

The Supremacy of Christ and the Sorrow of Calamity

by John Piper

This sermon delves into the profound topic of suffering and the brokenness of the world, emphasizing that the sufferings of this present time are incomparable to the glory that awaits believers. It explores the reasons behind the existence of calamities, conflicts, and miseries, pointing to God's sovereignty, holiness, and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ as the ultimate answers to the brokenness of the world.

Scripture: Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 6:10, Genesis 50:20, Romans 5:8, Acts 4:27

Topics: "Suffering", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

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Transcript

Chapter 8, verses 18 to 25. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. This is the Word of God.

You may be seated. As I prayed and reflected on what I should bring to you from God's Word, the situation in the world pressed itself upon me and I thought it would be fitting that I try to bring the supremacy of Christ into relationship to the calamities and conflicts that are all around us. And I have in mind Japan with thousands of people swept away in a morning and radiation every day threatening to engulf the land.

I have in mind Libya, and Syria, and Egypt, and Bahrain, and Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, terrorism in Jerusalem, and anarchy in Gaza, 250,000 marching in Trafalgar Square, earthquake on Thursday in Myanmar with 70 killed, a bus sawn in two by a light post mangling and killing half the people on it a couple of weeks ago, cancer in your lives, stillbirths, miscarriages, not to mention the ordinary departure of 50,000 plus people into eternity every day in our world. One of the truths that we embrace at our church, and I know you do as well, is that with trembling joy, we affirm that God is supreme over all things and that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the universe, this universe. And when we say it, when we say at our church, we exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, we don't say except calamities.

God is supreme in all things except war. God is supreme in all things except Al-Qaeda. God is supreme in all things except tsunamis.

We don't say that. We say all things, we mean all things, and that's why we say it with trembling. You didn't formulate your doctrine of God's supremacy in a rosy world.

You didn't bury your head in the sand when you came to the conviction that God is sovereign and that he rules this world and every part of it. We formulated our vision of God biblically in a real world of pain and suffering and evil. None of us who has lived a few decades, and for me that's six and a half now, has embraced this mission or this vision of God without trembling.

None of us embraces this vision, this doctrine, this mission for long without tears. We have said it at our church, I'm sure you've said it here dozens of times, that we are sorrowful yet always rejoicing. We are always rejoicing and always sorrowful.

You know, the Apostle Paul says, weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. And if you know just a few people, somebody's always weeping and somebody's always rejoicing, which means that Christians are called to live a miraculous, impossible emotional life. How can I do this? And you must, which is why Paul, I think in 2 Corinthians 6.10 says, sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

There's always a reason to rejoice. There's always a reason to weep. We are not a glib people.

When we speak of joy, we mean tear-stained joy. The soul would have no rainbow if the eye had no tears. We know that.

It is perhaps surprising to us that God stands forth sometimes with stunning clarity in the midst of evil. It may seem paradoxical because so many people ask on the news programs to religious people, so now where was God when? It is remarkable how this happens. Let's just take an example and I'll illustrate what I mean.

Most people when they think of horrific historic evil think of the Holocaust and Stalin's purge was worse, way worse. Sixty million people wiped out before he was finished, not six million. None of us should live in the dream world that that sort of thing doesn't happen.

It happens. So here is a person, typical 21st century person just gliding along in life, blissfully living in their artificial relativistic world, not feeling any strong convictions about anything. Instead scoffing that there is anything true or anything absolute.

Making light of those who hold strong convictions as though it's arrogant, thinking there is no such thing as truth, what is truth, that kind of person. And suddenly they find themselves in something like a

concentration camp or a gulag. And they watch unspeakable evil happen around them to others or perhaps to themselves.

And suddenly, totally unexpectedly, there rises in their hearts ultimate moral outrage. No, no, no, this is wrong. And they realize they have just done something they said cannot be done.

They've rendered a totally incontrovertible moral judgment, which up till now in their lives they had been blissfully saying cannot be done, must not be done, there is no truth, there is no absolute wrong, there is no absolute right. And they find just welling up from within them, unstoppably, this is wrong. And the next step, if God is gracious, is what does that mean? Where did that come from? How can that have any significance at all if I am the product of time and energy and matter and chance? That's just movement of chemicals in my brain.

