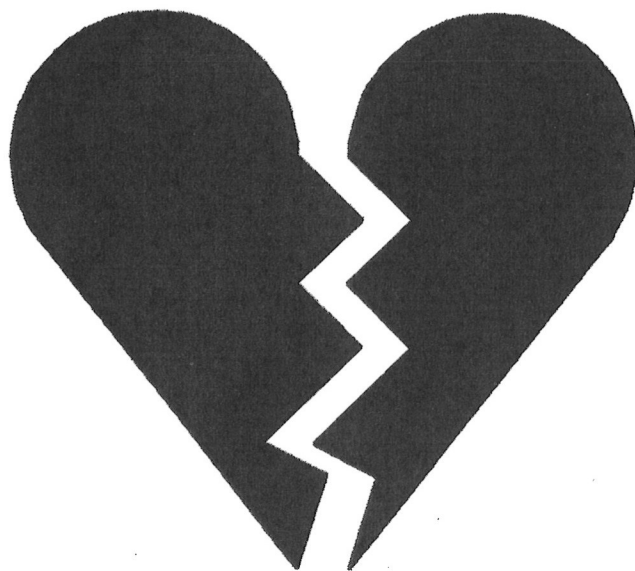


Deciphering Suffering for the Saint



*A Series of Sermons on Suffering
by Dr. Paul C. Fedena*

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"DECIPHERING SUFFERING"

TEXT: I Pet. 4:12-16

THESIS: To show how believers should react to suffering for Christ's sake.

INTRO: A. The subject of suffering in the world is both fascinating and frustrating. Why is it necessary? Why doesn't a loving God stop it? Why must believers endure it? Peter makes an attempt at "DECIPHERING SUFFERING" in this passage...to unlock the secrets of suffering.

ILLUS: All the Apostles, except John, experienced martyrdom. Believers are virtually GUARANTEED suffering.

II Tim. 3:12

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

B. Right now believers are suffering extreme hardship, persecution, disease, affliction,...WHY? Peter has already given one answer. He has taught that we are being purified THRU testings, trials and sufferings.

I Pet. 1:6-7

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

TRANS: Now, Peter shows us how to react to suffering...how to DECIPHER OUR SUFFERINGS...

I. DON'T BE ASTONISHED: V.12

A. Reminder: "...think it not strange"

1. It is not a lack of love that permits suffering.
 - a. The word "Beloved" shows intense or Divine love.
 - b. If suffering shows a lack of love then God loved His Son less than the world.
2. It is not a lack of power that permits suffering.
 - a. God could have stopped all sickness, sorrow and suffering.
 - b. God could have destroyed Nero and the ungodly in Peter's day or now.

B. Refining: "fiery trial..."

1. Lit. the smelter's furnace, scorching flames.
2. The gold smelter is not satisfied till he sees his face in the molten metal and the Lord is not satisfied till He sees His Son in us.

II. DON'T BE ANXIOUS: V.13

A. But Rejoice!

1. Not endure or "grin and bear it"!
2. Not weep, wail and worry!

B. But Recall: "Christ's sufferings..."

1. We cannot be partakers in the vicarious nature of His sufferings.
2. We can recall why He suffered:
 - a. He condemned sin and suffered for that...and so will we!
 - b. He cleansed Sonship with the Father and suffered for that...and so will we!
 - c. He carried Himself aloof from their sinfulness and His separation brot suffering...and so will we!
 - d. He convicted sinners by His spotless life and suffered for that... and so will we.

C. But Realize: "when His glory is...revealed"

1. Better to share His suffering now and His glory later,
2. Than to be like the lost who will often prosper now and will suffer later.

III. DON'T BE ASHAMED: V.14-16

A. When It Is For His Name: v.14

1. For then it brings blessings: "happy"
2. For the "spirit of glory and of God resteth on you."

B. When It Is For Good: v.15

QUOTE: "It is not the suffering, but the cause that makes the martyr." Mt.Henry

1. If you do wrong you deserve to suffer for it.
2. But if you suffer for doing right, then your suffering has merit.

C. When It Is As A Christian: v.16

1. There is no merit in mere suffering, but when we endure persecution for the cause of Christ or as a Christian, we can praise the Lord.
2. When Paul persecuted the Christians the Lord spoke to him and said "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?"!

NOTE: When we are persecuted, suffer, endure hardship for the cause of Christ then we can rejoice knowing that it is not us but the Lord who is being persecuted and that persecution has merit and will produce reward.

Poor Job was persecuted and suffered and had no idea why...but it was for the Lord. His reputation was at stake. The Lord allowed his suffering to show Satan how He loved and cared for His own and how when they responded positively it brought blessing to others (as it has for centuries).

Poor Paul was persecuted and suffered again and again for the cause of His Savior. The Lord permitted it to bless us and set an example for Christians of every age.

Poor Stephen was persecuted and martyred and was taken up to heaven to show us how to live and how to die.

Time and space would fail us to list the many who have suffered for His sake. Those who have suffered quietly, behind the scenes, on sick beds, in wheel chairs, etc. for His glory and to teach us that we can just suffer or we can suffer with a purpose and have a ministry in our suffering.

CONCL: Thus Peter "DECIPHERS SUFFERING" for us and gives us insight into how we should react to suffering. We should NOT BE ASTONISHED, ANXIOUS NOR ASHAMED when suffering for the Savior!

"IT WILL BE ALL BETTER LATER"

TEXT: Rom. 8:18

INTRO: A. Much of my life as a Pastor revolves around picking up the broken pieces of people's lives. Suffering is a daily part of my schedule. There is rarely a day when I do not have to attempt to minister to someone who is hurting.

B. Hundreds of times (perhaps thousands) I have turned to this passage to offer help and hope to the hurting. Basically the verse says "IT WILL BE ALL BETTER LATER!"

ILLUS: The parent says to the child "let me kiss it and make it all better." Of course the kiss doesn't really heal the hurt but the love expressed does help. That is the effect of this verse. It says "Everything is going to be all right - later."

I. SUFFERING NOW:

A. Loneliness and Ostracism:

1. Those who have lost loved ones are hurting now.

ILLUS: One lady called this week in tears and asked "How do I deal with my mother's death?" She said every time she goes into her bedroom the loneliness sets in again. I had the funeral 2 days after Christmas and she is dealing every day with the loneliness.

The widow or widower reaches over in bed and feels that empty space along side; has to eat alone, go to church alone, etc. The single person sits alone while others are together, etc.

Jesus knows about our loneliness. He was lonely most of His life. He feels our pain and sense of loss. He was lonely for fellowship with His Father in heaven. He was lonely for faithful friends down here. He was abandoned in His hour of greatest human need.

