

Nose Prints on the Glass

The New Birth Part 5

1 Peter 1:6 4-28-2012 & 4-29-2012

Summary: We are to rejoice while grieving over suffering (not a contradiction – we always have conflicting emotions). The solution to sorrow is greater joy (a clean river is bigger than the muddy river). This kind of extreme jubilation seems unrealistic – probably because our rich culture gives us so much access to the pleasures of this world that we opt for shallow pleasure, whereas people who suffer are driven to God where they find the deep joy. We are on a train ride to heaven, and you get the deep joy by looking out the window more to see the boarders of your inheritance. The suffering is short and necessary.

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1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Introduction: Bible Babble?

What are we to Make of the Commands to Rejoice in Suffering?

Our culture has coined the phrase “psychobabble” to describe psychological lingo that does not have any actual meaning. And anyone who knows me knows how much I dislike psychobabble. But there is another kind of babbling that I hate even more – religio-babble. Psychobabble uses psychological terms that are devoid of meaning to say nothing while pretending to say something.

Religio-babble does the same thing with Bible words. We could even call it biblio-babble. You go through some painful ordeal, and someone says to you, “Just cling to the Cross,” and you say, “What does that mean exactly?” and they do not have an answer – that is biblio-babble. If they say, “Just trust God,” and they do not know what “trust God” means – that is biblio-babble. Now, if you do know what those things mean then they might be some of the most profound and helpful things you will ever say. But any time you are using words and you do not know what they mean – you are babbling. You are not communicating anything.

When we tell people to rejoice in the midst of their suffering, is that Bible babble? Peter does say that in verse 6 - we greatly rejoice even though we are grieved. But what does that mean?

Let me ask you another question: What kind of effect does it have on your emotions when you read things like that in the Bible? When the Bible says that Christians greatly rejoice in our suffering, does that make you feel happy? Or does it make you feel even less joyful than you were to begin with, because now not only are you sad because of your suffering, but on top of that you feel guilty for not having joy?

Why does God command us to be joyful in our suffering? And how can we possibly obey that command?

Unfelt Joy?

Some people have suggested maybe it is talking about some kind of spiritualized joy that has nothing to do with your emotions. They say maybe it is a kind of joy where you do not actually feel emotionally happy – it is more of a decision of the will. The only problem I see with that view is the fact that it is absolute nonsense. What on earth is joy that you can’t feel? It is absolutely nothing. Joy IS a feeling, and there are no feelings that you cannot feel. If you don’t feel happy, then you are not happy. The idea of having joy but not feeling happy, or having fear of God but not feeling afraid, having hope but not feeling encouraged, having reverence but not feeling awe, trusting but not feeling confident, love that you cannot feel but that is only a decision– all of those are nothing but efforts to pacify a guilty conscience when God commands love and joy and peace and fear and faith, and you do not have them. God commands those feelings, and someone says, “I don’t have that feeling, and I don’t know how to get it. I can’t just decide to have it, therefore God can’t require it of me, therefore He must be talking about something other than a feeling.”

No!

That is horrible logic and it is dead wrong. And it is incredibly damaging, because it turns the language of Scripture into Bible babble. And I despise that kind of thinking because it trains people to read the Bible in a way that is disconnected from real life. Christianity becomes this theoretical, detached religion of mere words that do not have any actual connection with real life. And once you start reading the Bible that way, you might as well not read it at all.

When God speaks, He speaks about reality. And when He talks about joy, He means real joy that feels joyful. Happiness, delight, enjoyment, gladness – feeling good.

Rejoicing while Grieving

Grief is Appropriate

So what are we to make of passages like this that talk about joy in the midst of suffering? In fact, not only joy in the midst of suffering, but joy in the midst of *grief!*

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief...

So it is not that you dodged the trial and it never really hit you. It hit you square in the face and made you grieve. Lit. **you have been caused to grieve**. And that word for grieving points specifically to internal pain. Suffering causes distress, sadness, sorrow, and grief.

