

Jesus- Suffering

One of the great mysteries of life and one of the most frequently asked questions in all of life among atheists, agnostics, sincere believers and everyone in between is “Why, if God is such a great God of love and grace, is there so much suffering in the world?” Much of the world goes to bed each night and wakes up the next day hungry and/or in pain or in fear that either or both will overtake and overwhelm their lives. Much of the world lives in constant, reasonable fear of violence against themselves, their families and their country. On top of all of that, there is really no place on the face of the earth that is not prone to potential natural disasters- hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, disease, famine and drought seem to be ever increasing as each new year rolls around.

Do these things just happen as God casually watches from afar? Is God really concerned about what’s going on in His creation? Does God cause these things to happen or does He just allow them? Does God ever intervene to stop evil or suffering from happening? Does it really make any difference how we speak, live, and work or is it all “vanity” as Solomon bemoans?

God cares: ⁵ When the LORD saw that man’s wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every scheme his mind thought of was nothing but evil all the time, ⁶ the LORD regretted that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Gen 6:5-6 (HCSB) “But Noah found grace”

God intervenes: ²³ The Egyptians set out in pursuit—all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen—and went into the sea after them. ²⁴ Then during the morning watch, the

LORD looked down on the Egyptian forces from the pillar of fire and cloud, and threw them into confusion. ²⁵ He caused their chariot wheels to swerve and made them drive with difficulty. “Let’s get away from Israel,” the Egyptians said, “because the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt!” ²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back on the Egyptians, on their chariots and horsemen.” ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal depth. While the Egyptians were trying to escape from it, the LORD overthrew them in the sea. ²⁸ The waters came back and covered the chariots and horsemen, the entire army of Pharaoh, that had gone after them into the sea. None of them survived. **Ex** 14:23-28 (HCSB)

And there are numerous other examples throughout scripture of God’s intervention, particularly on behalf of His people, to prevent evil, harm and suffering. God does care! God does intervene from time to time to prevent evil, deliver from suffering, and heal sickness and disease. But we are still faced with the question: Why does God allow evil and suffering to exist at all, especially among His own children, especially among children? I don’t want to oversimplify the answer to this very complex question but I believe the scriptural answer is fairly simple. Jesus’ teaching reveals two primary reasons for all the suffering, pain, and bad things that happen in the world.....

Reasons for evil, pain, and suffering:

Sin (rebellion)

By far, most of the evil, pain, sickness, hunger, poverty, and fear in this world is self-induced by its inhabitants including God's own people. Much of the world has fully or at least partially rejected God's will and purposes for His creation. Even many of those who claim to be followers of Christ have compromised biblical Christian morals and principles, joined the culture of self-worship and secularism, embraced the pro-abortion movement, tolerated and even embraced perverted lifestyles and even ordaining those who practice such into the ministry. Many who claim to be Christians today live in such a way that is undistinguishable from their unregenerate peers.

27 “You have heard that it was said, **Do not commit adultery.** ²⁸ But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell! **Matt 5:27-30 (HCSB)**

Of course Jesus was using an exaggeration to make a point, but the point is that we should avoid sin at any and all cost. But we not only refuse to gouge out our eye or cut off our hand, we refuse to repent or change at all. We go on sinning as if it was normal, acceptable behavior. (remember- sins of parents impact their children)

Sin has brought so much untold suffering and in some cases God's judgment on the earth over the centuries and the worst is

yet to come. It is this rebelliousness and sin that will ultimately herald the final seven years of great judgment on the earth.

21 For at that time there will be great tribulation, the kind that hasn't taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again! ²² Unless those days were limited, no one would survive. But those days will be limited because of the elect. **Matt 24:21-22 (HCSB)**

41 The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather from His kingdom everything that causes sin and those guilty of lawlessness. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **Matt 13:41-42 (HCSB)**

Sanctification This may be the harder to understand much less appreciate. It seems sometimes that when we are pursuing God the most that we often struggle and suffer the most.

20 cc I assure you: You will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. ²¹ When a woman is in labor she has pain because her time has come. But when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the suffering because of the joy that a person has been born into the world. ²² So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will rob you of your joy. ²³ In that day you will not ask Me anything. “ I assure you: Anything you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked for nothing in My name.

Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete. **J**ohn 16:20-24 (HCSB)

Context: Jesus was teaching the disciples after he had instituted the Lord's Supper and washed their feet. They were still in the upper room. Conversation: His crucifixion would bring much sorrow, pain, and fear. Why? It was necessary that Christ suffer. It was necessary that the disciples endure that time of great sorrow, fear, and loss so that once Jesus was resurrected and ascended they could confidently and boldly go into all the world making and teaching disciples.

32 Look: An hour is coming, and has come, when each of you will be scattered to his own home, and you will leave Me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. ³³ I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." **J**ohn 16:32-33 (HCSB)

These eleven men were the Lord's best, the hand-picked team, the cream of the crop. Jesus personally trained them. After Pentecost they were fully committed to the kingdom. There seems to be likely no need to discipline them but they still endured much suffering and loss. Why?

9 "Then they will hand you over for persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of My name. ¹⁰ Then many will take offense, betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. ¹² Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be delivered."³

Matt 24:9-13 (HCSB)

Persecution, hatred, betrayal, deception, evil, pain and suffering are the testing, proving, purging forces of God used to reveal who His true children are and strengthen them. The reason North America is the only inhabited continent on the planet where Christianity is not growing is because there has not been enough persecution and suffering to purge and purify the church. The church in North America, as a whole, has become fat, lazy, and complacent. If we don't have a major turn around pretty quickly in this country we may soon begin to see, and we already are, increases in persecution and suffering that the church in America has never seen..... This would actually be good for the church. It would purge the apostate, false Christians and it would strengthen and fire up those who are truly saved.

There were more Christians martyred in the 20th century than all the other centuries combined. And the 21st century is starting out to be even much worse. I believe persecution will begin to increase in severity and frequency here in America. It may help some if we can change those in position of power in our government but the swelling hatred for Christ and His followers is growing in our culture and that is going to be hard to stop no matter who's in charge of the government.

So what should/can we do? I wish I could tell you that if you get trust and obey Jesus every day that everything is going to be all right, but I can't, God's Word makes no such promise. Some, in fact, most of the world's most dedicated, faithful, enduring Christian leaders have suffered the most.

Endure suffering:

Put Jesus first He cares. He's promised to meet your needs.

25 “This is why I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the sky: they don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? **27** Can any of you add a single cubit to his height by worrying? **28** And why do you worry about clothes? Learn how the wildflowers of the field grow: they don’t labor or spin thread. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these! **30** If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t He do much more for you—you of little faith? **31** So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ **32** For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. **34** Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. **Matt 6:25-34 (HCSB)**

God does care, more than you’ll every know this side of eternity. His heart breaks over the quantity and severity of suffering that goes on in this world. He offers a simple yet profound solution, not to evil and suffering, but in how we can and should handle it- “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

Pursue God’s peace, power, and presence

27 “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Your heart must not be troubled or fearful. **John 14:27 (HCSB)**

The context again was Jesus’ discussion, after washing their feet, with the disciples regarding His own suffering and departure and what the disciples themselves would have to endure. Whenever you are faced with suffering or hardship of any kind, you are faced with huge decision- turn to Christ, call on Him, pursue Him and receive His peace, resulting in potentially massive, accelerated growth and strength in your walk with Him or, you can become a bitter, discouraged, weakened, irregular, whiny, stumbling follower of Christ. There is no other choice.

Plant Christ’s suffering in the forefront of your mind.

1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged. **2** The soldiers also twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and threw a purple robe around Him. **3** And they repeatedly came up to Him and said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and were slapping His face. **John 19:1-2 (HCSB)**

14 It was the preparation day for the Passover, and it was about six in the morning. Then he told the Jews, “Here is your king!” **15** But they shouted, “Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “Should I crucify your king?” “We have no king but Caesar!” the chief priests answered. **16** So then, because of them, he handed Him over to be crucified. Therefore they took Jesus away. **17** Carrying His own cross, He went out to what is called Skull Place, which in Hebrew is called *Golgotha*.

¹⁸ There they crucified Him and two others with Him, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle **J**ohn 19:14-18 (HCSB)

25 Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple He loved standing there, He said to His mother, “**Woman, here is your son.**”²⁷ Then He said to the disciple, “**Here is your mother.**” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. **J**ohn 19:25-27 (HCSB)

28 After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now accomplished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, He said, “**I'm thirsty!**”²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on hyssop and held it up to His mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “**It is finished!**” Then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. **J**ohn 19:28-37 (HCSB)

Christ suffered for you more than you will ever in a life time of suffering begin to experience yourself. And He suffered so you would not have to spend eternity suffering in hell.