2. Those who have been shut out by their friends or relatives.

ILLUS: Jesus prophesied that salvation would even separate families...but it still hurts. But He too felt the ostracism of former disciples; those He had ministered to...

B. Heartache and Heartbreak: (Maryellen Heath)

1. The marriage doesn't work out, the child breaks his parent's hearts.
2. Friends you have helped no longer drop by or call.
3. You become a shut-in or are placed in a nursing home and family members or friends forget you. (Clara Garner)

ILLUS: Jesus knows about heartache...in fact He died, not of the wounds of Calvary, but of a broken heart because of rejection by those He came to save.

C. Sickness and Pain: (Helen Gliddon)

1. When you are sick you need friends and attention and special help.
2. When you are in pain you get help from someone who has been where you are.

ILLUS: Jesus never got sick, but He did experience pain! The pain of rejection, of ridicule, of mocking, of the whip, and the extreme pain of crucifixion.

D. Sorrow and Death: (Sonny Segletes' sisters and friends)

ILLUS: Pastor Penichietti had a funeral yesterday morning for a little baby who died suddenly...it just stopped breathing! The call came from the terrified mother 5AM Sat. morning. He said "I didn't want to be a Pastor then...!"

Lam. 1:12

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

TRANS: These are the "sufferings of this present time..." but thank god they are temporary and "are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us..." The sufferings are NOW...the glory is LATER...

II. GLORY THEN:

A. Heirs and Joint Heirs: v.17

1. Our suffering NOW is the coin which purchases for us the glory THEN!
2. Unfortunately heirs never become the possessors of their inheritance till after their death.
 - a. Jesus already died and has become "heir of all things."
 - b. We are presently a joint heir with Him NOW, but the benefits of His inheritance doesn't come to us till we are "glorified together" with Him.

B. Expectation and Manifestation: v.19

1. The entire universe with all its creatures are anticipating the day when God's children are finally revealed for what they really are.
2. The purchase price of our redemption was so great that all creation will be delivered when we are finally "home" and the suffering is finally over.

ILLUS: The point of our text is that the future glory is so great that present sufferings are insignificant by comparison. Also the glory is permanent whereas the suffering is temporary and LIGHT!

II Cor. 4:17

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

3. The word "manifestation" is the same word translated "revelation" in the last book of the Bible.

ILLUS: It is at the Revelation of Christ that we too will share in all His glory and we will be manifest to the world for the royalty we really are!

C. Adoption and Redemption: v.23

1. Our adoption will become final when our redemption is complete, i.e. when we receive our new bodies and are glorified like Christ!
2. It may be sufferings NOW, but it will be glory THEN!

CONCL: IT WILL BE ALL BETTER LATER! It doesn't matter what you are going through NOW, IT WILL BE ALL BETTER LATER, if you are one of God's children.

“IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP!”

TEXT: Romans 8:16-18

THESIS: To show that as children and heirs we need discipline to groom us to receive our inheritance.

INTRO: A. D.L. Moody told the story of a bedridden saint of God who, in spite of her physical condition and poverty, was always cheerful and praising the Lord. A wealthy Christian lady who always complained was asked to visit her. She went to a squalid part of town to an apartment house and began to ascending the 5 flights of stairs and said to her friend, “How dark and filthy it is here.” Her friend replied “I know, but IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP.” At each floor the rich lady would complain and her friend kept saying “IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP.” When they entered the sick room, they found it neat and clean and cheerful with flowers in the window. The bed ridden saint beamed with her usual joy and peace. The rich lady said, “It must be awful for you to just lie here.” “No,” smiled the shut-in, “not when you keep looking to Jesus, for you realize

IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP!” The pessimistic Christian lady was put to shame.

B. We need to constantly remind ourselves of this simple truth in times of tears, trials and suffering: “IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP!”

TRANS: This is the basic theme of the text. Paul reminds the Roman believers that because of their Sonship, they are joint-heirs with Christ and in spite of sufferings “IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP!”

I. SONSHIP: v.16

A. Bestowed By Birth:

1. The word here is “tekna” which means “begotten ones.”

ILLUS: No one ever earns salvation, they are born into it. And that birth is not the first birth, but the second birth. You don't get to be a child of God because your parents were, the new birth is bestowed by request and thru the agency of God's Word.

1 Pet. 1:23

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

2. The word in v.14 and 15 is “huios” which means “adult sons”.

- a. Immediately after the new birth, God grants all the status of an adult son with all the blessings, privileges and responsibilities.
- b. We are first born into God's family, then we are also adopted there so that we can be partakers of all that rightfully belongs to a full-fledged, adult member of the family.

B. Granted By Grace:

ILLUS: God never and cannot grant salvation on the basis of human merit or human goodness. If that were possible then Christ died in vain. As one lady put it: “What would we need Jesus for?”

II. SURETY: v.17a

DEFINITION: Something sure, certain, a guarantee.

A. Heirs of God:

1. The Lord Himself becomes our inheritance.
2. At the new birth God becomes our “Father” and we His sons and we become partakers of His Divine nature as the Holy Spirit indwells us. v.23

ILLUS: Note v.15 where the words “Abba, Father” are mentioned. The word “Abba” is Aramaic for “papa.” The Israelites were not permitted to speak His name, but we are encouraged to refer to Him as our “papa.” (This is the meaning of the word “Pope” and when applied to a mere man, any man, it is blasphemous!) True believers instinctively call the Lord “Father.” If we find ourselves constantly referring to Him as “Lord” and never “Father” we should be concerned. Jesus called Him “Father,” “My Father,” “Righteous Father,” not “Almighty God” or “Jehovah” etc. And when He taught His disciples to pray He said “When ye pray, say, Our Father...” Lk.11:2

B. Joint Heirs With Christ:

1. Note that we are not just heirs, but “joint heirs with Christ”!

ILLUS: If I am just an heir then I may just receive a portion of an estate. For example, I have 4 children. Suppose when I die, my house sells for 100,000 and my insurance benefits are \$10,000. If I give the Lord at least 10%, say \$10,000 (or better \$25,000), then each of my 4 children would have to split the balance. But if they were “joint heirs” my entire estate would belong to all of them. That’s what every believer has. All that belongs to Christ belongs to every believer!

A little boy was riding on a bus was asked teasingly by a man if he owned a car. Without blinking he said “Yes, a Mercedes Benz.” The man asked “How long have you owned it?” He again confidently answered “About 2 years.” “Do you drive it yourself?” the man asked. “Nope” said the little boy, “I’m only 10.” The car belonged to his father, but he actually saw it as his own. So to the believer and joint-heir with Christ. We own everything He has, but we can’t use it all yet!

