

Suffering for the Sake of the Body - Lesson 3

by John Piper

The Bible presents God and Jesus as sovereign over suffering, and suffering is a means of judgment, refinement, and sanctification, as well as a witness to the heinousness of God-demeaning pride and unbelief.

Duration: 1:25:31

Scripture: Matthew 5:11-12, John 20:21, Acts 14:21, Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Philippians 1:29, 1 Peter 4:12-13

Topics: "Suffering", "Trust God"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper discusses the topic of suffering and how it should not cause us to view God as a horrendous God. He emphasizes the magnitude of the ugliness of pride, unbelief, indifference, and scorn, which will be experienced in hell for eternity. Despite the suffering in the world, God has not left himself without a witness and has shown his goodness by providing rain and fruitful seasons. The sermon concludes with the encouragement to trust in God and rely on his spirit and power, as he will provide what is needed in times of difficulty.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.DesiringGod.org Let me read some verses from 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians is a book just filled with suffering, and Paul's suffering especially, and filled with comfort.

And it's not a book for young people, probably. Young people think they're invulnerable, and many of them do. And they're into strength and energy, and they're out there in the park and not ready to go work all day, rake, and that's wonderful.

But soon they will be apprised that this text is true, and we will need to have taught them well. This is chapter 4, verse 16 of 2 Corinthians. So we do not lose heart.

There's a great challenge for the Christian life. Are you losing heart? You just don't want to go on. You'd just rather curl up and die, or disappear, or take a long, long, long vacation, maybe about 30 years or so.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. And let's just pray, may it be so, may it be so in our church, that no matter what kind of outer wastings away as we get older, may our inner nature be renewed every day.

For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory, beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. What a rock! What a great solidity comes into your life if you live that way.

And whenever something happens to you that makes you feel wasted, you don't look at the things that are seen. You look at the things that are unseen. You rest in the fact that if you were to die this afternoon, or experience a long, drawn-out, slow misery in life, every day God would do something on your inner man and make you fit for an eternal weight of glory.

In fact, every day of suffering here, I'll argue later, will increase your weight of glory as you endure it faithfully. I really do hope that you will feel that this material is relevant for you in your situation, no matter how well things are going for you, because it is relevant. Recently I've dealt with a couple of marriages that are just tottering on the brink of collapse because one or the other or both partners just can't stand it anymore.

Not physical abuse, but just sin and frustration and disappointment and no compliance, no coming the way, staying in sin and not changing. And one of my approaches to working on that is two of my approaches. I do try real hard to get to the party that seems to be unwilling to budge, and by grace and prayer and accountability and truth, get them to budge.

And then from the party that feels like he or she is suffering the most, I ask, why do you make a happy marriage the condition of your staying here? Why should you presume that you're appointed to be happy in this relationship? Did you not mean your vows when you said, for better or for worse? 20, 30, 40 years of worse. Do you mean that? I almost have resolved in recent weeks to say to couples, I don't do much premarital counseling anymore, I'm not on that cutting edge like I used to be as much, but I feel like forcing couples to sign off on certain scenarios of misery. Suppose he does begin to drink.

Doesn't beat you up, just gets moody, uses bad language. Suppose he does abuse the finances. Suppose he does keep all kinds of crazy hours and doesn't tell you where he is.

Suppose he does lock himself in the room and just look at the computer all night instead of sitting with you. Are you going to leave him? And make him sign off on that. At the beginning.

And of course all young couples say, oh, he won't do that. He won't do that. Or she won't do that.

Well, don't count on it. Marriage, as God sees it, is not a relationship that is contingent upon your happiness. Most people treat it like that today, but it isn't.

You stay. You stay. In the slow fires of misery, as Abraham Lincoln was described.

That was a miserable marriage. Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln was a miserable, horrible marriage. And the slow fires of misery refined him and fit him for the fires of the Civil War.

So I only mention marriage not to discourage any of you young single folks. But primarily to show you that the breadth of suffering is very wide. It applies everywhere.

Not just for Sudan or Littleton, Colorado or whatever. I brought along the Christianity today, this morning, just to give you a flavor of what you see. Let me just flip through this.

So you get a magazine like this. You can take any magazine, really. Take Time Magazine, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report, any magazine.

Open it up and just start flipping through. Hate crime, the pistol-whipping death of the gay man in Wyoming, article about that. The closing down of the last leprosarium in America.

Only 150 new cases of leprosy in America, but 4 million cases of leprosy. The feeling goes until you burn your hand and you can't tell when your fingers are gone. A doing church amid bombs and bullets, evangelicals in Serbia and the misery they're going through right now.

Article about sickle cell anemia and new research is being done to try to help those who are characteristically afflicted with that. Global death rates may skyrocket. Talking here about sub-Saharan Africa and the reversal of the Malthusian trends that everybody thought would happen.

And the dropping in Namibia and Zambia and Swaziland of the expected length of life from 62 to 44 from 1990 until now. 62 to 44, mainly due to AIDS. Article from Wendy Marie Zoba on the exit strategy of a missionary from Honduras and how he drove his car when he got a mayday signal out to one of his churches and then he couldn't get back because during Hurricane Mitch the river had risen and he was there terrorized with that little group of people trying to find high ground as they saw their homes being swept away.

An article here by James Van Tolen, a young pastor in his 30s of cancer. It leads to the last paragraph, I am dying. This is the sermon he preached after being out with chemotherapy for seven months.

He comes back to his congregation with maybe a few months left. He said, I am dying. Maybe it will take longer instead of shorter.