It is not wrong to feel sadness and distress. Sometimes people misunderstand the commands about joy and they beat themselves up over the fact that they feel sorrow. It is not wrong to feel sorrow or be distressed. Suffering is supposed to hurt. Trouble that does not hurt is not trouble. We must experience trials, and trials that do not cause any internal pain or distress are not trials.

Paul was distressed, Jesus was distressed – God designed us to feel internal pain when we suffer. In fact, the more godly you are, the more severe your pain because you understand eternal realities. You understand the real horrors of sin and judgment and hell and that should cause severe, heartbroken anguish. Which is why some for some Christians, joy seems impossible. They look at the lost, they look at problems in the Church, they look at the sin in their own heart, and the sorrow of it all just overwhelms them.

Experience Joy Greater than your Sorrow

I read one author who said people like that “have religion enough to make them gloomy ... but have not enough to make them glad.”¹ I think there are a lot of people who have left Christianity because they think of it as nothing but a lot of guilt-producing rules. So they left so they could have some fun. And there are Christians who respond to that by saying, “No, Christianity isn’t about rules.” They do not want people to think Christianity is a drag, so they make it sound like there are no requirements on behavior. But that is not the solution. The way to reach those people is not by stripping down Christianity by removing the requirements of holiness. Those people’s problem is not that they went too deep into Christianity – it is that they did not go deep enough. They had religion enough to make them feel guilty, but not enough to find joy.

Coexistence of Joy and Sorrow

Peter is not talking about joy *instead* of grief – he is talking about joy *during* grief. Joy and grief at the same time – just like...

2 Corinthians 6:10 [we are] sorrowful, yet always rejoicing

Simultaneous sorrow and joy. And if that sounds like a contradiction to you, then you do not understand the human soul. You do not have to look very deep into your own soul to realize that we constantly experience conflicting emotions. Isn’t it true that if you took an inventory of all the feelings you have felt just today that you would see some things that are dragging you down and other things that are lifting your spirits? God made us complex beings, capable of conflicting emotions. In fact, I doubt there’s ever a moment when you are experiencing 100% pure joy with no sorrow mixed in, or 100% pure sorrow with no joy.

When someone says, “I’m happy” – that does not mean there is zero sadness in the person’s heart. It just means his happiness is greater than his sorrow. Something has happened that has given him strong good feelings – so strong that they eclipse his negative feelings. And when someone is feeling sad, it is not that they have zero joy; it is just that their sorrow is greater than their joy.

And if you understand that, you can understand that suffering should not diminish joy. There is no reason for distress to reduce your joy. Very often people falsely assume that if you feel more sorrow that means you have to feel less joy – as if your heart were like a cup that only had so much room for emotion, so if you have more of one you have to have less of another. That is not how it works. Your heart is more like a river than a cup. I have done a lot of whitewater rafting, and I have seen places where two rivers will come together, and one is clear and the other is muddy. The muddy one looks

¹ Alexander McLaren (http://preceptaustin.org/1_peter_exposition_by_a__mclaren.htm#btu).

like chocolate milk coming in to the other river, and you would think they would just mix together right away, but actually they kind of just flow side by side for quite a while. That is the way our emotions work. You have the clean, pure river of joy and the stirred up, muddy river of distress. There is absolutely no way to prevent the muddy river from coming in. But there are ways to make sure the joy river is a lot bigger than the muddy river of distress. So when they do mix together, the river is still mostly clear instead of mostly muddy.