And the second conviction rises, no, it's not. And you know that. You know that at the bottom of your heart, that those judgments of love and moral evil and moral right and beauty, these big, deep things that make humans human are not products of chemicals.

You know that beyond the shadow of a doubt. And you marvel at atheists and evolutionists who try to decrease us to mere stuff. You know, everybody knows.

But sometimes it takes horrific evil, and that's what I meant when I said, sometimes in the moment of the worst evil, God breaks in. Because the third step, after you say no morally and yes, that has significance, what I just said, there's only one explanation, God. And paradoxically, the God that you had been calling into question for this evil is the only foundation of calling it evil.

And you might find him right there. So the question for me that I would like to address biblically in the time we have left is, what's the explanation for this world of futility, calamity, conflict, misery, a conveyor belt of corpses? I'm going to give you two answers that are not the case, and then four that are. Number one, a reason that's not true for why these calamities and conflicts and miseries exist is that God is not in control.

That's wrong. Here's what the Bible says. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.

Even the winds and the sea obey him? I cannot fathom a Christian minister being asked how God related to the tsunami and having him simply say, God didn't mean for this to happen. Anybody who's read the Bible knows that answer cannot be true, cannot be true. The lot is cast in the lap, and it's every decision is from the Lord.

Every dice roll in Reno is governed by God. That is not an exaggeration. The sparrows fall, and the dice roll by his decree.

Who has spoken and it came to pass unless the Lord has commanded it? The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he will. Does disaster befall a city unless the Lord has done it? He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.

I am God, and there is no other, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose. That's a wrong answer to say this world exists because God is out of control. He's not.

He's in control. Second wrong answer, God is evil. He's not evil.

He's holy, holy, holy, as the pastor of this church has devoted his life to make biblically clear. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all, 1 John 1, 5. God is upright, and the Lord is holy.

The angels cry, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. As for you, this is the word that we should put over every evil in the world. As for you, Satan, as for you, demons, as for you, Hitler, Gaddafi, as for you, leaving, departing, divorcing wife, as for you, you meant it for evil.

God meant it for good. Not easy to say. Not easy.

Through many tears, we speak those words again and again in our lives. So and so meant it for evil. God meant it for good.

That's Genesis 50, verse 20, the story of Joseph. So those are two wrong answers. God is out of control.

The world is out of control, and God can't manage it. God is evil. Here are four right answers from the Bible for why this world exists.

Number one, the world of calamities exists because God planned a history of redemption and permitted sin to enter the world through our first parents, Adam and Eve. Second, Timothy 1, 9, God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. Now, fathom the implications of saying grace, unmerited, demerited favor through Jesus Christ came to us before the creation.

That means God planned a history of redemption climaxing in Jesus, which means he ordained that there be sin. You can't have redemption without something to redeem from. And the history of redemption was planned through grace, through crucified Jesus, before the foundation of the world.

The reason this world is the way it is is because God ordained that he permit Adam and Eve to sin. And when they sinned, they brought the whole thing down. God means to be known in his fullness.

Judgment, wrath, mercy, patience, kindness, love, grace, the whole range, and thus he ordains without sinning that sin be. That's number one. Number two, the reason that calamities and conflicts exist in the world and the miseries and death that we see around us is that God subjected the world to futility.

That's the text that I read earlier from Romans 8. He subjected the world to futility. This natural world that we live in is under a curse. The physical horrors that we see, and they are incredibly horrible at times.

The physical horrors we see, diseases, vivid pictures of deformities are parables or displays of the horror of sin, a signpost pointing to the horror of moral evil. Let me read the key verses again here. Romans 8, 18, the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly. In other words, nobody on the earth wanted this to happen, but because of him, he subjected it in hope that the whole creation would be set free from its bondage to decay. So, the futility of the world, tsunamis in the world, cancer, this thing that doesn't belong here is in the world because God subjected the world to futility.

Why? Because of sin. But why the correlation between physical horrors and moral sin? It's because nobody in this room is outraged at sin like we should be. Nobody, but oh, do we get outraged when we get

sick.

Oh, do we get outraged when we see 1,000 people swept away or 10,000. Oh, we get in God's face and say, how can such a thing be? While all the while making light of our moral outrage. Who loses sleep at night about how horribly rebellious we are, how impatient we are, how unkind we are, how neglectful of God we are? Who feels the same kind of gut reaction against our own sinfulness like we feel against cancer when it comes into our kid's life? The reason physical, outrageous, horrible evils are in the world is because they are parables of the moral evil that we take so lightly.