2. Heirship comes from relationship or sonship! “IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP!”

III. SUFFERINGS: v.17b,18a

NOTE: If heirship comes from relationship, so does suffering!

A. Present Pain:

1. The words “suffer with Him” only occurs one other time in the Bible: I Cor.12:26, referring to the Body of Christ.
2. This teaches us that whenever He, as the Head of the Body suffers, we suffer with Him, or whenever we suffer He suffers with us.
3. This suffering secures a place of honor in the future when we share His glory.
4. Sufferings and glory are related.

B. Present Paraclete: (v.26-27)

1. Knowing that we would have present pain, the Lord has provided a Paraclete (one to go alongside to help) to minister sufficient grace for any pain.
2. He even enables us to pray when we can’t express our pain nor understand our sufferings.

IV. SURPRISE: v.18b (21-23)

A. Future Glory:

1. One of Paul’s favorite expressions is “I reckon...” (He was a Southern Jew!)
2. The word means “my studied conclusion is...” or “my shrewd observation is...”

NOTE: The Greek word “logizomar” is used 19 times in Romans and is translated: reckon, counted, imputed, conclude, etc.

3. Paul here uses language which suggests weighing something in the balance; he is saying that if you put the suffering down here on one side of the scale and the glory of heaven on the other side you will have a true estimate of their real weight or value!

B. Future Inheritance:

ILLUS: An old TV series called “The Millionaire” had an anonymous man of great wealth surprising people by giving them a gift of 1 million dollars every week. Milton Petrie is a real billionaire who searched the New York papers for “stories of people life has kicked in the face (who) then reached for his checkbook. He once reported in the N.Y. Times that his chauffeur was in his will for 1 million dollars. At the end of the article he wrote: “Surprise!” Imagine this man’s shock when he read this article. This is how the believer should feel when he reads this passage. IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP!

CONCL: Yes, suffering saint: “IT’S BETTER HIGHER UP!” There is no legitimate earthly comparison between the suffering here and the glory there. We simply need to look forward with expectation and eager anticipation to what lies ahead of us. Keep looking up; remember, “the *perfections of heaven* will more than reward us for the *privations of earth!*”

If you are not yet a part of the family, better become His child today before you miss out on the inheritance!

“PUT OFF YOUR PITY PARTY”

TEXT: John 16:33

THESIS: To show what tribulations, trials and troubles can produce in the believer’s life

INTRO: A. Have you ever noticed how much of our Gospel music and much of our testimony time seems to dwell on our tribulations, trials and troubles? People do tend to maximize their problems and minimize their blessings, but the fact is they are not just having a ‘pity party’ most of the time, they are dealing with real life situations. Jesus did say “*in the world ye shall have tribulation.*” But that’s not all He said, He continued: “*but be of good cheer...*”! In other words He was saying, in spite of the tribulations, trials and troubles of life, you should “PUT OFF YOUR PITY PARTY” because He promised “*I have overcome the world.*”

B. As to the reasons the Lord assures us we will have tribulation in this world, we could offer many. But I like what Matthew Henry says:

QUOTE: “Men persecute (Christ’s disciples) because they are so good, and God corrects them because they are no better. Men design to cut them off from the earth, and God designs by affliction to make them meet for heaven; and so between them both they shall have tribulation.”

TRANS: “PUT OFF YOUR PITY PARTY” because...

I. TRIBULATIONS SEPARATE THE PRICELESS FROM THE WORTHLESS:

ILLUS: Our world “tribulation” comes from the ancient word “tribulum” - the instrument used to beat the grain to separate the chaff from the wheat.

I would like to pinpoint some seemingly disastrous tribulations, trials and troubles which plague believers and show how God is using them to *separate the priceless from the worthless* in our lives...

A. Debt May Produce Riches:

Phil. 3:7-8

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

1. Job went from “the lifestyles of the rich and famous” to the life of the poor and not so famous.
2. He moved from a position where he depended on his wealth and friends to where he had to depend on God alone and yet declared:

Job 1:21

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

3. Job was obedient and superficially spiritual before his tribulations, but by the end of his life he had become spiritually wealthy.
4. Job witnessed how that true riches are not measured in wealth, cattle, possessions, friends or even family, but in the richness of a personal walk with the Lord.

ILLUS: Perhaps God couldn't trust you with money, wealth, riches or fame and in your poverty you depend upon Him more and stay closer to Him.

D. Disability May Produce Strength:

2 Cor. 12:10

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

ILLUS: A cowboy applied for insurance: “Ever had an accident?” “Nope, but a bronco kicked me and broke 2 ribs and a rattlesnake bit me on the leg.” “Wouldn't you call those accidents?” “Nope, they did it on purpose!” It depends on how you look at it.

From God's viewpoint there are no accidents in the believer's life. Everything is a part of His perfect plan and purpose. He is preparing us for heaven! Molding us into the image of His Son. Your debt and disability may simply be God removing the worthless and replacing it with the priceless - in His sight! POYPP because...

11 TRIALS SEPARATE THE GOLD FROM THE DROSS:

1 Pet. 1:6-7

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

A. Disease May Produce Health

2 Kings 20:1-2

1 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying,

1. In setbacks like sickness it is our faith which is on trial.
2. The quality of our faith is important to God so He oversees every trial to refine it, to free us from the dross and to help us produce the gold.

Job 23:10

But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

B. Death May Produce Life:

1 Cor. 15:35-36

35 But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

36 Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:

1. In the natural world a seed must die before new life can exist.
2. In the supernatural world a life must die before new life can be formed.

Jn. 12:24

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. (Jesus was speaking of His death.)

ILLUS: The death of Clarence Hawk produced our Bus Barn. The death of Barry Ferguson produced those gym mats. The death of Edith Milacci produced the free Bibles we gave away. The death of several church members has helped FBCA. The death of Mrs. Cardi's dad produced 2 new lives. POYPP because...

III. TROUBLES SEPARATE THE SOLDIERS FROM THE DROPOUTS:

ILLUS: Boot camp is designed to do one of two things; produce soldiers or wash out the weak, cowards or wimps. Trouble in the Christian life is like boot camp. It will make you tougher or weaker.

A. Desertion May Produce Reconciliation:

ILLUS: An illiterate southern boy was before the judge for deserting his wife. He pleaded not guilty and said: "Judge, if y'all knew dat woman like I does you wouldn't call me no deserter - I'se a refugee!"

1. The classic biblical story of desertion is of Joseph and his brothers.
2. After years in prison and exile, Joseph and his brothers are reconciled.

Gen. 45:7-8

7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Gen. 50:20

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

B. Divorce May Produce Desire:

1. The woman at the well had a deep emptiness in her heart which the Lord used to win her to Himself.
2. Going through the tragedy of divorce may produce a longing in the soul for someone to replace that loved one and a person may turn to the Lord for forgiveness, restoration and love.