Maybe I'll preach for several months and maybe for a bit more. But I am dying. I know it and I hate it and I'm still frightened by it.

But there is hope, unwavering hope. I have hope not in something I've done, not in some purity that I've maintained, some sermon I've written. I hope in God.

The God who reaches out for an enemy and saves sinners and dies for the weak. And then an article on abortion, that it's not a necessary evil and the pain that really does get experienced by babies, especially in the partial birth abortion event. So you don't have to do much.

Watch the TV news or read any magazine you want and you'll know that the world is filled with suffering. Well, last night the point was plain. I hope that the Bible presents God and Jesus as sovereign over suffering and over Satan's hand in it, which raises many questions for us.

And we'll try to take up some of those now this morning. So my first question after last night is, what's the meaning of suffering in general in the world? Not just why do Christians suffer and what might God be doing through us and for us, which we'll talk about later, but why so much suffering in the whole world? And I have three steps to present. Number one, it is in part God's judgment on the world for its sinfulness and the portrayal in the physical world, or you could say the mental world as well, of the moral and spiritual horror of God belittling sin.

Let me give you three illustrations of judgment. These come out of the preaching on Romans that I've done in recent months. First, there's God's judgment in the downward spiral of depravity.

Romans 1.18, following, The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. So even now before the final judgment, the wrath of God is being poured out on the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men in measure, not fully, in this world. And then verse 24 and 26 and 28 highlight one particular kind of wrath.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. Or verse 26, For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions, for the women exchanged the natural function for that which was unnatural. Or verse 28, And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper.

So one form of judgment or wrath is that God abandons people to their own depraved thoughts and lusts and desires so that it spirals downward and downward and downward. So sometimes we hear people say, when they look at the state of American culture, we are ripe for judgment or judgment is coming. Well, that's probably true, but it misses the point that this is judgment.

Much of what we're seeing is judgment. What about death? Why so much death? Romans 5, 12 following, Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, so death as humans experience it, is consequence of sin entering the world. And so death spread to all men because all sinned.

Now drop to verse 15, By the transgression of the one, that's Adam, the many died. Verse 17, By the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one. Verse 18, Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men.

Verse 19, For as through the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, Jesus, the many will be made righteous. So the point there, this classic text on the doctrine of original sin, is that as sin entered the world, so death entered the world, and as sin spread to all men, so death spread to all men. So one of the meanings of death, which is I suppose the last enemy as the Bible calls it, and the great fear of the human race, though we deny it in many ways, is that it is a testimony to the horrific reality of sin.

So one of the ways to interpret the miseries of dying is to translate it not into God's being a mean God, but sin being a terrible reality. That's the jump we ought to make. Where we see death, we ought to think sin.

Futility and groaning. Romans 8.18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. That's the way Paul coped with his miseries in life.

He just kept comparing them to glory. Comparing them to glory. Comparing them to glory.

And as he did it, he was renewed in his inner man, and he reminded himself this is going to be short compared to eternity. It may feel long now, but it's short compared to eternity, and it's small in comparison to the weight of glory that is coming. Not worthy to be compared to the glory that is revealed to us.

For the anxious longing of creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. So the whole creation is as it were on tiptoes, yearning and longing for deliverance. For the creation was subjected to

futility.

Who did that? This whole world with all of its miseries originated I think here in this subjection to futility. Things don't work. They break down.

There's this law by which things go wrong and they decay and they rot and accidents happen and terrible things come about that frustrate the designs of animals and man. How did that come about? It was subjected to futility not willingly. It wasn't creation's own choice to be subjected, but because of Him.

Now who is this? You can see from the capital letter who the NASB thinks it is. Who subjected it. And here's the reason I think they're right.

In hope. Satan didn't bring about the fall in hope. God in response to the fall subjected creation to futility in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

So this glory here that Paul is so eager for in verse 18 is the glory of the children of God and the creation is going to be set free when we are set free. The creation is standing on its tiptoes waiting for the day when there will be the reclamation of the children of God and they are changed in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet when this perishable shall put on imperishable and this mortal shall put on immortality and death, triumph and victory will be totally wiped away and the kingdom will be established and then the lion will lie down with the lamb and trees will bear leaves that month in and month out bring healing to the nations and it will be a new world order that we live in. For we know that the whole creation groans, the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth.

There's a good analogy for the meaning. The meaning of a volcano or an earthquake, say the earthquake in Oakland that flattened the freeway, the meaning of that upheaval was labor pains. The labor pains of the world.

Until now, and not only this, but also we ourselves. So don't think that you as a Christian escaped the groaning. We ourselves having the firstfruits of the Spirit.

Yes, you have the Holy Spirit. God has poured His Spirit out into your life. You have that guarantee and that down payment and those firstfruits.

Even we, he wants to stress it, lest they say with their mouths hanging open, wait a minute, I thought Jesus died for us and took our place and bore our condemnation. How come we're included in the death and the futility which is the judgment upon the world? Didn't He bear our judgment? Didn't He bear our condemnation? And he says we, even we, we ourselves, ourselves, groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly. It's not now.

We have to wait for it. For our adoption of sons, namely, the redemption of our body. This is a hugely important text for understanding the meaning of sickness in the world, and the meaning of groaning in the world, and the meaning of so much agony that's in the world that Christians too will experience.

Our bodies are wasting away as we groan and wait for the redemption of our bodies. So yes, I believe in answered prayer. I believe we should pray for our bodies to experience measures of advance payment on this inheritance.

