

Suffering for the Sake of the Body - Lesson 1

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes the necessity of understanding suffering for effective leadership and ministry within the church.

Duration: 1:32:14

Scripture: Psalm 119:11, Matthew 4:1, James 4:7, 1 John 2:14

Topics: "Suffering And Pain", "Biblical Worldview"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the reality of suffering in the world and the need for Americans to be aware of the privilege they have compared to most of the world. He highlights the lack of basic necessities like clean water and healthcare that many people face. The speaker also discusses the secular age we live in and the importance of pastors in rebuilding a biblical worldview. He acknowledges the weightiness of the topic and the need to approach it with sensitivity, recognizing the immense pain and loss experienced by millions around the world. The sermon concludes with a reference to the power of Jesus to calm the wind and the question of whether he can still do so today.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org Well, welcome to the seminar that is designed to be a partial fulfillment of Issues in Spiritual Leadership, which is a course here at the Bethlehem Institute for people both in Track 1 and Track 2, or if you're just here to listen, that's fine, too. The name of the course is a little bit odd, Suffering for the Sake of the Body.

I mean the church when I say body there. The pursuit of people through pain is born out of a renewed sense in recent years that neither the ministry to the body nor the ministry in pursuit of the body in evangelism and world missions will succeed without a readiness of the people of God to suffer, to embrace suffering. So that's behind the title.

Why did I put it in the Issues in Spiritual Leadership class? What we have here in the Bethlehem Institute is two classes, a practical theology class and an Issues in Spiritual Leadership class, and they're all made up of clusters of seminars like this. And the reason is because you have to have the issue of suffering somewhat straight in your mind if you're going to be a leader. You have to have some convictions about this.

For example, April 20th, I guess it was, when the Littleton massacre happened, pastors and elders have to be able to respond to that. They have to say something biblical. They have to say something hope-giving and God-honoring.

And as soon as I began to hear about it, I began to earnestly intercede that that would happen, especially in Littleton, because I thought a lot of garbage was spoken in Oklahoma City. And frankly, I've been very encouraged. I have been so encouraged.

And I can't help but think that the reason is because there was so much faith issues at stake here that God was not put on trial immediately in this one like He was in the other one, and therefore many good things have been said, and I was encouraged. I'm going to give you a document. I was on writing leave when that happened, and yet I felt constrained to take out a morning and write a document for my elders and pastors here and send it to them on the email of what I would be thinking and saying if I were here and the kinds of resources they might have from the Scriptures to respond to that.

I'll give you that tomorrow as part of our practical application at the end. That's one reason. I think in order to be a leader in a situation like that, what would you do if you were asked to speak at a memorial service there? What would you say? If you're going to be a leader, you have to have something to say.

You don't have the luxury of saying, I'm speechless, I won't come to that memorial service. You can say you're speechless, but then you have to say something. When I first came to Bethlehem in 1980, I think it was probably the second or third sermon that I preached, and it was entitled Christ and Cancer.

The reason I began my life here 19 years ago with a sermon like that was because I knew that people had to know where I'm coming from with regard to suffering and what I might think or say when I walk into their hospital room. Does he think I'm being judged? Does he think I'm being chastened? Does he think this means nothing? Does he think the devil did this or does he think God did this? What does this man think when he comes to visit me in the hospital? You have to lay your cards on the table, I think, pretty quickly as a pastor in order to effectively minister to your people. A third reason for putting it in this class on spiritual leadership is that if you're a leader, you will suffer.

And you will suffer probably more as a leader than if you aren't a leader. Not necessarily, but perhaps. One of the reasons for that, I'll give you a surprising quote, perhaps you could think of others maybe, but this one you might not think of.

To be a leader, you have to be wise. At least you'll be a better leader if you are wise. And you'll be a better leader if you have knowledge that's relevant to the situation in which you're leading.

Listen to this quote from Ecclesiastes 1.18. In much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. I always began my classes at Bethel with that text to sober the students. They thought they were coming to college to figure out how to get healthy, wealthy, and happy.

And I said, I'll read it to you again. In much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. I know a seminary professor who killed himself the year before I got to seminary.

And I wish he hadn't, because his books to me have been very great. But the turmoil into which he sank as he struggled with his knowledge and his efforts to understand and to make plain biblical issues because of his own psychological makeup simply overcame him. And he killed himself at Berkeley while on a speaking tour there.

There is vexation that comes with knowledge. What's the opposite proverb? Tell me. Somebody say it.

Ignorance is bliss. That's biblical. It's just stupid also to want that kind of bliss.

But if you want to be happy, stay ignorant. But it will be a thin happiness, superficial happiness, glib happiness, probably uncaring happiness, not a very useful happiness. But there's a price to pay for this seminar because if you do gain knowledge in this seminar, and I have probably 80 overheads of Bible text to share with you, you will increase your turmoil and your capacity for ministry, I believe.

And those are not irreconcilable. In fact, they depend on each other somewhat. So leadership requires some wisdom and some knowledge and therefore it brings more suffering.

And the last reason why this seminar and why in this category of leadership is because the magnitude of the amount of suffering in the world is simply staggering. I was going to bring tonight, and I forgot it, the most recent issue of Christianity Today. And I sat down last night.

I think it came yesterday. It was the day before. And I just began to flip through it.

And I took a pen in my hand and I circled everything related to suffering. It seemed like there was something on every other page, at least for about 10 or 15 pages. The world is filled with suffering.

History is a conveyor belt of corpses and a drama of great tragedy. And so Americans who live in the Disneyland of the universe need to wake up to where most of the world lives. Most of the world has no 911.

