those perfections would never have been known apart from sin coming into the world.

Let me be clear that I am not saying that sin is a good thing, but sin was used by our all-powerful God to manifest His glory and when this world that was tainted by sin is burned up and all things are made new and time shall be no more, we will be joyfully praising Him for His glorious perfections for all eternity.

In John 9, Jesus and His disciples came upon a blind man and the disciples were asking why he suffered with blindness and Jesus gave them the bottom line John 9:3: “Jesus answered, ‘It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.’” This blind man suffered that the works (the glory) of God might be put on display.

At the end of Job, after all of his suffering, after all his so-called friend’s mostly worthless advice, after Job’s complaining, God parades His glory before Job. From nature, He shows Job His power, His wisdom, and His providential care. Job is overwhelmed with the glory of God and answers the Lord. Job 42:1b-3: “...I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” Job doesn’t have to know the answer; God is the answer and in seeing His Glory Job is satisfied. Job 42:5-6: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.”

Job didn't understand all the details, but it was enough to know that there was a purpose. Without suffering we would never know God's *comfort*, God's *enabling grace*, God's *healing*, or God's *compassion*. These are all a small part of His awesome glory. Our suffering puts these and many more of God's perfections on display.

The greatest demonstration of God's glory was the cross of Jesus Christ. In the cross we see the love of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, the wisdom of God, the judgment of God, the wrath of God, and much more. The cross and its amazing display of the glory of God was in the mind of God even before He created the world. Revelation 13:8 (NIV): "...the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world." God allows suffering for His glory!

II. Suffering Is Designed for Our Sanctification

That big word, sanctification, means to set apart. It is from the same Greek root as the word translated "holy." As it is used in this point it is referring to how God works through suffering to progressively set us apart from sin and self and to conform us to the likeness of Christ. It is likely that suffering is God's most prolific, most effective tool in our sanctification, our growth in holiness. Remember the twisted logic of the atheist philosopher, David Hume? He said, "Is God willing to prevent suffering, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is evil. If he is both able and willing? Whence then is suffering?"

He **is** able to prevent evil, but by not preventing it, he is not malevolent (evil); He is good. He uses suffering to accomplish His glorious purposes and our good. God neither causes nor allows any "purposeless" events or incidents of suffering. Often our desires become unruly and we seek pleasure from things tied to this world and a comfortable existence free from pain or suffering of any kind. God, however, desires for us to find our pleasure in Him and to receive our comfort from Him. To accomplish that, He allows suffering in our life. His purpose, for the suffering He allows, is to turn our hearts to Him alone. I never find God in the Scripture valuing His children being comfortable (there is a difference in being comforted and being comfortable).

Suffering brings about our sanctification primarily through deepening and disciplining us. Mature believers are almost always people who have been through suffering. Even those mature believers who seem to have smooth lives, when you dig deep you will see much suffering. Hebrews 12 deals extensively with this aspect of suffering. Hebrews 12:10: "For they [earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He [God] disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." The word translated "disciplines" refers to the training and correction of a child. The Lord's discipline often comes in the form of different degrees of suffering. Sometimes it is related to sin in our lives, but not always. Sometimes it is simply for our sanctification; it is to draw us close to Him and to give us discipline in our walk with Him.

I read an article this week by Joni Eareckson Tada on her fiftieth anniversary of the diving accident that made her a quadriplegic. From age 17 – 67 she has been confined to a wheel chair. It was a great article. Here is a short part of it.

Decades of study, paralysis, pain, and cancer have taught me to say [with] Psalm 119:71 "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." I won't rehearse all of suffering's benefits here... Like the way God uses it to shape Christ's character in us (Romans 8:28-29). Or how it produces patience (Romans 5:4). Or how it refines our heart like gold (1 Peter 1:7). Or gives us a livelier hope of Heaven (James 1:12).

[*The Gospel Coalition*]

Even Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God in human flesh went through suffering. Hebrews 5:8: “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” That does not mean that Jesus grew from disobedience to obedience; in the same book of the Bible we are told that He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). It means that He experientially demonstrated holiness through His much suffering. I am convinced that it is impossible for us to go past a certain depth in our walk with God apart from suffering. If you read the biographies of men and women who were amazingly used by God and walked in deep communion with God, they (without exception) went through much suffering.