That's the way I think when I pray. That Lord, Jesus has broken into this age. Yes, it's a fallen, it's a futile, it's a corrupt, it's a frustrating age, filled with sickness, filled with death, filled with pain, filled with frustration, but oh Christ, You have broken in in Your Son and You mean for us to have foretastes of glory.

The Holy Spirit has been given to us. What measures of foretaste might we have physically? And then, it's in God's hands. What measures of down payment physically we get now.

And we've seen some wonderful down payments. I got a phone mail yesterday that Michael Boyum is 100% leukemia free. We've walked with him.

His brother's blood was 80% right. They gave him a 50-50 chance to get through this thing. I think he's passed the day 100.

I'm not sure. But there are no more leukemic cells. He has no more of his own blood cells.

It's all his brother's cells. His blood marrow is producing 30%. And the family is rejoicing.

Well, would that he would do this for Melissa's kidneys. Let's have Melissa's kidneys, Lord. Instead of the lupus just taking her further and further down.

What about... well, fill in the blank. Some die and some live. And the way to understand that is in a sovereign God saying, I love my children.

It's a fallen world. Every misery they walk through is a testimony to the ugliness of the fall, the ugliness of sin in the world. I'm not judging them.

I'm transforming the death, the misery, and even their struggles with sin into sanctifying impulses that deepen their faith. And I am glorifying myself through their steadfastness through cancer, and I am glorifying myself through the deliverance of another from cancer. And we have to just say, may the Lord do what seems good to Him.

But we sure pray, because we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. So those are three instances of the meaning of suffering in the world. There's the judgment in the degeneration of sin.

There's judgment in death spreading to all men. And there's judgment in the groaning and the futility of the creation in all manner of miseries. That's owing to sin.

God brings it. But, don't forget this before we get to the conclusion down here. This judgment is remarkably mingled with many mercies, and not just on Christians.

Romans 2.4 Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance, but because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. So, there is patience. His kindness is being shown now.

His tolerance is being shown now. His patience is being shown now. Oh, how much worse it could be! And it's meant to lead us to repentance.

Or Matthew 5.44 I say to you, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven, for He causes His Son to rise on the evil and the good and sends

rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Evil had the sun go up on them in Minnesota this morning. Those who dishonored God all night last night did horrible things sexually and physically and mentally and spiritually.

All night last night they did horrible things defaming the name of God. And the sun came up on them this morning. Breezes blew over them this morning.

Their heart was beating this morning. They had no horrific disease this morning. And they're given another day's reprieve this morning.

He sent rain. Yes, we might think we've had enough, but it's making everything green. And when it stops, the crops will grow.

Acts 14.16 In the generations gone by, He permitted all the nations to go their own ways. And yet, in other words, He passed over most nations as He worked with Israel uniquely. But, He did not leave Himself without a witness in that He did good, did good for them, gave them rains from Heaven, fruitful seasons, satisfying their hearts with food and gladness.

Now here's my conclusion. A world of horrendous suffering should not cause us to think of God as a horrendous God, but of the magnitude and depth of the ugliness and heinousness of God-belittling pride and unbelief and indifference and scorn. This is what hell will mean for all eternity.

A witness to the heinousness of God-demeaning pride. So, let me pause here and see if you want to raise questions or make comments about this unit of the meaning of global suffering so far. No, let's just take that for a moment here.

The question is, we have difficulty knowing how to relate to an unbeliever who's experiencing intense suffering. Take an example. I remember we got a phone call a few years ago from the burn unit down in Hampton County.

That's a unit you just don't want to go to very often, but you need to go to some. And there was a woman there who had been burned. She fell asleep.

A cigarette caught her mattress on fire and she was burned over 90% of her body and they had her wrapped totally. No hair. Everything was wrapped.

Her eyes were just showing. And they didn't know if she'd live. This is pain.

This is pain. And one of our young women visited her on and off for, I think, almost a year. And when we get to the unit at the end on how to respond in Littleton, I'll have more specifics.

But I think what you do there is you embody the love of Christ. You become the love of Christ doing everything you can physically, everything you can mentally to bless them and minimize their pain. You want to minimize their pain and help them.

You want to show them that their ugliness and the horror of what they're experiencing doesn't drive you away. And your presence becomes the presence of Christ to them. And then you talk to them about the love of Christ for sinners.

You don't even deal head up with the issue of suffering right away. You just deal with the issue of personhood and the love of Christ willing to forgive sin and accept us into His favor and give us eternal glory. And then if they bring up the issue of why did this happen to me and how can He be a loving God, then you can talk in terms of, well, I'm not sure all the details of God's purpose for this in your life, but surely we could say that part of it is He wants very much your attention.

He wants you to know Him. He wants you to love Him. He wants you to experience His forgiveness.

And if it took this to get your attention in all eternity, I think someday you would be thankful for it if you would draw near to God and let Him have your soul and yield to His wooing in your life. And then you have to, well, are they going to be embittered at that comment or are they going to listen? And if they're embittered, you're patient, you listen, you say, I know this must be incredibly difficult for you to understand, and I just want to say to you right now, God's Word to you is, come, come to Me, all you who are burned and heavy laden and weary and hopeless, and I'll give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me and you'll find peace for your soul.

I'm meek and lowly. I'll draw near to you. I'll save you.

You'll lavish them with the gentle invitations of the Gospel. Because as long as a person lives, that's the warrant of the Gospel. When a person dies in unbelief, there's no more hope.

But as long as they live in unbelief, you hold out to them the hope that they can come. And if they come, God will forgive all their sins. He'll take them into His family.