Solution: Increase Joy

This is an important principle to understand, because most people think the solution to sorrow and sadness and depression is to reduce their feelings of sorrow. But most of the time the solution is not to reduce their sorrow, but rather to increase their joy. If your level of joy, on a scale of one to one hundred, is way down at a five, and your sorrow is at seventy, and you get rid of all the major problems in your life so that instead of seventy, your sorrow level drops down to twenty – if your joy level is still down at five, you are still miserable overall. But if your sorrow level stays at seventy and your joy goes to ninety, then your overall mood is happy. Whichever emotion is greater will overshadow the other one. That is why Scripture does not teach us to deal with our sorrow mainly by reducing the amount of trouble in our lives. The focus is always on increasing our joy. So when Peter says that we rejoice while we are grieving, it is not meaningless religious babble, it is not a contradiction, and it is not some kind of weird, spiritualized joy that you cannot feel. What Peter is talking about is very simple – joy that is so intense that it overshadows your very real sorrow.

ALL Sorrows

“But what kind of sorrow is he talking about? I can picture having a joy that is big enough to overshadow the sorrow of, say, a sprained ankle, or a financial setback, or a bad grade on a test. I could picture that. But what about the really deep sorrows? What about a divorce? Or the loss of a child? Or a diagnoses of inoperable cancer? There are the normal little bumps and bruises of life, and then there is the really big suffering. What kind of sorrow and hardship does Peter have in mind?”

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

That word translated **all kinds** is literally “many-colored.” He is talking about trials that are across the whole spectrum. From one extreme to another. This joy is a joy that can overshadow and eclipse the little sorrows and the big sorrows.

And that is great news, because isn't it the two extremes of the spectrum of suffering that tend to get us? When some catastrophic, excruciating pain comes into your life, it seems impossible to have a greater joy. We can handle the medium-sized sufferings that we run into once in a while. But then, when we get down to the really little things – losing your car keys, bumping your funny bone, your spouse or a friend being insensitive in some little way, something slips out of your hand and breaks on the floor – the tiny little annoyances of life – those get to us because it does not occur to us to apply biblical principles about suffering like we do with medium-sized suffering. There are many people who could handle getting fired better than they handle someone cutting them off on the highway. “The ants will pick the carcass clean just as quickly as the lion.” A bunch of little bites can have the same effect as a few big bites. The variety of suffering that comes our way is so incredibly wide-ranging, and Peter says, “All of it – from one end of the spectrum to the other – this joy I'm talking about is big enough to overshadow any kind of sorrow from any and every kind of suffering. The little daily annoyances and aggravations all the way up to the massive, life-shattering heartbreaks.”

If you look up that word translated **all kinds** (“many-colored”), you find that Peter used that term one other time. It is in 1 Peter 4:10, where it refers to the many-colored grace of God. And those two uses of the term really go together, don't they? God's grace is just as multi-faceted as your suffering. Whatever the particular color of suffering you are going through right now, God's grace has a shade to

match it. Do not ever think your suffering is so unique that the promises of Scripture do not really cover it. The spectrum of suffering is wide; the spectrum of grace is wider.

Great Joy

So, suffering should not diminish our joy. In fact, one of the most striking things about this section is the extreme language Peter uses to describe this joy. The word he uses is *agallao*, which is a much stronger word than the normal word for rejoice (*kairo*). It refers to joy that causes an external response – shouting or jumping up and down or some kind of expression like that. A good translation might be jubilation.

And I have to say - all week as I was studying this, that word made me really kind of uncomfortable. It just does not seem realistic. We generally think we are doing well if we can just get a little bit of a sense of peace from God during suffering. When you are going through some horrible time of pain or sorrow, and then you turn to God for comfort – if you can actually just have a few little glimmers of joy, that is a huge success. But to get to the point of shouting for joy, laughing, jubilation so extreme that it drives you to physical expressions – that just seems ... farfetched.

Heaven?

And for that reason, some commentators have suggested that this must be a reference not to our joy in this life, but to the joy we will have in heaven. The verbs are in the present tense, but sometimes, if the context demands it, the present tense can have a future reference. So some have argued that these should be understood that way. Not that we are now rejoicing with this kind of extreme exuberance, but that we will someday.

And that sounds very plausible – especially when you get to verse 8, where Peter cranks up the rhetoric even more.