CONCL: Teddy Roosevelt was very nearsighted and had to carry 2 pair of glasses. While speaking at a political campaign, he was shot near the heart but not badly wounded. The steel case he carried his glasses in had deflected the bullet. When the surgeon told him he said: "That's remarkable! I have always considered it a nuisance and a burden to carry that extra pair of thick, heavy glasses and yet God used that very thing to save my life." Won't it be wonderful to see how God used the very things we dreaded and resisted to be a blessing and protection for us? "PUT OFF YOUR PITY PARTY!" It's too early - we don't know the end.

Rom. 5:3

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

Rom. 8:35

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

1 Cor. 10:13

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

"FROM GROANING TO GLORY" or "*OUR HOPE HELPS US COPE!*"

TEXT: Romans 8:22-26

THESIS: To reveal God's plan which delivers us from groaning to glory; to show the believer how to live above the sufferings of this life.

INTRO: A. As I read, reread and studied this passage and tried to glean a title which would summarize its teaching or at least that truth which I desired to communicate, I came up with various ideas: "From the Gory to the Glory," "From the Hopeless to the Hopeful," "There Is Hope For The Helpless," "Creation's Groans and Saints' Sighs," "The Moans and Groans Of Creation," etc. I finally settled on "FROM GROANING TO GLORY" as that which states succinctly what I want to say. Or "*OUR HOPEHELPS US COPE!*"

B. The passage summarizes the plight of the planet and the suffering of the saints, in this present dispensation. If a dispensation is "God's Plan for Man" then the problems of this life, in this age, are a part of God's blueprint for earth and for us. God's people experience the same pain as the ungodly, have the same daily pressures, enjoy the same blessings, share the same experiences, joys, heartaches, health problems, hurts and disappointments. But the difference is our perspective! We look for something better in the future. "*Our hope helps us cope!*" The believer looks forward to the Rapture before he dies, but even if he dies before the Rapture, he looks forward to heaven! "*Our hope helps us cope!*"

TRANS: The passage before us speaks of “groaning” - which describes *our plight*, but it also speaks of glory - which describes *our prospect*.

1 THE CREATION GROANS: v.22

A. A Cursed Creation:

1. The curse was universal: the Fall cursed all!

ILLUS: The beauties of this terrestrial ball are not what they once were! I still revel in beauty of a rose (but I know about its thorns), I thrill at the beauty of the ocean (but I know that its beauty belies its dangers), I can enjoy the song of the bird (but I know he sings in the minor key), I am awed at the majesty of the snow capped mountains (but I know that they are only here because of the Flood), I am enthralled over the beauty of the sunset (but I know that tomorrow the hurricane, tornado, avalanche, cyclone, tidal wave, or earthquake can come).

Everywhere and in everything we see the results of sin and the Fall. We can only glimpse the greatness of the original creation in the fossil record, or in the vestiges of a once pristine planet. The great dinosaurs have been replaced by the lizards and alligators. The lions and tigers of today are mere pussy cats compared to the giant sabertoothed tigers. The huge pterodactyls have been replaced by bats. The sequoia and redwoods only hint at the forests of yesteryear. Dragonflies with 18 inch wingspans are gone along with the 8” beetles of the past. Everything was bigger, better and harmless to man - before the Fall!

2. The curse results in groaning.

- a. All of creation longs for and looks for a return to its former greatness. V.19
- b. There is a sighing among all the animals and within the planet to return to a condition of peace and harmony where eat or be eaten no longer is the rule.

B. A Crowned Creation:

1. The curse will be lifted.
2. Creation will be renewed.

- a We are told that in the Millennium animals will live again in harmony with man and with each other.

Is. 11:6-9

6 *The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.*

7 *And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

8 *And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.*

9 *They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.*

- b. We are told that men will again live 1000 years and a 100 year old will be considered a child.

Is. 65:17 and 20

17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

c. All of creation is in a state of subjection and “vanity” (i.e., doesn’t measure up to its original intended state).

111 THE SAINT GROANS: v.23

A. We Groan Inwardly:

1. Because we have the “firstfruits of the Spirit.”
 - a. The firstfruits are a pledge of the harvest to come!

ILLUS: Saints groan, but we do so because we only have now the “firstfruits.” We must look forward to the harvest. When the Israelite plucked the first ripe ears, he knew that something better and more abundant was just ahead!

- b. The firstfruits were holy to the Lord!
 - 1) Our new nature via the Holy Spirit is what guarantees we belong to Him.
 - 2) The Israelite offered the first fruits of the harvest to the Lord in thanksgiving and as a recognition that all belongs to Him.
- c. The firstfruits were not the harvest!
 - 1) No Jew went home with the firstfruits and said I have all I want...they just whet his appetite for the harvest to come.
 - 2) That’s why the believer groans! Having reaped handfuls, we long for sheaves!

ILLUS: When Joshua and Caleb brought back the gigantic grapes of Eschol and tasted of them, its no wonder they fought so hard to take the land of Caanan! All during the 40 yrs of wandering their mouths watered for those grapes, pomegranates, milk and honey!

No wonder they put up with the hardships of the wilderness: “THEIR HOPE HELPED THEM COME!”

B. We Wait Expectantly:

1. “Adoption” means we will receive our promised inheritance; no wonder we groan!

QUOTE: Spurgeon: *“You may judge a man by what he groans after. Some men groan after wealth...some groan continually under the troubles of life; they are merely impatient - there is no virtue in that. Some men groan because of their great losses or sufferings; well, this may be nothing but a rebellious smarting under the rod, and if so no blessing will come of it. But the man who yearns after more holiness, the man that sighs after God, the man that groans after perfection, the man that is*

discontented with his sinful self, the man that feels that he cannot be easy till he is made like Christ, that is the man who is blessed indeed.”

ILLUS: You pass by 2 homes and hear the groans within. In the first house someone dies and the hearse soon pulls up, and you see the tear stained cheeks of the family. In the other home a new baby is born and the groans are the travail of a new life. One is the groan of death and the other the groan of life. Note the word “travaileth” in v.22. The creation and the saints both groan with the groan of new life!

2. “Redemption” speaks of the completion of our salvation; no wonder we groan! “OUR HOPE HELPS US COPE!”