He'll begin to work for them with His mighty power, turning all their miseries for their good and bring them into everlasting glory and give them a brand new body. I think I'd probably talk about this outer nature is wasting away in the hope of getting a new body. I'm just thinking out loud here.

You could do the same thing. So, maybe Linda, the reason we tend to feel stuck at first is because we begin to think in terms of the philosophical, theological problems first. And probably we should put that a little bit farther back in the discussion.

Let them raise that. We don't come with a solution to the problem of evil as we walk into the hospital. That's not the way to do pastoral care.

With pastoral care, you care first. You get your arms around people first. That's the first thing I say in regard to Littleton.

You get your arms around people. You love people. You embody the tenderness of Christ as you walk through the world meeting suffering people.

Christ didn't first bring a solution to the problem of evil. When the problem was raised, who sinned that this man was born blind? He had an answer ready. But He didn't start with that.

He started with touching and loving and offering and giving Himself. And that's where we should start too, I think. Another comment or question before we take point number two under this heading? Okay, let's do point two.

It is not only judgment and a symbol. Suffering is not only a symbol of the horrific nature of sin and a judgment on it. It is God's message of warning and awakening that the world should take seriously their

desperate moral condition and repent.

Revelation 9.20 We have all these texts in Revelation. I only mention these three because I think they are like a paradigm of the way we should respond to plagues. The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent as if they should have repented of the works of their hands so as not to worship demons and the idols of gold and silver and of brass and stone and wood which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

And they did not repent of their murders nor their sorceries nor their immoralities nor their thefts. So these plagues here were evidently both judgment and instruments to wake people to repent. And the same thing is said in Revelation 16.9. The same thing in 16.11. And let me just mention here one of the texts that I have in that paper on Littleton.

Here you have to be sensitive and careful at what time you do this, but when Jesus was approached with this question, what about the people on whom the tower of Siloam fell? And 18 of them were crushed and they weren't doing anything. They were just walking by. And the tower fell upon them.

They were crushed. And then they raised another problem. In other words, they're raising the problem of seemingly meaningless evil in the world.

Suffering. They said, what about those who were sacrificing their offerings in the temple and Pilate came with some of his band and he slew them and mingled their blood with the blood of their sacrifices and put it on the altar? What about that, Jesus? Interpret that to us. And you remember what He said? Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Which means that one of the meanings of suffering in the world is to awaken people to the fact that that sort of thing can happen and may happen to you before you get home and are you ready? That's the big issue in life. The big issue in life is not solving the problem of why the tower fell or why Pilate mingled their blood with their sacrifices. The big issue is, now what happens to them when they die? Because that's eternity.

This is just a little teeny space of time in which we suffer. And that's eternity. That's the big question.

And so Jesus deals with the big question first. Are you ready? You will all likewise perish. Meaning, I think, you will all meet with some kind of unexpected demise and are you ready to deal with it? My conclusion on the second point is, texts like these show that the plagues and catastrophes, even when they are designed for judgment in general, also have in them a call for repentance so that anyone who will wake up to the ugliness of his sin and repent and turn to Christ could be saved.

Here's number three. Now, this is the one I said last night that we would get to right off the bat this morning, so it was almost off the bat. Why is Satan left? Satan is not obliterated, but permitted to torment the world because it is God's purpose to glorify the power and beauty of sacrificial, sin-forgiving grace through defeating Satan progressively through the death of Christ and through that death's application by the Spirit in Christians' lives.

Long statement. Let me try to unpack it. The devil and his angels are irredeemable.

There's no hope for them. Jesus implies this when He says that the eternal fire has been prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25.41 So, it's already prepared.

He's not waiting to see if he needs to prepare it because they persevere in unbelief. But it is prepared because he knows they're not going to repent. The devil is irredeemable.

He is fixed in his evil and he will never change and all those with him. Jude confirms this truth when he says that the fallen angels are being, quote, kept in eternal bonds under the darkness for the judgment of the great day. Kept in eternal bondage.

Verse 6 of Jude. Therefore, the reason Christ withholds His judgment from them now is not to give them a chance to repent and be saved. That is one of the reasons why He withholds judgment from us now.

Not willing that any should perish. 2 Peter 3.9 Gives time. So why then? If it's not to give them time to repent, why does He give them time to do so much more misery in the world? The key, I think, this is my sense from the New Testament, the key is that Satan is defeated in the New Testament by the death of Jesus.

Paul puts it this way referring to the death of Christ. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities by the death of Christ, He made a public display of them having triumphed over them through Him, through Christ, or through it, the cross, it could be translated. So if you ask, well, is He going to defeat this enemy? Is He going to nullify His effects? Is He going to put Him out of existence? The first answer we get is not only is He sovereign over Him, but by dying for sinners, He disarms the rulers and authorities and makes a public display of them triumphing over them through Him.

So evidently, in God's inscrutable wisdom, it is better to get victory over Satan through the death of Jesus than through one strong, authoritative, powerful word, let them cease to exist. And they would cease to exist. So something about God's wisdom inclines Him to defeat the devil in stages and defeat the devil through the death of His Son.

Of all ways to conceive of defeating His archenemy, here Satan, Lucifer, rebels in eternity somewhere. God casts him and his angels out and God designs a long warfare and a staged battle plan by which the devil is defeated in stages. And the decisive stage being through the death of the Son of God.

Something really profound here about why God would choose to do it that way. When He has every right and every authority to simply say to Satan, go to hell and leave this world alone from this day forward. And He doesn't do it.