Most of the world has no doctor accessible. Most of the world has no clean water to drink at the turning of a faucet, nor a toilet to flush away their waste, nor any refrigeration to keep their foods healthy and clean. Most of the world lives on the brink of disease and disaster most of the time, a billion people almost, on the brink of serious poverty, if not extreme poverty.

And we live in a world that would be regarded as the vast majority of the world as heaven. Absolute heaven. And the fact that we murmur as much as we do is a great, great sin.

The Bible says, don't murmur. Philippians 2.15 And it is one of our chief sins in the church and outside of the church. We murmur because part of the fall is that you grow accustomed to the greatest things and you're not staggered when you get up in the morning that you're breathing, or that your house didn't burn down, or that the sun came up, or that the air is clean.

We're not staggered that the mercies of God are new every morning, both on the good and the evil. And so we murmur. And it's a good wake-up call to talk about suffering from the Bible's standpoint.

So I want to pray and then launch into our time and I'll explain how we're going to proceed after I do. So, let's pray together. Father in heaven, this is a weighty, weighty topic because I left Noel tonight and kissed her goodbye.

I said, pray for me. It feels very weighty. Because I fear being glib about something so awful.

Because the suffering in the world isn't a toothache. There are people screaming right now by the millions around the world in great pain and in great loss as they've just seen some horrific accident, or as the child has just died in their arms, or a doctor has just announced some terrible news, or another bomb has

landed in the wrong place, or, or, or. And so we know that if we could hear right now all the crying in the world and all the screaming in the world, we would perish from despair.

Which is why we are finite and you alone are infinite and able to cope, indeed, to rise above and triumph in this. But Lord, apprise us of as much as we should know from Your Word now and how to live in it and embrace it and flourish and be strong and minister through it and join the four submissions with it and glorify Your name. We pray.

Amen. Now why in the world would I begin with a title like this and a theme like this? Ten Aspects of God's Sovereignty Over Suffering and Satan's Hand in It. I wouldn't have to deal with Satan here because as we perceive the origins of our suffering, we can't tell whether they're from him or not.

But I do this just because the Bible has him involved so much in this. And I also do it because I want you to see God's sovereign not only over the natural world where so much suffering arises, both from viruses and bacteria as well as volcanoes and winds and flooding and storms and earthquakes, pestilence and plague and accidents and so on. So that's the reason for undertaking this.

I believe with all my heart and you'll see this and it's not surprising to anybody who knows me, that this right here is foundational for everything in this matter. And you have to work that out best you can and leave to mystery what you can't. And how you conceive this is going to make a whale of a difference in how you minister pastorally.

A whale of a difference. And we could contrast it with other approaches, but we'll just do the positive side here. The great aim of Satan is to prevent and weaken and if possible destroy faith.

1 Thessalonians 3.5 Paul says, For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith for fear that the tempter might have tempted you and our labor would be in vain. So he correlates the work of the tempter with the destruction of faith. If he can do this, he can destroy the mission of the church and the people of the earth.

Jesus said in John 8.44, He was a murderer from the beginning. That's why I say He will destroy. Satan is a murderer.

He wants to destroy people forever with himself in hell. Destroy faith, destroy missions, destroy people, and thus dishonor God. That's his aim.

Satan uses pleasure and pain to do it. Pleasure to make us doubt God's satisfying greatness. Pain to make us doubt God's sovereign goodness.

So whether you live in America or whether you live in Sudan, Satan has his strategies for both places to destroy faith. One would be very severe persecution to make people give up on the goodness of God. He loved me, wouldn't allow such things.

And one is to lure you into alternative idols and gods in America because you think living high off the hog and avoiding all discomfort is more to be desired than obedience to Jesus. So, pain and pleasure are great weapons in the hand of Satan. To triumph over Satan in pleasure and pain, we need to know the word of truth that teaches God's sovereignty over Satan.

By the word of God, we will triumph. Here's the quote from 1 John 2.14, I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one. So one of my great desires for this seminar is that you would overcome the evil one when he tempts you to doubt God in your suffering or abandon God for an inferior pleasure.

And you will do that according to 1 John 2.14 if the word of God abides in you. And I'm going to pack as much into you as I possibly can on this issue. I grieve over the number of people in my church who read so little of the Bible so little of the time.

We've done surveys and the statistics are simply appalling. And if they're appalling in this church, they're appalling probably in every church. The number of Christians who barely deal with the Bible daily is appalling.

How we are not destroyed by the devil, I do not know, except by the sheer, extraordinary, long-suffering grace of God as we neglect the means of grace. But he wrote to them that they might triumph over the evil one by having the word of God abide in them. And that doesn't happen unless you read it and memorize it daily.

May God teach us now His Word that we might triumph for our own souls and for the sake of our neighbors and for the nations. Question about that? That's the reason for setting this up in regard to Satan. Question? Okay.

Okay. Number one. Aspects of God's sovereignty over Satan's.

This one, God's sovereignty over Satan's delegated world rule. Here's what I mean by that. What I usually do under these units is give some texts that show Satan's role in suffering or in rule, and then God's relationship to that particular role that Satan has.

John 12.31 Now judgment is upon this world that the ruler of this world will be cast out. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. So the ruler of this world is described as one who is to be cast out, namely Satan.

That is a very high title. The ruler of this world. That means he has amazing sway in history and in our world.

Here's his own self-claim, and it's probably not too much of an overstatement. Luke 4 Satan led Jesus up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, I will give You all this domain and its glory for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

Therefore, if You worship before me, it shall be Yours. Now is that braggadocio? Kind of a Jesse Ventura nonsense? My governor has plummeted in the last two days in my moral estimation to the point where I am embarrassed and ashamed and hope that Minnesota will wake up. I don't think it's braggadocio.