Our sin against the holy God is 10,000 times more outrageous than the sweeping away of all people on the planet in a tsunami. The reason we are called to look at these things and weep over them is to testify to that being the result of my sin and therefore that being the evidence that sin is horrific and God is holy. So, that's the second reason there is such a world to testify to the real moral outrage of our sin, not the outrage of our sickness.

Third, this kind of world exists that we live in in order that the followers of Christ may experience and display that no pleasure and no treasure here compares to knowing Christ. In other words, we are given a world of loss. As soon as you enter the world as a child, you start losing things.

You get hungry, you lose comfort, you cry, ah, ah, got to have milk. It's just one sequence of frustration after the other which may or may not get satisfied. Why? And the older you get, the losses start multiplying.

I sat with my wife several years ago. We just sat and looked at each other. And we looked around and it felt like one thing was being lost after the other.

Just one thing after the other. People are being lost, eyes are being lost, health is being lost, sexual things are being lost, hair is being lost, eyesight, loss, loss, loss. And they get harder and harder and then we lose life.

The reason that is the way it is, third reason, is because God means for we Christians to be so satisfied in Jesus that when these losses come, we magnify His worth by not being sad. I count everything as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. I just want to make much of Him when I die because dying is gain.

The last loss is all gain. That's what He wants us to show. We have a world like this because it's a glorious opportunity to show that the world is not our treasure.

Christ is our treasure. That's number three. Number four, the last one.

The reason this world exists like it does with all of its calamities and conflicts and miseries and death is to make a place for the Son of God to suffer and die for our sins. This may sound strange to you because we have the notion in our mind that God looked at the world of fall, sin, and death and responded to it with Christ as a Redeemer. That's not the order in which it happened in His head.

God ordained that there be grace flowing through a crucified Christ before He created this world. And therefore, this world is the stage prepared for Christ, the apex of the revelation of the glory of grace. The reason there is terror in the world is that Christ might be terrorized.

The reason there is trouble in the world is that Christ could be troubled. The reason there is pain in the world is so that the Son of God incarnate could experience pain. Christ is the ultimate reason for the universe the way it is.

The ultimate revelation of the glory of God is the revelation of grace flowing to unworthy sinners like us through a suffering Savior. There could be no suffering Savior, no glorious manifestation of grace had there been no sin, no fall, no misery, no tsunamis. It's all for Christ and the revelation of His unparalleled grace towards sinners.

Romans 5, 8, God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God's love comes clearest at the point where Christ is dying for sinners. Had there been no sin, had there been no way of dying, the love of God would simply not shine like this.

You might have created the universe differently and planned the whole thing differently and find this plan to be reprehensible. If that's the case, you need to be born again. You don't have eyes yet.

Listen to this amazing word from Acts 4, verse 27. Truly in this city, Jerusalem, there were gathered together against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, talking to the Father. Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.

So all those people gathered together, Herod, Pilate, Gentile soldiers, crowds crying, crucify him, all gathered together to do whatever your hand and your plan predestined to take place. All of it. All the scheming, all the flogging, all the spitting, all the beating with rods, all the mockery, all the abandonment of the disciples, all the thorns poking into the head, all the nails going through the hands and feet, all the sword going into his side, the weight of all the sins resting upon him, all of it according to plan.

In order that you might know what love is, God shows his love for us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The deepest answer, and with this I close, the deepest answer to terrorism, calamity, conflict, misery, cancer, death is the suffering and death of the Son of God. The deepest answer is the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

He entered into our fallen world of sin and misery and death. He bore in himself the cause of it all, sin, and he bought by his death the cure of it all, forgiveness and everlasting joy in the age to come. It's not an absurd world.

It's not a meaningless world. It exists to make plain the horrors of sin and the wonders of Christ. If you embrace him as your Savior and your Lord and your treasure and your friend, you will know the truth and the truth will free you from a lifetime of bitterness.

Father in heaven, we are sinners yet in need of a Savior every hour, and we thank you for Christ. We are prone to be angry. We are prone to be bitter and resentful.

We are prone to be blaming and sulking and depressed and discouraged. Forgive us for our sins. Apply the blood of Christ to us.

Deliver us from cynicism and fill us with joy, I pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

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