Rather, He puts His Son to death as the means by which the triumph will come over Satan. Let's think further about this. The weapon of soul-destroying sin and guilt is thus taken out of Satan's hand.

That's what happened at the cross. The weapon of soul-destroying sin and guilt is taken out of Satan's hand. He is disarmed of the single weapon that can condemn us.

Unforgiven sin. We see this in 1 Corinthians 15.55. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. So what God has done is remove and disarm Satan of the one thing by which He can condemn us.

Unforgiven sin. Oh, this is important to get a handle on. Because you know Satan is not out of action right now.

He's tormenting. He's causing sickness. He's killing.

He's tempting. He's doing many things. And you might say, well, he doesn't look like a disarmed enemy.

But he has been disarmed because the sting of death has been removed. And the sting of death is sin. You see, there is one way and only one that Satan can damn you.

And that is see to it that your sins are not forgiven. That's all. Because there's only one thing that will condemn you and send you to hell, and that is unforgiven sin.

This produces real gutsy people in the face of Satan. One of you were talking with me last night about this. If you know that because of Christ's shed blood and your simple childlike resting in that, in spite of all your imperfections and all your ongoing remaining corruption, you are resting and trusting in that.

If you know that you are reckoned righteous and all your sins are covered by an infinitely valuable blood of Christ, you can look right into the face of the devil, no matter what he's doing to you, and say, you may torment me. You may keep me awake. You may give me nightmares.

You may cause green apparitions to run across my ceiling. You may cause cats to crawl across my bed. You may cause people to hate me.

You may bring against me all manner of persecution, but you cannot damn me. I am safe in God forever. I think there are many saints who don't lay hold on their inheritance here and think that even though they have to do unbelievable battle with Satan, they are somehow vulnerable to destruction from Satan.

Well, they're not. We are not promised that Satan will not harass us. We are promised triumph over the one thing by which he can condemn us.

He cannot have us. Now, without sin and the law to condemn and accuse and oppress us, Satan is a defeated foe. He is disarmed.

Christ has triumphed over him not by putting him out of existence, but by letting him live and watch while millions of saints find forgiveness for their sins and turn their back on Satan because of the greater glory of the grace of Christ. Something about that is more attractive to God than obliterating Satan in spite of all the misery he causes. Something about that is more attractive to God.

It was a costly triumph. God's values are not so easily reckoned. If God had simply terminated Satan, then it would not have been so clear that God is both strong and thus able to terminate Satan, and infinitely more to be desired than Satan.

That would not have been so clear. God wills for His glory to shine forth not only through acts of raw physical power by which He could dispense Satan out of the universe, but also He wills for His glory to shine through acts of moral and spiritual power that display the beauty of His grace with lavish colors like in the death of His Son. To take sinners out of Satan's hands by virtue of Christ's sin-bearing sacrifice and by His law-fulfilling obedience to the Father was a more glorious victory than mere annihilation of the enemy.

If Christ obliterated all devils and demons now, which He could do, His sheer power would be seen as glorious, yes. But His superior beauty and worth would not shine so brightly as when humans renounce the promises of Satan and take pleasure in the greater glory of Christ. That's the best I can do.

Question or comment? Or another idea, John? Because of their blindness, God of this world blinds the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing, and here's the exact wording of 2 Corinthians 4. To keep them from seeing the light of the knowledge, the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God. In other words, they just don't recognize it for all that it is. They don't turn because they don't see it.

But, verse 6 says, He who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. And so we see it, and seeing it we freely embrace it and respond. And when we do that, willingly taking all manner of suffering upon us in the process, we show how valuable and precious the glory of grace and the glory of Christ, the glory of the gospel is.

And related to this last point that you covered, is it somewhat in a related way that angels can see the grace of God because they don't experience it personally? That's part of it, I think, that God wills that the drama of redemption, including the real hedonistic choices of His people to recognize beauty and be drawn to it irresistibly and embrace Christ, that's part of the drama that He wants to use to lavishly demonstrate the superior worth of His own glory in the world. Other comments or questions? I was just wondering when we're going through... Good question. When we're going through turmoil, when we're going through trials, when Satan is harassing us, how much do we put up with and when do we stand against Him? I would say you stand against Him immediately.

Anything you discern to be evil, you resist. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Resist him and he will flee from you.

But in that warfare, in that give and take, there are battles from day to day in which you gain some ground and then you gain some ground, you gain some ground, you gain some ground. And I think for some, and I don't have an explanation, I didn't have an explanation for last night in this last conversation that I had here about why some saints have to go through longer and more difficult battles and more setbacks it seems than other saints. And frankly, I don't think it's merely in terms of you don't have the right kind of faith or you don't have the right kind of belief or whatever.

Because I think God is sovereign in that for some people who have very inadequate mustard seed like faith, they say one word of depart from me and leave me. And the temptation to look at the video is gone. And for another, he says leave me, leave me, get out of my head, you demonic thought.

And whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. It's back again and again and again. I've witnessed in my own life remarkable progress in this matter over time.

There were seasons of my life as a younger man where I would do battle and the battle would be much longer, much harder than it is today in many regards. Now I don't know what to do except to say that over time as you grow in grace and you sink your roots down and you learn certain strategies of setting your mind on things that are above and not on things that are on the earth, certain fangs that Satan has in you begin to weaken and he loses some of his abilities. Many of us have given place to the devil in ways that we shouldn't have.

I watch young people today making choices and just tremble at the way they're giving place to the devil. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Don't give place to the devil.

How many of us let the sun go down on wrath against parents and kids? How many teenagers go to bed night after night angry at somebody? And that's just opening the door to the devil according to Ephesians 4. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Don't give place to the devil. And every night the devil gets another foothold and another foothold and another foothold.