8 ...[you] are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

Inexpressible means it is beyond the capacity of human language to even describe it. And **glorious** is literally, “**having been glorified.**” The word **glorified** is a term normally associated with the Second Coming and heaven. This is heavenly glory-type joy that is beyond words to describe. That does not sound to me like this life.

No – Here and Now

If you have been around here long you know I love to preach about joy. I am all about joy – deep, rich, profound joy here and now, in this life. I believe in that with all my heart. However, even though I am so big on the importance of great joy in this life, Peter’s language here is hard even for me to swallow. It really does sound too extreme to describe our level of joy in this life. And so as I was studying this, and I got to those commentators who make an argument for this referring to future joy in heaven, I have to say I was really rooting for those guys to be right. In my heart I am thinking, “Man, I hope they are right.” Because frankly, I did not want to have to stand up here and tell you that the norm in the Christian life is this over-the-top level of joy. I did not want to have to preach that to you because, to be honest, I am not living that way. I wanted these present tense verbs to turn out to be futuristic presents because if they aren’t, and Peter really is describing this life, that means I am nowhere near where I need to be spiritually.

But even with all my rooting for them, those commentators came up short. Their argument does not fly.

8 ... even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an inexpressible and glorious joy²

Because of the grammatical relationship between the phrase **do not see** and the word **rejoice**, the two actions have to be simultaneous. The rejoicing takes place during the same period that we do not see Jesus, which is here and now in this life. That is why all the translations translate these as present and not future.

What you read in your English Bible is exactly right – which leaves me with the problem I did not want to have. On the one hand, I don't want to just stand up here and throw some great sounding religious lingo or Bible babble at you that has no connection to real life. But on the other hand, if the Bible says it, then it is true.

So why is it that so few of us experience this level of joy? We experience joy in the Lord – no question about that – but *this much* joy? And in times of sorrow and pain and grief? Is that even possible? And if it is possible, why doesn't it happen more?

Suffering Turns your Attention Future

From what I have heard, it actually does happen – in other places in the world. In places where there is severe persecution, it is not uncommon at all to hear about this kind of joy. I would suggest that one reason this level of joy is so illusive to us in our culture is because of our wealth. We have so much access to the shallow pleasures of this world that we are drawn away from the source of real joy.

Compared to most human beings who have ever lived, we live in a context of unbelievable comfort. Throughout most of history not even the wealthiest, most extravagant kings lived like we do. We eat like kings. We sleep on \$1000 mattresses. We drive around in vehicles with soft seats and shocks so we don't feel any bumps as we just glide across town, and if the temperature gets a couple degrees off we turn up the heater or AC, so that we do not have to experience any discomfort. We live in castles where there are entire rooms devoted just to entertainment. We spend hours every week just sitting around being entertained. We have so much access to the pleasures of this world, that we become prone to seeking our happiness from those things, which leaves us with a weak, insipid, shallow joy.

But when Christians really suffer, and they do not have access to the comforts of this world, they are forced to turn their attention to their future inheritance – and that is where the real joy comes. When have you ever heard someone say, “Man, that period of comfort and ease I just went through – I grew so much!”? You never hear that. It is always the times of hardship and suffering when people talk about how much they grew closer to God.

Last week Sam was talking to me about legalism and grace, and I wanted to make sure we were on the same page so I asked him to define those two terms. So he defined legalism, and then I said, “OK, how about grace?” And he got half way through his definition of grace, and then couldn't finish because he was weeping. Sam has been so touched by God's grace that all he has to do is try to define it in a casual conversation on an airplane and he is moved to tears. Would you like to have that kind of love for one of the attributes of God? How do you get that? Do you think if I asked Sam, “How did you ever develop such an intense love for that attribute of God?” do you think he would say, “Oh, it happened during this period of ease and comfort and smooth sailing I went through a few years back”? It is the excruciating crucible that forges that kind of joy in God.