I think there's a sense in which this is very true. He's called the ruler of this world because in some sense, there's been handed over to Him the powers of the world. Now, does that mean then that our God watches the world go with Satan ruling it and is not doing anything by way of rule Himself? Well, let's put over against it a few texts.

Romans 13.1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God. And those which exist are established by God. Now, can you put those two together? Can you handle that? The ruler of this world is Satan.

All authority that exists exists from God. None of it exists except what is established by God. Unless you think, well, that's after the cross.

Maybe Satan isn't the world ruler today. But you know that's not true because He's called the God of this world in 2 Corinthians 4. And we also know because here in the Old Testament, we have similar kinds of claims for God. Daniel 2.20 Daniel said, Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever.

For wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs. He removes kings and establishes kings.

And we might add, governors. So God does that. God does Clinton.

God does Ventura. God does Yeltsin. And God did Nero.

And God did Hitler. Unless I'm missing something in this verse. He who changes the times and epochs, He removes kings, and He establishes kings.

So this rule here, here's my effort to put them together. You may have another way. When He calls Satan the ruler of this world, and when He says He has this to give to whomever He pleases, He is a dog on a leash.

He cannot do more than God ordains for Him to do, so that over Satan is God, establishing whom He pleases over the nations. Daniel 4.17 The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes, and sets over it the lowliest of men. 1 Chronicles 21.1 Now this is very important.

Putting these two together. 1 Chronicles 21.1 You might bracket them if you have a pencil in your pages, so that you'll know why I'm putting these together like this. Satan, in 1 Chronicles 21.1, stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.

Now you're aware, aren't you, that in the Old Testament, just like we have parallel Gospels, which tell the same stories, sometimes a little different nuances, so in 1 Chronicles and 2 Samuel, you'll have the same stories retold. And look at the parallel to 1 Chronicles 21.1 in 2 Samuel 24.1 Now again, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it, namely the anger of the Lord, incited David against them to say, go number Israel and Judah. So in one text it says that Satan moved David to number Israel, and in this text it says the Lord incited David to number Israel and Judah.

Again, my paradigm here that's developing out of these kinds of texts is that Satan is active, he's real, he does these things, but from another vantage point where you can see around him and above him, the mighty, sovereign hand of God is at work. And sometimes the biblical authors will go right through the secondary causes straight to the ultimate one, and sometimes they will lodge right on the secondary one. And we shouldn't see these as contradictions any more than we see multiple causes as contradictions in other areas, and you just need to decide who's the supreme governor.

Now, Proverbs 21.1 relates here because it says, the king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he wishes. Now that's a remarkable statement.

The king's heart is like a river of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he wishes, either by his will of permission or by his will of effectuality, he governs kings. Ezra is an example.

Ezra 6.22 They observed the Feast of the Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had caused them to rejoice and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. So God can take the heart of a king and turn it to encourage his people. Another example of this that I didn't put on the overhead is Abimelech in Genesis 20 where Abraham, you remember, or Abram, still there, lies about Sarah being his wife and says she's his sister and Abimelech takes her into his harem and has a dream and almost has sex with her and God doesn't allow it.

And he gets mad at Abraham and God says to him in the dream, I kept you from having sexual relations with her. So God can restrain sin whenever he pleases or permit sin flowing from the human heart whenever he pleases and thus he maintains control on what kings do. One more on this one.

The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations. He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever the plans of His heart from generation to generation.

So anytime a nation makes a counsel under the influence of Satan perhaps, God can nullify that. He frustrates plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord, not the counsel of the nations, stands forever.

The plans of His heart from generation to generation. Now, the reason for making this point one and talking about, you might say, what does this have to do with suffering? It has to do with suffering because vast stretches of the suffering in the world is caused by wars and decisions of rulers and kings. Foolish decisions, evil decisions that are made by kings bring about great, great suffering.

Witness Yugoslavia, Kosovo. Witness 60 million people who perished because of what happened between 1917 and 1930 in Russia. Makes the Holocaust pale almost by comparison what the early communist rulers did to cleanse that land.

And that came from kings. It came from rulers. Question of clarification.

I mean, it raises huge questions, right? Massive questions. But, Verna, I said it and I mean it. And I think you're wrong.

You couldn't hear Verna. Verna said, the Lord does not even permit sin. It's not by His permissive will or His active will that He relates to sin, right? Is that what you said? Okay, I think it will be plain before we're done here, Verna, that if you own up to these texts, that's not true.

I don't even know what it would mean that He relates to it in some way other than by permission or active, but let's talk afterwards if you don't see it in these texts. Number two. God's sovereignty over Satan's angels, demons, and evil spirits.

That's what I mean when I say His angels, His messengers, demons and evil spirits. We're going to be looking as we move through here to what degree Satan is involved in sickness and to what degree Satan is involved in the calamities of the world, Hurricane Mitch, Columbine High, or whatever. To what degree is Satan involved here and how does God relate to that? So let's talk about God's sovereignty over Satan's angels.

Daniel 10.12 This is a situation where Daniel is praying and an angel is dispatched to come to him and is delayed for three weeks because of his encounter with some kind of demonic prince. So let's read about this. And he said to me, Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this, it's the angel talking to Daniel, and on humbling yourself before God, your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for 21 days. So, the prince of the kingdom of Persia, some kind of demonic power, evidently, was withstanding me for 21 days. And then, behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, now that's Michael the archangel, one of the chief princes of God, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.

So there is an angelic emissary on his way to minister to Daniel or to answer his prayer and reveal things to him, and he was delayed for three weeks in his coming by this prince of the kingdom of Persia. Now, what conclusions can you draw from that with regard to the power of demons or princes, authorities, and world rulers, powers of darkness? Well, not much, I would say. Not much.