And then when the poor kid wakes up at age 23 or 24 and he's done that for 5, 6, 7 years, how does he get liberated? Does it just happen like that? Just one Satan? Go away. Well, probably not. At least experience would say not.

Jesus can do that. Get out of here. But what happened when the disciples tried to do it? They couldn't get this demon out of there and Jesus came down and He's pulling His hair out.

Oh, how long will I be with you, you wicked and unbelieving generation? And then one word and the devil's gone. And they say, why couldn't we cast it out? And He says this utterly perplexing word, this kind, this kind, as though there were harder ones than other kinds, comes out only by prayer. And surely they would have thought, we prayed.

And they did. I'm sure they did. What He meant was, there is probably a length of praying, an earnestness of praying, a maturity of praying that you don't have yet and you need.

So, wherever you are in the warfare, don't give up. Because time with God and long seasons of learning, strategies of war and not giving up and keeping fighting against lust or against fear or against anxiety or against greed or against apparitions or against headaches or against cancer or whatever. If you don't give up, there will come more and more and more maturity and depth and liberty.

And God may be pleased in due season to give you the total freedom you want from the devil's more aggressive attacks. I just think people that create the impressions of an either-or approach to the spiritual life don't reckon with the complexities of human nature, the measures of varied maturity, the measures of imperfect sanctification and the complexities of Scripture. And so, I just think we're all over the map on this and we need to help each other.

The body of Christ is so important here. Don't fight your battles alone. Get in small groups.

People are gifted. John and I were talking about this last night. Some people are gifted with gifts of discernment and gifts of deliverance that others don't have.

Get somebody to pray for you. If you're stuck in something and all your prayers seem to hit the ceiling, find somebody whose prayers don't seem to be characteristically stuck. That is the point of the body.

Is that not the point of the body? What's the point of the body if that's not the point of the body? Go ahead. God who is the creator of all things kept this. That's right.

Yeah, even Heaven. And that's what he was saying before he left. The text that Jim referred to is Ephesians 3.10 that the principalities and powers might see the wisdom of God in the church.

And surely, by in the church, he means the blood-bought body of Jesus availing themselves of the spiritual resources purchased for them on the cross, fighting the spiritual warfare with all the armor of the helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness and the feet of the shod with the gospel and the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness and the sword of the Spirit. That whole thing that's going on here is

part of the wisdom of God as to how He defeats the devil and how He brings redemption fully to the world through the agency of His people who have been ravished by His glory in the gospel and now at great cost to themselves are spreading it out to others. God evidently seems to think that that is better than obliterating the devil.

And we might say, well, I wouldn't run it like that. It's just too costly. It's too costly.

There's too much pain in the world. If you got rid of the devil and all angels, there wouldn't be so much pain and horror in the world. And God says, I know there wouldn't.

But also, My glory, My grace would not shine as brightly in the ways that it needs to shine if I did it that way. There's a hand here. The observation is that the unregenerate or the reprobate as well as suffering are there for us and something for us and not just us for them, but them for us.

And you're getting ahead of me there. We will tackle that when we get to the nature and purposes of Christian suffering. There was a hand back there.

Go ahead. Excellent exhortation. Let me see if I can say it for the tape here.

That since God is big enough to be glorified in and through the pain, sufferings, and struggles of His people, let us drop our masks as though our struggles both with sin and with suffering and with pain have to be put up lest somebody will interpret our pain or our struggle as something that God can't be honored through but that the body of Christ in its mission and in its inner workings can't glorify God through. Amen to that. Okay.

Let's turn now to this next unit which is another big one. So the end of that unit was why global suffering? Why the devil goes on existing? Why death? Why futility? And we've seen several possible answers. And please, please, don't think that in my mind I'm presuming to give the last word or a definitive answer to questions that have boggled the minds of the greatest theologians and philosophers.

I'm trying to point you to biblical trajectories along which you can think more deeply and get in there and wrestle with me over the years. And I know good and well, I'm so aware of this. Here we are talking on a Saturday morning and most people in this room right now are feeling pretty good though some of you may be wrestling with some horrific things in your life or feeling some pain in your body.

I'm aware that to talk about pain now, to talk about its purposes now is so different when actually you're standing there in the moment of something absolutely terrible like a car wreck or somebody is caught in a room that's burning and they can't get out and you can hear their screams or some little baby has fallen down head first into a narrow well and you're their parent and you can hear their cries and you're just screaming, oh God, oh God. You remember that one down in Texas a few years ago. I know at those moments it's so different than it is now.

C.S. Lewis has a way of saying things and he wrote a book on the problem of pain, you know, and he said right at the beginning there's a difference between talking about the problem of pain and having a toothache. And the toothache is much more serious than the theoretical problem of pain. And that's the way it is.

And so I'm not naive about that, that we're talking into relative ease right now, but oh how I believe and I think my little teeny experience with suffering and pain in my life has borne it out that if you can sink some

roots down into these kinds of truths, you will not be blown over. You will be strong. Oh, I get so encouraged.

I was so encouraged when that couple came up to me last Sunday who has this little baby who's anencephalic and they were not angry at God. They wanted prayer. They wanted help.

They asked me some hard questions. But their roots were so deep and I felt so encouraged and they mightily encouraged my faith as they dealt with that hard thing in their life. But we're all over the place on that and we need to be patient with each other and help each other grow deep in these things.