Does that mean we should all get rid of all our stuff and live in cardboard boxes and try to get sick? No. God is a loving parent, and He wants us to enjoy the gifts He gives us. The problem is not with God's gifts – it is in the way we use them. Those gifts do not have to destroy our joy. They only destroy it if we try to turn those gifts themselves into sources of our joy.

² The main verb is “rejoice” and it is modified by the participle “not seeing.” Both are present. You cannot have a present participle modify a present main verb where the main verb is a futuristic present and the participle is not. In this kind of construction, the action of the participle and the main verb have to be simultaneous.

A Train Ride to Glory

When people see the commands in Scripture about having joy, they sometimes object, “I can’t just flip a switch and have certain emotions.” That is true – you can’t. But you can control what you think about most.

6 In this you greatly rejoice

What is “this”? It is the certainty of our inheritance in heaven (vv.3-5).

Focus on the Promises (Steak)

God’s great and precious promises are like a steak dinner. You can have a full plate of prime rib and mashed potatoes and dinner rolls and all the rest, but it will give you no energy and no nourishment and no satisfaction unless you actually put it in your mouth and eat it. And God’s promises will not give you strength and hope and satisfaction and joy unless you think deeply about them. And whenever you turn your attention away from them, you just stopped eating. And if you do that for very long, do not be surprised if you start feeling hunger pangs.

The Train

Imagine you inherited a vast estate. In fact, not just an estate, but an entire kingdom – stretching for hundreds of miles in some of the most amazing country you have ever seen. And in this life you are on a train, going through the mountains, on your way to go see this inheritance and take possession of it.

And as the train gets to the fringes of the territory of your inheritance, you look out the window and it takes your breath away. As the train moves along the mountain side, on one side it drops off so when you look out the train windows you can see ... seems like forever. And it is amazing – lush green valleys and rolling hills and spectacular mountains and rivers and streams and waterfalls and wildlife – it just has you mesmerized. The conductor sees that your eyes are the size of quarters and he chuckles and says, “This isn’t anything. This part is the badlands compared to what’s up ahead. We’ll go through the most spectacular mountains you have ever seen, then it levels out just before you get to the coast. Your kingdom includes hundreds of miles of pristine beach. Believe me – it gets a lot better than what you’re seeing now.”

We are all on this train en route to our inheritance. However – we are not all riding in the same car. Some of us are riding in the luxury car – first class. Big, plush seats, and servers bringing you all kinds of food and drinks all the time. Others are in the regular cars, and others could not even get seats and are back in the cars with the cattle. Nothing back there but a horrendous smell.

Who do you think spends more time looking out the window? The people in the luxury car start to become focused on all the luxuries inside the train. They just love the comfort of their big, plush seat, and all the food service and everything. But after a while, the selection of drinks gets a little old.

“Don’t you have anything else?”

And the filet mignon comes and it’s overcooked!

“Great! Now my whole dinner is ruined! Man, I’m having a bad day – first the drinks, and now this...”

And then you notice that the seats by the windows are not quite as soft as the ones in the aisle. So you move away from the window to get a softer seat. And the more you try to get your joy from the pleasures inside the train, the more you find yourself disappointed and unfulfilled. If they do bring you a really good steak, do you enjoy that? Sure. Does it give you some joy? Yeah – but nothing like the joy in the hearts of those people back in the cattle car who have their faces pressed up against the windows and are lost in thoughts about this amazing inheritance they are about to receive.

How can we get that kind of joy? Do we have to move back to the cattle car? Not necessarily. We could have it too if we would just look out the window. Go ahead and enjoy the steak, but when you do let it remind you that this steak is just a foretaste of what's to come, and then let that cause you turn and look out the window some more.