It would surely be an argument from silence to say God couldn't have sent Michael 20 days earlier. And it's surely an argument from silence to say God himself could not have said, Prince of Persia, depart from my angel. So it's a massive argument from silence to say that demonic powers have some kind of extraordinary control here by which they could frustrate the designs of God to get a message to Daniel within three weeks or one day or three hours.

Now, to undergird that, let's just look at what the Bible does say about God's right and authority over these beings. Mark 1.27, they were all amazed... synagogue... Jesus did this... so that they debated among themselves saying, what is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey Him.

Now, I infer from that that when Christ wants to, He can get obedience from demons. They obey Christ when He means for them to obey. He might tell them to do something and have them not obey because He said it with not all of His authority.

But He might also use more of His authority and they would go. Matthew 8.29 This is the demoniac there. They cried out saying... these demons... what business do we have with each other, son of God, that is, you and us? Have you come here to torment us before the time? That's an interesting statement.

What do you think he's referring to there? What time? Hell or final judgment because there is a place and a time appointed for the devil and his angels according to Matthew 25. They know that's coming. We'll talk about this tomorrow morning about why God doesn't just obliterate the devil and his angels.

Have you ever asked that question? Why doesn't He just make them history? He has the right and He has the power to just extinguish them. They do much damage in the world. They ruin much faith.

They cause much disease. And they are irredeemable. Therefore, He's not giving them time so that they might repent.

Why? There's a time and they know it's coming and so they're a little bit upset that He's coming before the time. And He said to them, Go. And they came out and went into the swine.

So if the Son of God shows up, they go. If He tells them to go. So my conclusion from number two, and I'll pause here and see if you have a question, is that when it comes to demons, what they do, they do because God has chosen not to tell them not to do it.

I don't know what word you'd use besides permission to describe that, but whatever word you want to use is fine with me. Demons do what they do because God has not intervened with what He has the right and authority to intervene to do, namely tell them what to do. Christ broke no laws when He commanded demons to go out.

Nor would He break any laws today if a demon were about to do something terrible in your life or in this city and God didn't tell Him not to do it. Or did? Question? Lutice? It's safe then to say that Satan, like everybody else in everything, whether he's told, whether we know that he's told, isn't... Let me see if I can repeat that now. Lutice said that one way to say it then would be that everything Satan does, whether by not being commanded to do otherwise or being commanded to do what he does, takes the form of servitude to the Lord's ultimate purposes.

What's the point of calling this demon the Prince of Persia? A lot is being built on that today that I don't want to build with, namely the whole dimension of territorial spirits. It may be, and there are millions of Christians today who operate on the assumption that this is so, that every territory in the world has its assigned demon and that one way to do spiritual warfare and evangelism is to try to discern the nature of that territorial spirit and then to do combat with him through some kind of concerted praying. So you might say, over Minneapolis, there's a demon of technology or something, you know.

Or over Las Vegas. Let's take that. That's a nice easy example.

A demon of lust and gambling. Well, maybe. Maybe.

Frankly, I am not going to build a strategy of ministry around that. The foundations for it in the Bible are so minuscule and built on so much silence. And here's my main reason.

Paul didn't minister that way. Nor did any of the other apostles that we know of. As you read how they spread the Gospel, they never went into a town, set aside some days to discern the nature of the territorial spirit and then do combat.

So it is... A lot of people are doing that today. You're not going to find it in Bethlehem, in my leadership anyway. So I do not know the answer except to say probably there's some truth in that, that there are demons assigned to localities or countries and they do do damage and they do hold that country in bondage, but the way to fight it biblically is to preach the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and God will undermine their authority as directly as He pleases.

There's one back... Well, first here and then back there. Well, that text, God knows the end from the beginning. And the question is, am I trying to give some understanding how God gets from the beginning to the end? That has to do with knowledge, right? God knows.

And I'm mainly talking about rule here and governance. So I'm kind of just leaving that issue aside of God's measure of knowledge. Yeah, it is indirect and I'm having a hard time seeing it.

Let me say more and tell me... I'll probably shed light on that question as more of this gets out. And if I don't, come back to me and get clarity for me. One more and then we're going to move on.

Go ahead. To do an evil thing. There are a couple of examples where you have in the Old Testament the situation with the prophet Micah.

Not the biblical Micah, but that is the one who wrote the book. But the situation where Ahab is going to go up and fight and he wants to know, are we going to win? And all the prophets say, you're going to win, you're going to win. And Micah comes along and says, you're not going to win.

You're going to fall. And the king gets all upset and says, I told you, he always gives bad news. I hate this prophet.

And then you get a glimpse into the heavenlies and Micah explains... I may not get these details exactly right. What happened, and the Lord said, who will go for me and be a lying spirit in the false prophets? And a being presents himself and says, I'll go. And he says, go.

Now, that's pretty oblique, but that's the closest I can think of where you have an actual, you go and do it, but was that a demon or was that an angel? I don't know. Let's do number 3. God's sovereignty over Satan's hand in persecution. Here, 1 Peter 5.8 is a text that shows that Satan is involved in persecution.

Be of sober spirit. Be on the alert. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Now, watch the connection here with verse 9. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same... Now, that's referring back to this devouring here. The same experience of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the whole world. After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

So, this satanic devouring that's going on is this experience of suffering. So the lion's jaws are pain, suffering. He wants to destroy faith in this text through bringing Christians into suffering, into persecution.

So, what is God's role in this? Same book, 1 Peter 4.19, just a few verses earlier. Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. So I take that to mean, according to the will of God, that suffering in that case is the will of God.