The necessity, nature, and purposes of Christian suffering. So let's briefly talk about the necessity of it here. The necessity of Christian suffering.

Must Christians suffer? Mark 8.34 He summoned the crowd with His disciples and said to them, if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake in the Gospels will save it. It is standard, ordinary discipleship to bear a cross.

And a cross is an instrument of death. I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live.

That's Paul's way of saying take up your cross. It involves self-denial. Not ultimate self-denial because heaven is held out to you and glorious rewards are held out to you to sustain you if you'll do this.

But in this life, normal Christianity is loss. I have lost all things, and I have counted them as refuse for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Luke 14.26 If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, brothers, children, sisters, yes, even his own life, he can't be My disciple.

The kind of relationship there has to be such that if you lose them, it would be like losing those you hate instead of losing those you love. Luke 14.33 Then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up or renounce all his possessions. Give up might be an overstatement there in the sense of actual loss, but renounce in the sense of they're not yours anymore, and if they disappear and go, that's not the loss of your life or your joy.

We'll see that later too from Hebrews. More text on necessity. John 12.25 He who loves his life loses it.

He who hates his life in this world, see the qualification there, will keep it for eternal life. It's ok to want eternal life. It's ok to want eternal reward.

It's ok to want to be given joy with God forever and ever and thus to make that the ground of your willingness to lose here. John 15.20 Jesus says, a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you.

If they kept My word, they'll keep your word. Matthew 10.25 It is enough for the disciple that he becomes like his teacher and the slave like his master if they have called the head of the house Beelzebul. They call Me the devil.

How much more will they malign the members of his own household? He's trying to get us clear. Some people have the notion that if Jesus died for us or took our place, then He bore the maligning. And He was persecuted.

So we don't have to bear the maligning and we don't have to be persecuted. And exactly the opposite is stated in those two texts. So He says, John 20.21, Peace be with you as the Father has sent Me.

As He sent Me, I send you. Now how did He send Jesus? He sent Him, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being found in human likeness. He humbled Himself and became a servant and obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

And He says, I send you out like sheep in the midst of wolves. 1 Peter 2.20 and 21 shows us both Jesus as substitute and model. Not either or, but both and.

For what credit is there if when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it... Now this is relevant to marriage because so many marriage partners say, I have a right to be treated better. Yes, you do. That's true.

You do. But when you do right and suffer for it, you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this.

You've been called for this purpose. Since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example. Now notice this.

He suffered for you and you should suffer as He did. So His substitution for you does not mean He took it all so you don't have to take any. He took it all in that He redeems you from sin.

Your suffering is not expiatory or propitiatory or substitutionary. It is simply following Christ. And we'll ask why in a minute.

I'm just saying it's normal. He left you an example for you to follow in His steps. So, when you get to persecution, chapter 4 of 1 Peter 12-14, beloved, don't be surprised.

Don't be surprised. That's one of the reasons I'm teaching this seminar. At least there will be 100 people or so who will be less surprised now when it comes.

Don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal that comes upon you or that's among you which comes upon you for your testing as though something strange were happening to you. It's not a surprise. It shouldn't be.

And it's not strange because Jesus came into the world embracing suffering. It was His plan to endure suffering. And He says, as the Father sent Me, so send I you.

So it's not strange when wolves devour sheep. It's strange when they don't. America is strange.

The American church is strange. The Sudanese church is not strange. But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing.

Wow! To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that, this is a means to the end of something, so that also at the revelation of His glory, this is the second coming, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Let me say something encouraging to you there in regard to those of you who fear that when the trial comes, this fiery ordeal, you just won't have the wherewithal to cope, whether it's torture or some terrible relational animosity or long suffering.

Don't you see in this verse here, if you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed because at those critical moments when you're about to cave, the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests on you. I think that's a promise of something unusual. Not the ordinary presence of the Holy Spirit, but an extraordinary presence of the Holy Spirit.

Frankly, when I read the stories of the suffering church today or when I read the history of the suffering of the church, or when I think about martyrdom, or when I think about the kinds of things that could come, the kind of tortures that are done to people, I say, Lord, I don't know. I just don't know. I don't know.

I want to die well. I really want to finish well. I want to be firm to the end.

You read about Lotis' note to me about Jan Hus. In your note last Sunday, you said that when he was burned at the stake, he sang until his head caught on fire. You ever gotten near a bonfire with your hand? All I can say is, that is an instance of this.

This is not Jan Hus. Jan Hus. It's not Jan Hus.

This is the Spirit of glory and of God resting on those who in obedience have held true to the end. So take heart. When the time comes, God will give it to you.

Give you what you need. Today, you may not feel like you're adequate for it, but just keep walking with Him. Keep availing yourself with as much of His Spirit and as much of His power as you can get now.

And when the time comes, you will have what you need. That's my hope. Acts 14.21 Paul planting churches.

What does he say to all the churches? What would you say if you had ten churches to plant in the next couple of years? What would you teach them and leave them with? After they had preached the Gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra. A few months later, visiting the churches in Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith. Yes, yes, that's what we do.

Saying, this is how he encouraged them, through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom. That's what you've got to say. You must teach young believers through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom.

More tribulations than you have gone through heretofore in your life, you must now walk through on your way to Heaven. That's what we teach young believers. Otherwise we do them a great disservice.

Encourage them. Encourage them. Give them courage.

Exhort them. Help them by being realistic with them. Many tribulations are coming your way, relationally and physically and spiritually.

Christian life is war. So Paul comes to the end of his life and the last thing we read, and the last letter he wrote was, I have kept the faith. I have finished my course, my long marathon.

