

Evil and Suffering - part 2

Grace and Truth – part 12

July 9, 2023

DAY 1: The personal side of suffering

1. Last week we looked at the theological response to evil and suffering.
2. This week we'll look at the pastoral response to evil and suffering.
3. The problem of evil and suffering asks its greatest questions in the midst of pain. We may have theological truths in our head, but pain tends to overwhelm our intellectual answers.
4. Pain opens the door to the question of God's goodness. "If there is some kind of God, He cannot be good." Then we turn to philosophy to justify our unbelief.
5. Isaiah 55 is a prophetic passage about the Messiah, written about 700 years before Jesus. The Christian faith offers something no one else or any other religion can offer. Only Christianity believes in a God who is familiar with suffering and acquainted with grief.

Isaiah 55:2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

Isaiah 55:3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

6. He entered into our suffering, Himself! His entrance is our answer. His suffering is the key to the reason, the answer, and the comfort for our suffering.
7. He himself has gone through the worst horrors, the lowest humiliations, and the worst of suffering.
8. What difference does it make to you that Jesus went through the most extreme time of evil and suffering? For you?!
9. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 2: His birth, He enters into our suffering

1. At Christmas time, we celebrate, not just the “babe in a manger,” but the incarnation, God coming in the flesh!

2. Jesus “residence” was in heaven, a place of perfection with no sin, no suffering, no conflict.

3. Jesus was with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, in perfect love and harmony.

4. Why would He leave all of that to come here? To a broken world, fraught with international conflict all the way down to relational conflict and personal conflict?

5. The apostle Paul describes the downward descent out of heaven down to a sin-plagued world.

Philippians 2:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

6. God in the flesh tells us a lot about evil and suffering.

7. Consider the questions we typically ask when experiencing suffering:

a. Is God indifferent to our suffering?

No. He is so concerned about us that He joins us in our suffering.

b. Is God cruel?

Whatever God is doing, He has kept His own rules and played fair.

c. Has God given up on this world and handed us over to the evil and suffering of our own making?

No. He allows evil and suffering to exist but not only shares in our suffering, but he comes to fix it.

7. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, which includes our suffering.

8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 3: His death, the power of relatability.

1. When you go through very painful seasons of suffering, sharing your pain can be scary. One of the things that is so disheartening, so discouraging is to have someone glibly offer a piece of advice. You may have some of Job's "comforters" as friends. (May God help us).

2. Thankfully, the opposite is true. When you talk with someone who has gone through what you are going through, their testimony is very heartening!

3. Here is some of what Isaiah foresaw about the coming Messiah's pain.

Isaiah 55:3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

4. What strikes you from these prophecies about Jesus, and what He would endure?

5. When we consider Good Friday we almost always consider the physical torture Jesus endured. It included His beatings, floggings, brutal torture, gruesome death--profound evil and suffering.

6. But there was a far greater pain than physical torment. It was personal torment.

7. It's the unseen pain and event of the cross that is deeper than all of the physical pain and trauma Jesus endured.

*Romans 3:25 God presented Christ as **a sacrifice of atonement**, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

8. All our sins and the punishment for our sins were unleashed upon Him, our substitute. This is a suffering that not one of us can comprehend, and no one but Jesus will ever have to endure.

9. While there are some evils Jesus did not specifically experience that you have experienced, what Jesus suffered on the cross tells us there is no **degree** of suffering with which Jesus is unfamiliar.

10. What strikes you about today's devotional?

DAY 4: Cross tells us that Jesus can redeem anything, no matter the depths of suffering

1. God's ability to use your pain for good is nowhere more deeply seen than at the cross.
2. It may be hard to admit this when we are going through suffering, but pain can be redeemed for our greatest good.

3. Let's go back to Isaiah 55.

Isaiah 55:7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.

⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, ...

4. What painful realities did Jesus face and endure?

5. What reasons are given for His suffering?

Isaiah 48:10 See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

6. When it comes to our sufferings, it does marginal good to try to understand God's redemptive work in our lives.

7. But, it does the most good when we take a long gaze at the cross. The greatest suffering was down by the most innocent of persons!

8. Why? What possible reason could God possibly have for allowing the crucifixion to occur? If you were there, you would have asked, "Why? Why would God allow this perfectly innocent man to be cruelly crucified?" What possible reason would God have for this? Your eternal good, and the salvation of the nations comes from that horrific event.

9. If God could redeem that horrific pain, name a pain God cannot redeem. There is no suffering God cannot redeem.

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: Resurrection, the power to resurrect and redeem our pain

1. The resurrection promises exactly what we *ultimately* long for. Nobody wants to give up on the dream of the life we were meant to live, want to live, should live.
2. We don't want to give up on life, allowing evil and suffering to win. We want the problems done. We want life without the problems. That is what God's people will enjoy for all eternity.
3. The answer, the way we get there, is found in the resurrection of Jesus!

He causes His suffering to come untrue!

4. You may believe that your experience with evil and suffering is just too daunting and too painful. You may feel that your bout with evil and suffering is too great a problem.

How about the problem of God facing a lifeless in a tomb?

5. God did the impossible – to raise Jesus from the dead. He has proven, once for all, to make every sadness come untrue.
6. More than the resurrection undoing our pain and suffering, the resurrection will turn our pain into our glory!
7. Jesus' resurrected body included the scars of His crucifixion.

John 20:25 But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

8. His scars of suffering turn into the reminders of redemptive glory! So will yours!
9. Notice how God rewarded His Son for His suffering on the cross.

Isaiah 55:10 ...he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?