Let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator and let them do what is right. Or, 1 Peter 3.17, it is better if God should will it so that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. Now, tell me if those two verses, 4.19 and 3.17, do not teach that God decides by this will, whatever kind of will it is here, I'm not putting any labels on it, whether you will suffer for doing what is right or not.

It is better if God should will it so that you suffer for doing what is right. Now, relate that back to this lion. This lion is prowling around trying to devour people.

That devouring or that attempt to devour is called the same experience of suffering that all the brethren throughout the world. This is a pretty widespread experience of persecution in Peter's time. Is that only Satan deciding who will suffer? Or do these two verses also suggest that behind the lion there's a leash? On the lion there's a leash.

And God decides to what extent He will be permitted to put His teeth into His people. Look at this Luke 22.53 text. When I was with you day after day, this is the garden of Gethsemane.

They've just come out against Him with clubs and a mob, this meek lamb of God here with no weapon in His hands. When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me. But, very, very interesting wording here now.

This is your hour and the power of darkness. What does that mean? Somebody tell me one of the implications of that. There's probably more than one.

The rest of the hours are God's. And this one belongs to the power of darkness. And this mob, how did it get out of God's hand? Yeah, it probably didn't.

This is your hour. This is your hour. I give you one hour.

I give you one hour. I'll withhold my hands here and let you have this hour. Or, you might say, the darkest hour in the history of the world was from Gethsemane through about noon the next day.

That's the darkest moment in history. Satan, according to his getting into Judas, remember, Satan entered into Judas. Satan is targeting this hour.

He wants to bring down this Christ by any means he can. Maximize his suffering. Of course, he's an absolute fool because he shot himself in the head when he did it.

This is your hour. And the power of darkness. You get one hour.

And then, nobody takes my life from me. I lay it down on my own accord. And if I lay it down, I will take it again.

So, who's taking the life of Jesus? Satan is taking the life of Jesus. Judas is taking the life of Jesus. Roman soldiers are taking the life of Jesus.

Pilate is taking the life of Jesus. And his father is taking the life of Jesus. Isaiah 53.10 It was the will of the Lord to bruise him.

He has put him to grief. And Verna, it was sin for Jesus to be crucified. It was sin.

And God planned it. You'll see that in other texts. And He planned to give them one hour here in order that He might destroy their forces.

I will pose the question tomorrow morning, Why? Why are you going about history this way? Clean it up for goodness sakes. Get the enemy out of the way. Why? Thousands of years of tolerating this subordinate enemy when you could just snap your finger and he'd be gone.

Why? Why? Why? It just screams to be answered from the Bible. So, I'll tackle that under why global suffering tomorrow. But here's number four.

I'm just trying to expose you tonight to the incredibly broad biblical basis for God's sovereignty over Satan and the suffering that He and the natural world brings about. It raises huge problems. Please do not think that I'm oblivious to these and we'll run away from them.

Go ahead. Is all suffering the will of God? If it is, are we to submit to it or resist it? And the answer is, all suffering... Now, I haven't provided enough foundation of this yet, but I hope before we're done, I will say all suffering is according to God's sovereign will or will of decree. Not according to His will of command.

God says, Thou shalt not murder. And He could have stopped those boys in Littleton, Colorado. He saw them get out of their cars.

He saw them driving there. He saw the guns. He read their minds.

He saw them walking across the parking lot. He saw them entering the room. All He had to do was make them faint.

That's all He had to do. So, they were disobeying His will of command. Thou shalt not murder.

But, they were fulfilling a sovereign will. Call it different names. Permissive will or whatever.

So, the answer to your question is yes, at that level. Now, second question. If so, should we resist it? And the answer is, sometimes.

And when it comes to other people's pain, I would say, always fight as long as you can fight. Fight by prayer. Pray for healing.

My goodness, I believe in the power of God to heal. And that He heals in answer to prayer. Let us pray for healing.

Paul did. Take the thorn out of my flesh. Several times.

And then God stopped him. And if God hadn't stopped him, I'll bet you Paul would have kept on praying. Take this thorn away.

But, there come times, this is not easy to discern, especially in extraordinary and extreme cases of cancer, say, or some very debilitating disease, where you simply say, I do believe God has appointed my time. One year. We have a family in this church right now that were just told last week that the baby in her womb is anencephalic.

No brain, or perhaps outside the skull. Those babies never live. Never.

No exceptions. How shall we pray? She's six months along. How shall we pray? Well, I do dare to pray that they made a mistake in the photograph.

And I do dare to pray that God could heal it. But this is a very mature couple. Very mature.

And they're ready for whatever God wills. that's a provisional answer. Now, you may come back, well, why are we praying against it if it is God's sovereign will? And the answer is that when God sovereignly wills a thing, we take our cues from the will of command, not the will that has its hidden purposes in God.

The hidden things belong to God. And why He allows a Littleton, and why He allows a cancer, or why He may cause the one or the other in one case or not, that's hidden. It's not our business, ultimately.

What's our business is what does the Bible say to do in response to it? And the Bible says pray for them, love them, care for them, fight for them, defend them, nurture them. The problem of Abraham's offering of Isaac, what do you do when God commands something He forbids? You probably lose a lot of sleep. Maybe that's why Abraham got up so early in the morning.

Maybe he never went to sleep. I don't know. If anybody came to me in this church today and says, God told me last night to shoot you in the head, I'd say, He didn't do that.

And they'd say, no, no, it says right here. Isaac, and all I know to say is perhaps at that point in redemptive history, before the law, there was some ambiguity. Your face is just filled with questions, Donna.

The truth would be there. The measure of its revelation and the thoroughness of its revelation and the grounding, I don't know for sure. But I don't think that's an adequate way to get off the hook.