Living a life of hope means living a life with our faces pressed up against the window. Every moment you spend thinking about heaven is a moment of looking out the window of this life into eternity. That is what we are doing right now. That is why you are here, isn't it? Aren't you here this morning because you would rather put your fingerprints and nose prints all over the glass as you spend a couple hours gazing out the window at your inheritance? Some of your friends are out enjoying the pleasures of this world right now. They slept in, or they are involved in some kind of recreation. Meanwhile you are sitting in church. Why? What are you going to tell them when they see you come home from church? Just tell them, "I was putting nose prints on the glass!"

1) The Train Ride is Short

Now, in order to get the full impact of joy from looking out the window of the train into eternity, Peter wants us to know two very important things about this train ride. The first one is this – it is short.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer...

Some of our trials last a few minutes; other people suffer horribly from the day they are born to the day they die. But either way – even you suffer with something for eighty years, Peter says you need to understand, that is a **little while**. The train ride is short compared to eternity. Paul says the same thing.

2 Corinthians 4:17 our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory

Peter will say it again in chapter 5.

1 Peter 5:10 And the God of all grace ...after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you

James says this life is like a puff of steam that appears and then vanishes. Hebrews 11:25 says it is a **short time**. Seventy, eighty, ninety years in this world is a brief, momentary, fleeting period of time.

"That's fine for God to say that, but what do I do if eighty years doesn't feel like a short time to me?"

What if you are Joni Erickson and you become a quadriplegic as a teenager, and you have decades in a wheelchair to look forward to? Eighty years does not naturally feel like a short time to anyone. The only way to make it seem like the short time that it is is to expand your perspective by thinking about eternity. Our problem is we tend to think about death as if it were the end. Someone has a hard marriage, and becomes overwhelmed because he thinks, "I can't handle this *for the rest of my life!*" It is one thing to go through a rough patch if you have some light at the end of the tunnel, but when you know it is for the rest of your life – that is when it can be overwhelming. And Peter is reminding us that no trial is for the rest of your life. They might last for the rest of this life, but this life is only the train ride. And when we arrive in eternity it will be a distant memory.

2) The Train Ride is Necessary

So, Peter reminds us that the train ride is short. And secondly, that the train ride is necessary. The NIV translates verse 6 this way: **...for a little while you may have had to suffer grief...** A literal translation would sound like this:

In which you rejoice, a little while, if necessary, you may be grieved in various trials

That little phrase **if necessary** teaches us some very important principles about suffering.

Suffering only happens when it's Necessary

The word **if** tells us that suffering does not happen unless it is necessary. If it is not necessary, it will not happen. Hardships are never random for the Christian. They only happen when they are absolutely necessary.

It is God's Plan that makes them Necessary

What makes it necessary? Circumstances? No – circumstances do not dictate anything to God. Nothing dictates anything to God. The only one who makes anything necessary is God. Suffering is necessary if and only if God's perfect plan requires it. Otherwise it is not necessary and it will not happen.

1 Peter 3:17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Think about that verse. If you do good, according to that verse, you may or may not suffer as a result. What determines whether you will suffer? God's will.

7 These [trials] have come so that your faith ... may be proved genuine

Look at the phrase "**so that**." What does "so that" mean? That points to purpose, right? The trials are coming so that something else will happen. What? So that what may happen? The suffering comes so that your faith will be **proved genuine**. Who is it in this universe who wants to prove your faith genuine? The devil? The sinful people around you who are causing pain in your life? No. That is God's purpose. The "so that" points to the purpose of God. God wants to expose the genuineness of your faith, so He sends suffering to accomplish that purpose.

When the train ride is hard; when you face suffering – little or big, from the death of a loved one all the way down to misplacing your reading glasses – you will not be able to have joy unless you realize the necessity of that hardship. It is not random. It is not mainly because of whatever earthly circumstances you see causing it. Those are the secondary cause; the primary cause is God. God caused this suffering because it is necessary for His perfect plan. The next time some painful thing happens to you, if God were standing right there and you said, "God, was that really necessary?" what do you think the answer would be? Would God say, "No, I act capriciously and arbitrarily, and I do some things for no reason whatsoever"? Of course not. God does not do anything for no reason.