I have fought the what? The good fight. Right to the end. I've done it.

I've fought to the end. Read 2 Corinthians. He comes there to Troas.

Sometimes we think Paul was a super saint, which of course he was, but not in the way many people think. When he got to Troas, you remember on his way, and he had sent Titus out to find out how it was going in Corinth and in Thessalonica, and he said, fears within and fighting without. There's a line to a hymn about that.

Fears within, fighting without. A door was opened to me, and I couldn't stay. He was so distraught, he couldn't even do evangelism in Troas and had to find out how it was going with the saints that he had ministered to.

And if Paul had fears within and fighting without, count on him. And this one we've looked at already, well, part of it. Still on the necessity of suffering.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, heirs, heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ, and this should be your stay and your strength, your rock, if indeed we suffer with Him, if we suffer with Him, so that we may be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed.

So this if here says we're children of God, we're heirs of God, we're fellow heirs with Christ, if when sufferings come, we don't bail out, but we embrace them the way Christ embraced them and said, for the surpassing worth of the glory of my inheritance as a child of God, I will take anything rather than apostatizing and giving up on my Christ. 2 Timothy 3.12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. I think maybe one of the reasons that doesn't come true as regularly as it does for some is that we've probably domesticated this word godly.

What does godly mean? That's such a pietistic sounding word that it sounds like me and God in our warm, cozy bedroom with our Bible in our lap and feeling good and little worship music on in the background and the blanket around us and heaters on and the coffee's brewing. Godliness. Well, that's okay.

I do that on my day off. My day off last Thursday, I only took half the day off because I had to get ready for this, but I did take the morning off and my wife comes over to teach the homeschool unit here and she brings Talitha, so there's nobody at home for about three hours. And I got up and I ate a bowl of cereal and now it's about eight.

And I went to the living room and I sat in Noel's chair. She always gets the big, comfortable chair. I sat in Noel's chair.

I put her afghan over my legs. I flicked on the little light there because it was very rainy and dark and so the window wasn't bright enough and I put my Bible in my lap and I just read 1 Samuel for two and a half hours, although I slept probably half of it. Because that's what a day off means to me.

When you get sleepy, you sleep. That's what a vacation is and that's what a day off is. So I start reading.

Two chapters in, I'm going like this. I say, fine, Lord, You can handle that. I lay my head down and the doorbell rang and it was American Express or something and it woke me up and I'm back and I didn't fall asleep again and I read ten chapters in 1 Samuel just soaking, just enjoying it.

I didn't feel any pain at all. That's good. That's good.

You need to do that. I don't think that's what he means here. People that do that get persecuted? Not necessarily.

Godliness is probably something really radical. It's probably just being so Godward that everywhere you go, God is on the agenda. Every conversation you're in, God is on the agenda.

Let me give you an instance of probably where I failed in this and where had I not failed, it might have resulted in some persecution. I went to Subway on Thursday. Same Thursday, Noel and I go out to lunch on our day off.

This time we went to Subway over in Dinkytown. Now, Dinkytown is a place with a lot of students and some students are strange people. You can tell by looking at it sometimes and sometimes not, but in front of us was a girl with a backpack.

They wear a backpack over one shoulder. And all over the backpack were buttons like the bumper sticker I pass over here, pagan and proud of it. I'm a pro-choice and I vote.

She had a button about abortion and a button I'd never seen before. The button said, How dare you assume that I'm a Christian? And she's standing right there in front of me. There's about three people before we get to the line.

I probably should have said, Boy, you don't like Christians, do you? Your button here says, How dare you assume? I just said something and risked an in-your-face confrontation in Subway. I probably should have done that. Pray for me.

Pray for me. I didn't do it. I had Talitha there and Noel there and I thought blah, blah, blah.

All kinds of rationalizations and I didn't do it. I think that's godliness. God-wardness.

Get God into Subway. If you get God at work and God in the neighborhood and God over the backyard fence and God in your dorm room and God everywhere, probably this will come true more consistently. I think that's probably what godliness is.

Okay, here's where we're going to take a break because we're going to go to point two. But before we do, questions. I don't want to minimize our suffering, but it seems to me, why don't we suffer more for our faith? The question is, why don't we suffer more for our faith here in America? And I don't know the final answer to that, but I just gave you one answer.

We're chicken-hearted and therefore we don't bring our faith up enough in enough controversial settings. I don't think we should try to suffer. I don't think you should try to make people mad at you.

You don't have to do that. If you're just forthcoming with the Gospel enough and regularly, it will happen. That's one reason.

Another reason probably is that from season to season, America is a very baby country. I mean, just think how young our country is, given the history of the world. And one of the reasons perhaps the Lord has granted us a 200-year season of prosperity is for the sake of spreading the Gospel.

America should be using its funds not to build second and third houses, own second and third cars, get second and third computers, and become more and more rich and fat and comfortable, but we should be

streamlining for the Gospel. That's the reason we're prosperous. We have been blessed that we might be a blessing for the nations.

And we more and more get acculturated into a culture of wealth and ease and prosperity, and we assume more and more to be needs and natural, when in fact we ought to be living more on the cutting edge and multiplying our resources for those countries so that the heavenly powers would watch the church in God's wisdom denying itself and loving the lost and the hungry and the AIDS orphans and just doing far more. We ought to be dreaming more dreams of how to maximize our usefulness in the world with all this comfort and ease that we have. And if we don't, it won't last very long.

Two hundred years is not a long time for a nation. Some nations lasted a thousand years. I don't think America's going to last a thousand years.

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