That's why I said I really don't know the answer to that question. What I do know is God didn't let him do it. And here's what Hebrews says.

Hebrews says, now this may be the closest thing to a biblical answer. Hebrews says that he acted in faith believing that He would get him back. In other words, maybe the way Abraham said this is, this can't be.

God can't be asking me to do something that He considers wrong. All I can imagine here is that He means for Him to immediately raise him from the dead. Or stop the knife.

Or something. So maybe Abraham, right up to the last minute, was saying he is going to find a way to keep this from happening. One more and then I've got to go on or we'll never get through ten tonight.

Go ahead. That's a possible approach. God is absolute.

God is not... God writes the book. God does not inherit a book of the law from some higher authority and then submit to it. He creates it and the suggestion then is He can go against it.

That's real troubling because He might just decide to break all of His promises too. We've really got to leave that and move on. More of that same kind of thing will emerge.

So, hang on. Number four. God's sovereignty over Satan's life-taking power.

He's a murderer. We said that already. John 8.44 He was a murderer from the beginning.

I take that to mean He's instrumental in bringing about death somehow. Here's an example from Revelation 2.10. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you in prison.

That's how active Satan can be in the world. So that you will be tested. You will have tribulation for ten days.

Be faithful unto death. Now, that seems like at the end of ten days you're going to die. And He's already talked about one of His faithful martyrs already.

And I will give you the crown of life. So, does Satan have the right and power to kill? Yes, he does. But not the ultimate right and power to kill.

Deuteronomy 32.39 See now that I, I am He, says the Lord. There is no God besides Me. It is I who put to death and give life.

I have wounded. It is I who heal. And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

So, he's claiming an absolute right over the power of death. Or 1 Samuel 2.6 where Hannah sings her song. The Lord kills and the Lord makes alive.

He brings down to shield and He raises up. So, if Satan gets a hand in the taking of life, it is under the sovereign hand of God. Here's a real relevant example that I can apply to any of your circumstances as you head home tonight.

Come now you who say, James 4.13 Come now you who say, today or tomorrow, we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit. Or, this week we'll go and fish tomorrow. Yet, you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.

You're just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will live. And do this or that.

But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Now, does that not mean that whether you live or not on your way to such and such a city to buy and get gain is determined by the Lord? If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

And if He doesn't, we won't. It's very interesting. You know, on the issue of Calvinism and so on, I have been around many, many people when they've lost loved ones.

And it is a remarkable thing how the Bible saturated godly people right across the theological spectrum on most of the issues that separate Calvinists and Arminians, most of them bow before the sovereignty of God in the midst of it. I could mention one dear woman that I love very much, but I want to name her because she doesn't agree with me theologically, but when her 16-year-old boy was broadsided at a railroad and killed instantly, the first thing she said to me was, I don't know why the Lord took him, but I trust Him. She's not operating out of any sophisticated Calvinistic scheme at all.

She's operating out of a life of simply absorbing Scripture like these and saying, if God is God, there are a thousand ways He could have stopped that car or changed His schedule in the morning or anything else. Here's a remarkable one. 1 Corinthians 11.29 in the context of the Lord's Supper.

For he who eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. So be careful how you take the Lord's Supper. For this reason, many among you are weak and sick and a number sleep.

But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. So this is judgment. This is God's judgment, chastisement on the church for the abuse of the Lord's Supper.

There's weakness. There's sickness. But look what else there is.

But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. You know what this sleep refers to here? What does it refer to? It refers to death. That means some Christians die so they won't go to hell.

Judging the body rightly I think means looking at the body of Christ. There's a big argument as to whether the body refers to the church here or to the piece of bread you have in your hand, the body of Christ. My interpretation is, and I could go either way and make good sense out of it, judging the body rightly means if you don't esteem these elements as more precious, as emblems of the body of Christ than you do, you

are despising the very body of Christ the way you're getting drunk at the Lord's table.

That's what's happening. You're getting drunk with the wine and overeating. And He says, don't you have houses? Go home and eat for goodness sakes.

And then come back here and do the Lord's Supper. So this is simply an abuse, minimizing of the Lord's Supper. But the point I'm making is God's judgment, His discipline, see that key word there, His discipline, which is different from condemnation.

Oh, that will be an important distinction for you to keep in mind as we talk about God's hand in suffering. God never condemns His people. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are angry.

No cancer is condemnation. No accident is condemnation. No breakup of a marriage is condemnation.

It may be discipline from a Father's loving hand. Painful, but it isn't condemnation. And here death is included among those things that happen by way of discipline to keep condemnation from happening.

God snuffs out the life of some people so that they might be preserved. Hebrews 2.14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. So here again, the devil is called the one who has the power of death.

See that? Him who had the power of death is the devil. And in dying, Christ renders him powerless. How so? We'll see that later.

Just three little texts here on the power of Jesus over death. Lazarus, come forth. He raises Him from the dead.

Young man, arise. The widow's son at Nain. Talitha Kum, the little 12-year-old girl.

Jesus has the power to raise the dead. He can stop... The interesting story about this one is that the news came to Jesus before Lazarus died that he was sick. And Jesus waited two more days.

And the word came, He's dead. And Jesus said, I'm glad that I was not there so that your faith might be strengthened. He chose to let Him die so that He could raise Him from the dead.

So God is sovereign over the life-taking powers of Satan. God's sovereignty over Satan's hand in natural disasters. There are many texts, but we'll take Job.

Remember the situation. Satan comes before God. Have you considered my servant Job? God says to him, for there's no one like him on earth.

A blameless and upright man. Don't miss that. It's a good man here.

A good man. A faithful man. He's praying for his children every morning and trusting in God.