Overcoming Past Pain

This is the key to overcoming past suffering. There are some Christians who are lacking joy, not because of present suffering, but because of something in the past. They are so locked down by some horrible thing that happened years ago, that joy seems unattainable. When that happens it is because something inside you is rejecting that past trial. Something inside you saying, "No – there is no way that was a good thing. There's no way it was necessary. There's no way it was part of a good purpose – it was nothing but bad, and it should not have happened." They cannot be comforted because they are unwilling to look at the divine side of it. They only want to look at the evil, human side of it. Sometimes people like that are afraid that, if they look at the divine side – if they allow their heart to accept the fact that God was indeed doing a good thing in this – that is almost like saying it is OK what the evil men did. For example, suppose someone was horribly abused in some way by a family member and they read in Scripture where it says God is in control of all things, and God only does good things. And God is telling them, "I had a good purpose. What that family member did to you was wicked and evil and horrible, and I HATE what he did to you. However, what I was doing in that trial was actually good – perfectly, wonderfully good. Even though it is impossible for you to even imagine

how it could be good – it is. If you could see what I can see, you would agree – yes, that was necessary and it was for my good, and in heaven when you can see the whole picture you will say, ‘Yes, I’m so glad that happened’.” The person hears a preacher say that and says, “No – I won’t look at it from that point of view. Because if I allow myself to accept the fact that God was doing a good thing – that is like saying what my uncle did to me was kind of OK because it was part of God’s purpose.”

For other people – it is their own sin. They do not want to turn their attention to the fact that God had a wonderfully good purpose in mind when he allowed them to fall into some terrible sin, because it feels like you are almost justifying your sin when you do that.

But that is not at all the case. Embracing the good God was doing in no way justifies the wicked, sinful human action. The people who murdered Jesus Christ on the cross will burn in hell forever for that sin – even though in their actions God was accomplishing the most wonderful act of salvation God ever did. The crucifixion of Jesus was wonderful, because of what God was doing. And it was horrible, because of what evil men were doing. And the wonderful part God was doing was WAY bigger than the evil the people were doing. And the painful things that have happened to you were horrible because of what evil men and women did. And God HATES that evil that was done to you. But in those very same actions God was doing something eternally good and wonderful. And the good He was doing is far, far greater than the evil the people were doing.

You do not have to cling to looking at the evil side of it. Let that go, and fix your thoughts on the good that God was doing. Trust God to punish the wicked for what they did, and to set all injustices right.

Conclusion

Do not spend your energy trying to get comfortable in whatever train car you are in. And anything that pulls your attention away from the windows will never bring you real joy. The ride is short, and the suffering inside the train car is necessary.

And that is where the train illustration breaks down. In the train illustration, suffering in your cabin is good because it turns your attention away from the inside of the train to what is outside the window. That is why the saints in **Hebrews 10:34** joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property, because they knew that they had better and lasting possessions. They had their nose pressed so tight up against the glass that you could take their whole chair out from under them and replace it with a paint bucket to sit on.., and they would just laugh it off because of what they saw outside that window.

But in our situation, suffering does more than just cause us to look out the window more. Our suffering also increases our inheritance.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

The suffering is actually increasing the glory we will receive. When it becomes more uncomfortable inside the train car, not only does that make you look out the window more, but it actually transforms what is out there to become even more glorious and delightful. Whenever the Father sees someone in the train car suffering, He adds more to the inheritance.

“How does that work?”

That is where we will pick it up next time.

Benediction: Jude 24-25 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy- 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

1:25 Questions

- 1) What two or three kinds of suffering tend to pull you away from the window the most?
- 2) The next time one of those kinds of suffering happens, what aspect of your inheritance would bring you the most joy to think about?
- 3) What could you do that would help you remember to look out the window of the train in those times?