- a. Even heaven will not end our groaning!
- b. The saints in heaven have not yet received their new bodies; they must wait for us! (“they without us cannot be made perfect” Heb.11:40)
- c. The saints in heaven are free from sin, but are disembodied spirits who long for the “adoption, to wit, the redemption of (their bodies).”
- d. They don’t groan out of pain, but out of desire for completion.
- e. Every saint, below and above, looks for and longs for, his or her new glorified body; we long to be completely conformed to His image and “OUR HOPE HELPS US COPE!”
- f. No matter what suffering we go through down here we look forward to our future glory and “OUR HOPE HELPS US COPE!” cf. v.18

ILLUS: Hope is not only looking for something in the future, but something pleasant. Ex: A boy does something bad and his mother promises “When daddy gets home you are going to get it.” If you ask him “Do you think you will be punished when your dad gets home?” he might say “I believe I will” but he won’t say “I hope I will.” v.24-25

111 THE SPIRIT GROANS: v.26

A. Our Hope Helps Us Cope.

B. The Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray!

ILLUS: The Christian’s body is the connecting link between God and creation’s agony. **Creation** groans so we groan and when we go to the Holy Spirit He groans in our behalf and translates our groans into intelligible requests to God. Because we share the pain and groans of a fallen creation we can have great sympathy for others and because of the indwelling Holy Spirit we have a foretaste of glory which will come on the day of redemption.

CONCL: All creation will groan until it is redeemed and renewed. The saints above and below groan until they are fully redeemed and renewed. The Holy Spirit groans now in our behalf until our hope is replaced with the completion of our redemption and we inherit our possessions as “joint heirs with Christ.” V.17 “OUR HOPE HELPS US TO COPE!”

“MAKING SENSE OUT OF SUFFERING”

TEXT: Job 5:7

INTRO: A. Our text says it all: “*Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward!*” There is no escaping trouble, trial, sickness, disease or death in this world. Believers are not exempt (or getting saved would provide an unfair advantage). But suffering has a different meaning for the saved and may provide a ministry for them, whereas suffering is often totally valueless for the unsaved. And believers can make sense out of suffering while the unsaved have no explanation.

B. There are obvious differences as to how suffering may occur even though the results may be the same.

ILLUS: Someone is shot in their own home. Maybe it was suicide. Perhaps it was an accident while cleaning a gun. It might have been murder. It could have been stupidity (thinking the gun was not loaded and pointing it at someone). Maybe the firing mechanism was defective. Perhaps the safety didn't function. Many possible explanations, but the person is still dead! Suffering is like that, there maybe several different reasons people suffer, but the pain is just as real. Let's look at some possibilities in an attempt at “MAKING SENSE OUT OF SUFFERING...”

1 SUFFERING DUE TO THE CURSE: Gen. 3:16-17

A. This is the Ultimate Explanation For All Suffering:

ILLUS: If Adam hadn't sinned, we would never step on a thorn, we wouldn't have to worry about a snow storm, we wouldn't need clothing, we would never sneeze, sniffle or get sick, we would never lose a loved one, we wouldn't have to swat mosquitoes, avoid snakes or stub our toes. We would never sit in a Dr's office, attend a funeral or mourn the loss of a loved one. We would never get a wart, have a worry or be exposed to wickedness!

The devil may not be directly responsible for all our trials and troubles, but we can blame him for being the ultimate source of all our suffering. But though that is a truth we cannot avoid, there are other more specific causes for suffering...

11 SUFFERING DUE TO PERSONAL SIN: 1 Pet. 3:18

A. All Sin Involves Suffering: (But all suffering is not the result of sin...)

1. Sin always breeds death: death of character, reputation, spirituality, testimony, health or life!

Jas. 1:15

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

2. Sin also breed corruption: corruption of morals, values, judgment, discernment, personality,

Gal. 6:8

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption...

ILLUS: Sin always corrupts us and it kills us! We cannot escape the inexorable law that we reap what we sow, reap more than we sow and reap later than we sow. *“Be sure your sin will find you out.”* On way to avoid suffering is to avoid sin!

111 SUFFERING DUE TO NEGLECT: Jas. 4:17

James 4:17

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

A. We Pay The Price When We Fail To Do Right:

1. Doing wrong (sin) results in suffering.
2. Not doing right (sin) also results in suffering.

ILLUS: Drinking can lead to cirrhosis of the liver. But failing to keep clean can lead to all kinds of health problems. The principle is that we pay a price for not doing what we know we should do. Since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, neglecting its proper maintenance may lead to serious suffering.

We can also suffer spiritually when we neglect spiritual maintenance. Daily prayer and Bible reading can help us prevent spiritual failure.

1V SUFFERING DUE TO DISEASE: Jn. 11:3

Jn. 11:3

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

A. The Lord’s Beloved Are Not Exempt From Sickness:

1. Bodies break down, germs invade us, we get weak, sick and die!
2. The Law of Entropy is active for the saint and the sinner.
3. It rains on the just and the unjust.

ILLUS: More time than not believers get sick simply because they are human and not because they are believers or because they are sinners.

Lk. 13:1-5

1 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

V SUFFERING DUE TO ACCIDENTS: Lk. 13:1-5 (above)

A. Natural Disasters Happen To God’s People Too:

1. When the tower of Siloam fell and killed or injured 18 people it was not a judgment of God upon men, saints or sinners, it was merely an accident.
2. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time may injure you or kill you; believers are not exempt - unless God specifically exempts them!

ILLUS: One thing is certain, i.e., if you are in the center of God's will you are safe until He is finished using you! You may suffer, but you cannot die until He permits it. If you DO suffer, it can then be used to His glory.

VI SUFFERING DUE TO CHASTENING: Heb. 12:6

A. God's Love Demands Chastening:

1. God doesn't want to raise brats! V.9
2. God must chasten us to enable us to grow and to be disciplined and mature.
3. God's love is revealed in His chastening.
 - a. He doesn't chasten the devil's children.
 - b. This explains why the ungodly often get away with their sin down here.

ILLUS: Hopefully you don't hate your parents because they chastened you when you did wrong. You might have resented it at the time, but as you matured, you realized that they loved you and were only trying to mold your character and help you grow up right. V.11-13

VII SUFFERING DUE TO GOD'S WILL:

1 Pet. 3:17

For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

A. Suffering For Doing Right!

1. This may include physical punishment for standing up for the Lord.
2. It may mean ridicule by co-workers, harassment by a boss, ostracism by friends and rejection by loved ones.
3. It may even include martyrdom.

Rev. 20:4

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

4. It may include suffering so God may be glorified.

Jn. 11:4

When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Jn. 11:40 (After Lazarus' resurrection...)

Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

Jn. 9:1-3

1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

CONCL: I hope that these reasons for suffering will help you to “MAKE SENSE OUT OF YOUR SUFFERING! We need to realize that unless it is *personal sin* or *neglect*, we have absolutely no control over our suffering. Thus we must learn to trust God’s judgment and His dealings with us as His children.