Fearing God, turning away from evil. Then Satan answered the Lord, does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge about Him and His house and all that He has on every side? In other words, He's serving you because He gets health, wealth, and prosperity. Job is just an instance of the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel.

You have blessed the work of His hands. His possessions have increased in the land. Put forth your hand now and touch all that He has.

And He'll curse you to your face. Satan is not omniscient. Then the Lord said to Satan, behold, all that He has is in your power.

Only do not put forth your hand on Him. He might have put in, yet. Alright, it begins to happen now.

Satan is unleashed to go do his dirty work. But watch how it happens and what Job says. A messenger came to Job.

The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them. And the Sabaeans attacked and took them. And they slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped.

So I think in the flow of the passage you would say Satan stirred up the Sabaeans. Verse 16, while he was still speaking, another also came and said, the fire of God... Now, is that true or is that not true? Maybe that's a bad report. Maybe not.

The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them and I alone have escaped to tell you. Are you going to tune me down? I alone have escaped to tell you. Verse 17, while he was still speaking, another also came and said, the Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword and I alone have escaped to tell you.

While he was still speaking, another came as the worst of all. Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house. And behold, a great wind... that's very relevant... came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house and it fell on the young people and they died.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. And here's Job's response. Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, fell to the ground and worshiped.

He said, naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return. The Lord gave my children to me and the Lord has taken my children from me. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Unless we think that Job got his theology wrong there, there's a lot of bad theology in the book of Job, the inspired writer adds this, through all this, Job did not sin, nor did he blame God. In other words, when he said, the Lord gave and the Lord took away, he wasn't sinning. And he wasn't giving fault or blame to God.

Just sovereign causality. Now the reason I put this under natural disasters is because the wind caused it. The wind caused the death of his children.

The wind. Now look what God says about the wind or Elihu in chapter 37. This is very interesting.

37 verse 5, Out of the south comes the storm. God disperses the cloud of His lightning. It changes direction, turning around by His guidance, that it may do whatever He commands it on the face of the inhabited earth, whether for a rod, some translations say punishment, some say chastisement, I chose rod because it's the literal word, it does mean punishment or chastisement, whether for a rod or for love, He causes it to happen.

Stand and consider the wonders of God. Now do you see what that's saying? He's saying God commands the wind, it goes this way, it goes that way, it goes that way, and He commands it, sometimes He commands it as a rod, and sometimes He commands it as loving kindness. The wind can carry the boat safe to the harbor, or the wind can make waves so high the boat sinks, or 10,000 people perish in hunger.

Psalm 135.5 The Lord is great. Whatever the Lord pleases, He does in the heavens and on the earth. He makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from His treasures.

It won't do any good to say, as I've heard some say recently, Satan is also able to govern the weather. I think that's probably true. I think that's probably true.

But Job, when he hears that, that this wind here was Satan's doing, he says the Lord gave and the Lord took away, and the writer agrees with him. So behind Satan is God. Praise the Lord, Psalm 148.7 Praise the Lord from the earth, sea monsters in all deeps, fire, hail, snow, clouds, stormy wind fulfilling His word.

You know, there was a time 200 years ago, 150 years ago, 130 years ago, civil war. When if you read the correspondence of the soldiers from the north and the south in the great civil war that took, what, 500,000 lives? That's just 130 years ago. We killed each other in America like that.

Almost all of them spoke in terms of the providence of God. There was a smiling providence on us today and the troop fell back. Or there was a frowning providence on us today and we lost 5,000.

They just talked that way. Everybody, not everybody, but it was in the air. It was an assumption.

You need to know that because we live in an America where God is on trial always. And I'll tell you, God is never on trial. You're on trial.

And the moment you put God on trial, you have a great verdict coming down against you. But it's a secular age through and through we live in. And therefore the assumptions of biblical worldview are gone.

And I believe one of the functions of a pastor is to try to rebuild a worldview. I've been feeling this very keenly recently as I've pondered. I've got to give some lectures on preaching in various places in the coming year.

I've been trying to think what should I say. I've said everything I want to say. Should I just say it over again another way? But here's something new that I want to say.

You know, there's a lot of talk in missions and in ministry about contextualization and translation, very important concepts of taking the Bible from its century and contextualizing it in the 20th century or taking it from a western culture and contextualizing it in a third world country or a primitive animist culture or something like that. And those are real crucial issues. But I think we tend to forget that alongside translation and contextualization, now I don't have a word, an Asian word yet for this third thing that we pastors must do.

The assumption of both of those is that the vocabulary and the world view of the receptor culture is adequate for the reality of the Bible. And it isn't in any culture. None.

And more so today in America than ever is our cultural world view and the categories of mind and assumptions of the human thought that are brought to the words and the concepts of the Bible inadequate for their reception. So that these kinds of things simply don't have places. There are no words.

There are no categories behind words. In my church on Sunday, where last Sunday sat 1,600 people or so, my guess is there were hundreds, dozens of people whose world views, whose categories of thought are so shaped by the television and the media and secular education and their own flesh and the devil and the world in America that I have to do more than translate into those categories. Truth will be wrecked if I translate it into those categories.

Those categories are so distorted and so truncated and bent that they have to be fixed. And this is a major problem in communication. It's much harder than translation and contextualization.

There is a whole rebuilding of world, a rebuilding of mind, a rebuilding of the way you even conceive of reality and what is uppermost and everything. The Bible comes through with such truths and such visions of reality that people just... And that's not surprising. We shouldn't be surprised at that.

And the only way I know is to do your best is to get some link and then begin to pour in truth. And the truth sets the mind free by forming new categories of thought where they're needed. Now, it's not totally that way.

Otherwise, you couldn't ever communicate with anybody about anything. But it is very, very hard. Just another text there on wind from Mark 4, 37-34 where Jesus says, Hush, be still.