Here is just one example of God taking those He will use greatly through much suffering. John Patton was born in 1824 in Scotland. He became a missionary to the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu) in the South Seas from 1858 until 1907 just before he died. It was an island populated by fierce cannibals. He lost his thirty-four-year-old wife four months after he landed on the island of Tanna. Two weeks later his newborn son died. He buried both of them with his own hands. He said, “But for Jesus, and the fellowship vouchsafed to me there, I [would] have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave!” Paton was constantly in danger and more than once experienced supernatural deliverance. Eventually almost all of the people on that island, and another island called Aniwa, were converted to Christ. In addition to giving the Gospel to these former cannibals, he also translated the New Testament into their language.

The Scripture is filled with promises and exhortations to persevere in suffering because it is through suffering that we are deepened and disciplined. 1 Peter 1:6-7: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

III. Suffering Gives Us a Greater Capacity to Enjoy Heaven

2 Corinthians 4:17-18: “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Paul’s affliction produced a “weight of glory.” The Greek word translated “weight” is better translated in this context “abundance.” Paul is saying that suffering here results in a greater capacity to delight in Heaven.

IV. Our Suffering Fills Up What Is Lacking in Christ’s Afflictions

Colossians 1:24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” That last part of this verse “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” needs some explanation. Certainly, Christ’s afflictions on the cross are not lacking in their sufficiency to atone for the sin of all who come to Him! When He cried “It is finished.”, He was saying that the sin debt was paid in full. Paul is saying that the suffering of Christ’s messengers often makes those they are trying to reach more open to the Gospel. Paul gives us an example of what he is referring to in 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 (NIV): “because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” In other words, the Thessalonians saw

Paul's suffering to get the Gospel to them and they imitated Paul by enduring affliction related to being a Christian.

Dr. J. Oswald Sanders shares the account of an indigenous missionary in India who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the Gospel. After a long day of many miles he came to a village to share the Gospel, but he and his message was rejected by the villagers. Discouraged, he went to the edge of the village and lay down under a tree and in his exhausted state went to sleep. When he awoke, the whole town was gathered to hear him. The head man of the village explained that they had come to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet, they concluded that he must be a holy man and that they had been evil in rejecting him. They then told him that they were ready to hear him because of his willingness to suffer to get the message to them. [This account and much of the material in this point is from the book *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* by John Piper and Justin Taylor]

V. Suffering Must Be Accompanied by Hope

The Greek word for hope (*elpis*) is not a wish or longing. Hope is the *joyful confidence and expectation* that what God has promised, He will accomplish in His perfect timing. When hope fills our heart, we are able to endure suffering. One of my favorite passages relating to hope is Hebrews 6:18b (HCSV): "...seize the hope set before us." We are to grab hold of, seize the hope that God who cannot lie has made some amazing promises about our suffering. This secure hope for the future gives us confidence in whatever suffering we must go through here. The devil's main tactic when we are suffering is to get us to believe the lie that there is no hope.

A biblical worldview of suffering always sees suffering in light of biblical hope. There is coming an end to all suffering. Revelation 21:4: "and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." Don't ever lose sight of the hope that is in Christ.

Conclusion

Years ago, I read a poem by John Piper that I thought was okay, but I wasn't all that impressed. The more suffering I see, and the more I understand about hope, the more this poem means. I share it with you in closing.

*A big man running on the lawn:
That's old John Younge with both legs on.
The blind can see a bird on wing,
The dumb can lift their voice and sing.
The diabetic eats at will,
The coronary runs uphill.*

*The lame can walk, the deaf can hear,
The cancer-ridden bone is clear.
Arthritic joints are lithe and free,
And every pain has ceased to be.
And every sorrow deep within,
And every trace of lingering sin
Is gone. And all that's left is joy,
And endless ages to employ
The mind and heart, and understand,*

*And love the sovereign Lord who planned
That it should take eternity
To lavish all His grace on me.*

—John Piper

That is what hope looks like.