“YOU HAVE TO BEAT THE BATTER IN ORDER TO BAKE A CAKE”

TEXT: Romans 8:28

THESIS: To dissect the promise of Rom. 8:28 as an encouragement to those going thru a time of trial.

INTRO: A. Some wit noted that “you have to break some eggs to make an omelette.” You also have “to beat the batter in order to bake a cake.” The point is that you may be going thru some rough times so God can bless your life. That thing in your life you find so distasteful right now, may be a part of the “all things” in this “VERY SPECIAL PROMISE” of Romans 8:28.

ILLUS: Not many people like the taste of flour, or raw eggs, or bakers chocolate, or shortening, or vanilla extract. But nearly everyone likes chocolate cake! We often have “dry periods” like the flour, “raw” deals like the eggs, “bitter” experiences like the bakers chocolate and distasteful times like the shortening and vanilla extract. None are very tasty or palatable till they are beaten up TOGETHER and thrust into the oven and become chocolate cake! If you are “taking a beating” - cheer up! God is making some chocolate cake in your life. After the mix up of life and the heat of oven of adversity, you will have the desert of heaven.

B. The Bible speaks of the “ALL THINGS” of creation (“all things were made by Him”), the “ALL THINGS” of regeneration (all things are become new to the believer), the “ALL THINGS” of Christ’s preeminence (all things should take 2nd place to Him). But the “ALL THINGS” of Romans 8:28 is one of the most precious promises in the Bible and must be claimed and personalized by the believer: “...for ME!” (There is a conditional promise in 2 Cor.9:8 that promises the bel. “all grace” so he will have “all sufficiency” in “ALL THINGS” but the condition is liberality in giving. (v.6,7).) But Rom.8:28 is an unconditional promise to the believer who loves the Lord and is “called according to His purpose.”

TRANS: Let’s examine the promise; dissect it, put in under careful scrutiny and see what it really yields and promises to the believer...

1 DEFINITION BY NEGATION: (WHAT THE PROMISE DOESN’T SAY!)

A. NOT “All Things Work For Good”:

1. The word “together” is the key.

ILLUS: If we were to take just the brass, strings or percussion instruments in the orchestra, the music would not be as sweet as when they are all blended TOGETHER. The verse says “all things work TOGETHER for good” - not separately.

2. Individual trials or experiences are often hurtful and negative, but “TOGETHER” God is orchestrating them for our good.

B. NOT “So You See Them As Good”:

1. Your disease or disability may not look good to you now, but it may be working something in your life of benefit later.

ILLUS: Perhaps you needed to learn humility and lose your pride. Like the man who asked if his friend’s dog was a thoroughbred. He replied, “He’s so thoroughbred, that if he could talk, he wouldn’t speak to either of us!”

2. Your divorce was a bad thing, but perhaps you needed to learn not to be so overbearing, domineering, or argumentative and it changed you.

ILLUS: Today 1 out of every 2 marriages end in divorce. That is a tragedy, but for believer, if divorce is a part of his or her past, hopefully there were some lessons learned. (Like the southern boy before the Judge for leaving his wife: “Your honor, if y’all knew that woman like I does, you wouldn’t call me no deserter - “I’s a refugee!”)

We don’t always see things as good and that is not the promise. We don’t omniscience nor prescience and cannot see what good will come *later*.

C. NOT “Might Work For Good”:

1. There is no “might” or “maybe” in the text.
2. There is the positive statement that “all things work together for good...”

ILLUS: Take desertion: All Paul’s friends deserted him when he was imprisoned, but it was there he penned this text, and most of his epistles. John was completely deserted on Patmos and it was there he received the Revelation of future events. Joseph’s brothers deserted him, but he said “God meant it for GOOD!”

Maybe your mom or dad deserted you as a child, but maybe that’s why you got saved! Maybe that’s why you are the giving, kind, loving person you are. Maybe that’s why you are so loyal to your friends!

3. The text doesn’t leave any room for doubt about the outcome of the events in the life of the believer; there is no “might” there!

D. NOT “SHALL Work Together...”:

1. This isn't a promise of what will happen sometime in the distant future, it is what is taking place right now; every event is NOW working together for good!
2. Both verbs: "work" and "love" are in the present tense.
3. We love now and God is working now.
4. Our ultimate sanctification is the result of the events in our lives; we are NOW being conformed to Christ's image. (look at the next verse: 29!)

E. NOT "All Things EXCEPT..."

1. It doesn't say "all things, EXCEPT..." your present problem!
2. It doesn't exclude *your* disappointment, disaster, discouragement, deprivation, disability, danger, distress, detour, disease...

ILLUS: The "all things" in the "original Greek" says "all things"! (Except in the new versions: "God works all things for good..." or "in everything God works for good..." or in the NIV "in all things God works for the good of those..." That's no promise!) It says "all things" i.e., dark things, bright things, happy things, sad things, sweet things, bitter things, prosperity, adversity...ALL THINGS!

F. NOT "All Things, But NOT...":

1. Not "all things, but not MY THINGS..." i.e., the things you are going thru right now.
2. Is doesn't say "all things but not MY cancer, MY hardship, MY circumstances, MY loss..."

ILLUS: Right after Paul got saved the Lord told Ananias:

Acts 9:16

For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Paul in turn told believers:

Phil. 1:29 (in Philippi)

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

1 Thes. 3:4 (In Thessalonica)

For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

2 Tim. 2:12 (Timothy)

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

Heb. 11:25 (about our fellowship with other believers)

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

2 Thes. 1:5-9 (placing our suffering into perspective)

5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

II. DEFINITION BY AFFIRMATION: (WHAT THE PROMISE DOES SAY!)

A “We Know...”:

1. There is no such thing as fate, luck or chance in the promise.
2. There is no such thing as an “accident” in the believers life.

ILLUS: A cowboy was applying for insurance. “Have you ever had an accident?” “Nope! But a bronc kicked me broke 2 ribs and a rattlesnake bit me once on the leg. “Wouldn’t you call those accidents?” “Nope!” They did it on purpose.” It depends on how you look at it. From God’s viewpoint there are no accidents in the believers life.

3. God works even that which He doesn’t promote or condone to our good and His glory.
4. We cannot change our past - we must love God and trust Him to work out the tangled details of our lives.

ILLUS: When Jesus met the woman at the well with 5 husbands he didn’t tell her to go back and divorce #5, 4, 3 and 2 and live with #1, he just saved her and told her to begin her new life. When the woman was caught in the act of adultery, he didn’t condemn her, he said: “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.”

B. “Work Together for Good...”

1. Even the death of a loved one in Christ is “precious” in His sight.
2. The death of a believer is often the source of blessing for a family or even a church.