And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. Could He do that once and not do it today? Is there something that happened between the Jesus of history and the Jesus risen in power, given a name above every name, that once He could do that to a hurricane and today He can't do it to a hurricane? 1995, there was a monsoon that killed 200,000 people. So, come back tomorrow because I've got to ask the question, why does He tolerate this kind of thing? Why does God tolerate this kind of thing when He could simply say three words? Or two.

Probably two would do it. One. One would do it.

Still. Or turn out to sea. Turn out to sea.

We sing. Some do. There's not a plant or flower below that makes Thy glories known and clouds arise and tempests blow by order from Thy throne.

I remember about 15 years ago a tornado came right through south Minneapolis. Remember that? Just dancing all around. Knocking down the big oak trees.

Just dancing. Came right up. A 35W here crossed over.

Dissipated over that way. It was Sunday afternoon. And we had an evening service back then and I wondered, is the church going to be there? I lived, I think at that time, I still lived over in the big yellow house where Tom Stiller lives now.

And we were in the basement listening to the radio waiting for it to go. And this neighborhood got jumped over so the church is there. And people were there that night.

And I just opened it up for prayer for all the people whose houses had been wrecked and yards had been wrecked and businesses had been wrecked. And I remember Char Ransom. You hear Char? You're not here tonight.

What a prayer she prayed. Because she just embraced the sovereignty of God so big. She knew that God commands the winds and He can say, hurricane lift and hurricane dip and hurricane move.

And she prayed for all those people and she mingled together compassion and conviction in such a beautiful way that I was very pleased. Number six. We're going to go until nine in case you're wondering.

No break tonight. We will break tomorrow. God's sovereignty over Satan's sickness causing power.

So here now we're at the sickness level. Does Satan cause sickness? He does. Not all sickness probably, but some at least.

Acts 10.38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth how God anointed Him, this is Peter talking, with the Holy Spirit and with power and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. That's pretty sweeping. Healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with Him.

So there's a broad statement about healings of people who were oppressed by the devil. So a lot of sickness is owing to the oppression of the devil. Luke 13.16 A woman, a daughter of Abraham, as she is, and this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for 18 long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day? This is Jesus talking to those who are about to scold Him.

So He says that the reason this woman for 18 years has been bent over is because she's been bound by Satan. Satan has bound this woman for 18 long years. So in that case, something like scoliosis, or worse apparently, had been satanically originated somehow or sustained.

However, once you've said that, Satan is involved in sickness, then you have to put over against it again texts like Exodus 4.11. The Lord said to Moses when He said, I don't have a mouth that can speak. He said, who made man's mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I the Lord? So yes, as we've seen, Satan is involved in sickness, but not ultimately. Not without a leash.

Not without permission and ordering. John 9.1 Remember the man born blind who sinned. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned that this man was born blind? His parents or him? Jesus answered, it was neither that this man sinned nor his parents.

It was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. God had a purpose in this. Now the second half of Job, which is sickness.

Satan says to God, Job 2.3, or God says to Job, have you considered My servant Job? For there's no one like him on the earth, a blameless, upright man, fearing God, turning away from evil. He still holds fast to his integrity, although you incited me... Now there, look at that. You incited me against him.

Very interesting. So it was the wind of God to ruin him without cause. Satan answered the Lord and said, skin for skin.

Okay, you haven't touched his skin yet. Of course, he'll keep serving you as long as you don't touch his skin. Satan will always retreat and change his tactic.

Yes, all that a man has, he will give for his life. However, put forth your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh and he will curse you to your face. So the Lord said to Satan, behold, he is in your power.

Only spare his life. Then Satan went out. Now watch this carefully.

Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smoked. So Satan did the smiting. Satan smoked Job with boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

This is Satan. That's the subject of that verb right there. And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

And then his wife said to him, do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die. Curse God. How much of that is there today? Curse God and die.

But he said to her, you speak as one of the foolish women speaks. I like that. I think there's a little bit of gentleness in there.

Not too much probably. But he doesn't say you're a fool. He says you're starting to act like one of them.

I don't think you're one of them. At least that's the break I give her here. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? There it is again.

And here's the author again. In all this, Job did not sin with his lips when he said God gives us adversity as well as good. So, the Lord took my children, and the Lord, yes, with or without Satan, I am under His sovereign discipline.

Look at the end of the book of Job here. Job answered the Lord when all was said and done. This is the point of the book, in fact.

I think. I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. That's the end of the book.

That's the point of all the interplay between Satan. In fact, Satan drops out of the picture pretty much as the book goes on. We're on sickness here.

Instances of satanic involvement with sickness and God's supreme authority over that satanic involvement. And the thorn in the flesh passage in 2 Corinthians 12 is one example. Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me, to keep me from exalting myself.

So, Satan is into humility. Or is he? I don't think so. He's forced like a lackey of God's sanctifying will to do God's bidding for His precious Son and Apostle, Paul.

Concerning this, I implored the Lord, so it's right to pray, though it was God's sovereign will that the thorn come. I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you.

My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, Paul says, will I rather boast about my weaknesses? Here's the purpose. So that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

You know, there's one other place, and I didn't put it on the overhead, where Satan is clearly made the instrument of sanctification. That's what he is here. Satan is God's instrument of sanctification, or his messenger at least is.

You remember the story in 1 Corinthians 5 where they disciplined a man who was sleeping with his stepmother probably and it was an appalling thing to the church, and they put him out of the church, and Paul said, hand him over to Satan that his flesh might be destroyed and his soul might be saved at the day of judgment. Satan was used for a destructive purpose unto the purpose of salvation for the soul. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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