ILLUS: Without the death of Clarence Hawk the bus mechanics would still be working on buses laying on the cold ground. Many ministries have been blessed because some believer died and left large sums to missions or churches.

3. The death of a saint is definitely “good” because it is gain, not loss and promotes us to heaven.
4. The death of a loved one may cause us to long to go to heaven.

C. “That Love God...the Called...”:

1. The prerequisite to this promise is that you are saved.
2. The blessings go to those who “love God” and are “the called...”

CONCL: What a promise! What a blessing! What a Savior! Do you qualify for this promise?

“THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON”

TEXT: 2 Cor. 11:23-30

THESIS: To show that God allows “bumps” in life to enable the believer to climb higher.

INTRO: A. What made Paul a great Christian? He had received nearly 200 lashes on his frail body (v.24, 25). On 3 occasions he was bruised with a bundle of sticks (rods) lashed together. He was stoned by an angry mob, survived 3 shipwrecks, spent 24 hrs. overboard in bone-chilling waters, spent weary days and nights in brutal travel. He had been robbed, attacked, lost, faced death several times, experienced fatigue, starvation, thirst, cold and nakedness and yet concluded “*If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine INFIRMITIES. (11:30)*”

B. Paul had learned the secret to enduring pain - praise! On top of the lengthy list of Sufferings in ch.11, in ch. 12 he speaks of a “thorn in the flesh” - Satanic torment which God permitted to keep him humble in the light of the special revelations about heaven he had been privileged to preview. Some simply complain about their pain or problems - others learn the language of praise.

ILLUS: A little boy was leading his sister up a mountain path and the way was very rocky. “This isn’t a path at all,” she complained, “it’s all rocky and bumpy.” He replied: “Sure, THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON!” That’s the secret to life’s painful experiences...

1 MAKING STEPPINGSTONES OUT OF OUR STUMBLINGBLOCKS:

A. The Path Is Not Easy - BUT THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON!

1. Most of us are used to paved roads and level sidewalks.
2. But God places bumps and barriers in our way (discouragement, defeat, distress, depression, doubt, death) *to help us climb higher.*

NOTE: If God removed the bumps you could never climb to the top!

- a. If we kick against the bumps we only hurt ourselves. 12:9b
- b. If we try to go around them we miss God’s will and grace. 12:9a
- c. If we try to remove them we find they are too heavy for us alone.
- d. If we stop and quit we miss the short-range blessings and the long-range benefits.

B. The Way Is Not Smooth - BUT THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON!

1. Joseph was pampered by his father, hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, spent years in prison, forgotten and apparently forsaken - but HE CLIMBED ON THE BUMPS and rose to the top.
2. Jesus was born into poverty, a member of a minority race, under foreign domination, grew up in an obscure and scorned village, fellowshiped with the cast offs, ridiculed as a glutton, drunkard and a Satanic accomplice, sold by a friend, abandoned and crucified at Calvary - BUT HE CLIMBED ON THE BUMPS of rejection and ascended to glory!

11 MAKING MOLEHILLS OUT OF OUR MOUNTAINS: 2 Cor. 12:10

A. The Route Seems Impassable - BUT THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON!

1. There are rocks and bumps on God's path, but detours are always rougher than the main road (but detours are temporary and the scenery may be better!)
2. Trust God and the rocks that seem like mountains will become molehills when seen thru eyes of faith. (Caleb)

B. The Course Seems Tortuous - BUT THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON!

1. His Word will impart stamina for the climb.
2. Prayer will provide strength for the struggle.
3. Fellowship with God's people will give encouragement for the battle.
4. Ministering to others will lighten your burden.

ILLUS: When knocked out of the ring you can either quit or use the chairs to climb back into the ring!

5. Remembering your priorities will help you climb higher:
 - a. Glorify the Lord. 12:7-9 "therefore...! (v.10)
 - b. Keep your balance. "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord and not evil?" Job asked. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

QUOTE: "Where God does not rule, He overrules." He is all powerful.

1 MAKING BLESSINGS OUT OF OUR BARRIERS: 2 Cor. 1:8-10

A. The Passage Seems Impenetrable - BUT THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON!

1. Don't be a victim - become a victor! Like Paul!
2. Don't become a casualty - become courageous! Like Paul!

NOTE: Paul came to the end of his life or service and though *a prisoner about to be executed*, he saw himself rather as *a sacrifice about to be offered*.

Jesus came to the end of His life of service - Peter pulls his sword...Jesus says "STOP!" "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father and He shall presently give me more than 12 legions of angels?" He is saying there are 2 ways to face life's crises: ESCAPE OR FULFILLMENT. Which will you follow?

B. The Journey Seems Beyond Your Endurance - BUT THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON!

1. We cannot change the world AROUND us (bring back a dead loved one return to happier days past, etc.) but we can change the world WITHIN us!
2. Daydreams cushion us from being hurt by reality but they are also substitutes that keep us from growing up to maturity!

CONCL: Instead of GIVING UP - LOOK UP! And climb on the bumps of the pain in your life! When the problems become bumps, remember "THE BUMPS ARE WHAT YOU CLIMB ON!"

If you are unsaved, you don't have the resources of the Christian and the bumps hurt and will lead you to despair, defeat and possibly even death! (suicide) Why not trust the One Who wants to turn your "bumps" into smooth paths? And to get you to climb on your bumps to heaven?

ILLUS: It was a major "bump" that made me seek the Lord and led to my salvation. It can for you as well.

"DARK IN THE ARK"

TEXT: Genesis 6:14-16

THESIS: To show why darkness is often the lot of the believer.

INTRO: A. We know the story of Noah and the Ark. We are fascinated with Noah's obedience. We marvel at how Noah and his 3 sons cared for all the animals for a year. We ask how did Mrs. Noah and her 3 daughters-in-law fed everyone without a local supermarket or MacDonalds, and kept their home-on-the-water clean. What had begun as an adventure of faith surely lost its luster after a few weeks or months.

B. But have you ever thought about how dark it must have been inside the Ark? Here was a boat longer than a football field, three stories high, with only one 18" window! And most of the time the weather outside was dark and stormy. Surely it was "DARK IN THE ARK!"

TRANS: Over the years in the ministry after visiting countless hospital patients, ministering to the hurting, afflicted, sick and dying, I find myself searching the Scriptures and preaching messages about suffering a lot. For those who are well and walking in the light, they may wonder why. But one day you too will find it to be "DARK IN THE ARK"...

I. ONLY ONE WINDOW:

A. Dark In The Ark Because No One Joined Them:

1. Before dealing with the reason there was only one window, I want to speak about other reasons for darkness inside the Ark.
2. And ones, friends, neighbors had rejected Noah and his message of "gloom and doom."
 - a. They no doubt chided him because he was too negative.
 - b. They ridiculed him because they didn't believe a flood was possible.

ILLUS: From the human standpoint and from logic and their knowledge of the laws operating in the universe, they were convinced that Noah was a religious fanatic. After all they had not only never witnessed or heard of a flood, but they had never even seen rain!

Many today scoff at our belief in Christ and our trust in the Word of God. They say "Those wierdos have been talking about Jesus coming back for centuries. They are wackos!" But He has come and He will come! And the reason for his delay is that they might get saved!

2 Pet. 3:3-9

3 *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,*

4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

- a. The pain of their rejection must have added to the darkness of the ark.

ILLUS: The thought that outside the ark everything was chaos, death and destruction, must have grieved Noah, knowing that all they had to do was believe the message that God had given him and they would have been spared. He knew instead that God had finally shut them in and outside their bloated bodies were floating and rotting and their never-dying souls would be eternally lost! No wonder it was “DARK IN THE ARK!”

B. Dark In The Ark Because Of The Length Of The Flood:

1. While it is true that Noah and his family were safe inside, they nonetheless had to suffer in darkness and loneliness.
2. For over a year they had to sit in the darkness and gloom and contemplate a world which had been devastated and would be nearly devoid of life.
3. Day after endless day, the Ark bounced around on a boundless ocean and they had no idea how long this would continue.

ILLUS: Are you going thru a dark time in your ark? Do you feel like it will never end? Do you despair at the outcome? Does it seem like there is very little light in your pain or suffering, your temptation or trial? Hang on wait it out, the darkness will not last forever, because you are a child of light and Jesus is the Light of the world. Also you need to remember that it is...

C. Dark In The Ark Because Of God’s Design!

1. Noah’s situation was by God’s design and the fact that there was only one window was also by God’s design.

ILLUS: You need to remember that your pain or problem may also be by God’s design. (If you are suffering for “evil doing” then you are just getting what you deserve, but if for “well doing” – then rejoice – it may be “God’s will”) 1 Peter 4:12-19

2. An infinite, omniscient God could surely have designed an ark with windows everywhere, a giant skylight or whatever, but in His sovereignty He chose not to.

ILLUS: As the waters began to quiet and Noah and his family were able to go “topside” to the one window, think of how much they would have appreciated the light and the fresh air! If your pain or problem is by God’s design, think of the blessings of the sunshine and refreshing new life you will have when the storm subsides and you are sailing along peacefully on calmer seas! Perspective is everything.

QUOTE: George H. Morrison, in his message: “The Problem of Pain” under the heading: “Why Do The Innocent Suffer” wrote: “If pain were a curse, and nothing but a curse, well might we doubt the justice on the throne; but, if pain be a ladder to a better life, then *light* falls on the sufferings of the innocent. It is not the anger of heaven that is smiting them. It may be the love of heaven that is blessing them. There are always tears and blood upon the steps that lead men heavenward to where the angels are.”

POEM: “I walked a mile with Pleasure, She chattered all the way, But left me none the wiser, for all she had to say. I walked a mile with Sorrow, And ne’er a word said she; But, oh, the things I learned from her, When Sorrow walked with me!”

II. AT LEAST ONE WINDOW:

A. In Temptation – An Escape Window:

1 Cor. 10:13

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

1. There may have been only one window in the Ark, but thank God there was at least one! Imagine the complete absence of light and ventilation without it.
2. There is “light” in God’s Word to help you with temptation and the “fresh air” of God’s Spirit to help you when you are tempted.

B. In Trials – A Prayer Window:

1. I can visualize Noah often going to that one window and asking God when his trial would end.
2. Perhaps many long hours were spent there looking out over the vast expanse of water with bloated carcasses and debris floating around and no signs of life, and Noah pleading with God for relief.

ILLUS: Noah had lived 650 years before the flood, but the one year on the Ark, during the flood, was no doubt the longest year in his very long life! There were the same amount of days, hours and minutes in that year as in all the others, but it surely seemed longer. Except for that one window, where he could breathe fresh air and look for relief, it would indeed have seem hopeless. But Noah lived another 350 years after the flood, that worst year of his life. So too, your trial will end and things will be better. Why not use your prayer window while you are in the trial?

C. In Tribulation – A Grace Window: 2 Cor. 12:7-10

1. Paul never quit serving God because of his “thorn” of pain; God reminded him of His never failing grace.

QUOTE: Samuel Gipp, who broke his neck and lives daily with suffering, in his book “Living With Pain” states: “Whatever your duties are, you will never find satisfaction by successfully shirking them. The less that you do, the worse you will feel. The worse that you feel, the less you will do. Now all you need to do is to pick up some “shrink book” on how to “cope” with your problem and you are doomed! You don’t need to sit around and wallow in your pain...today’s psychologists offer no more help for

hurting people than to give them an excuse for doing nothing. Today there are millions of people who have been made “mental cripples” by “discovering” that they were sick because of something that they read among the ramblings of a fantasizing “expert.” They use what they have read as a license to do nothing and as a proof of the need for sympathy and preferential treatment. Burn the “shrink” books, Read your Bible and get to work!”

2. God’s grace is sufficient *in* your pain as well as *before* or *after* your pain.
3. If you are unsaved, there is no “grace window” for your pain and if you believe that your plight couldn’t be worse, you are wrong! and if you don’t like your present discomfort, you’re going to hate Hell!

CONCL: It may be “DARK IN YOUR ARK” now, but remember God may have designed your ark! But He has also designed *an escape window for your temptation, a prayer window for your trials and a grace window for your tribulations.* There maybe only one window to lighten your darkness, but thank God there is at least one window!

“FROM A DULL STONE TO A SPARKLING DIAMOND”

TEXT: Psalm 119:67,71,75

THESIS: To show that things of value often must go thru a purging process.

INTRO: A. Most of us are aware that things of value must often go thru a purging or refining process to increase their value. Special sand must go thru intense heat before it becomes glittering glass. Unsightly trees become beautiful cabinetry after being chopped down, making a trip to the sawmill and being diligently worked on by the carpenter. But before that most pampered and admired rock on the block ends up on the bride-to-be’s finger, it must be transformed “FROM A DULL STONE TO A SPARKLING DIAMOND.” Behind the brilliance of that beautiful ring is a long history of obscure and difficult development. After ages of formation in the earth, it is uncovered in a South African mine an unimpressive, dull, roughly shaped stone. It comes into the hands of someone who recognizes its potential beauty and with the wisdom to bring out its splendor. The crude stone is studied, measured, and split. Then it is cut and polished to eliminate the flaws and discolorations and given facets to reflect the light.

B. This is very much like the “dull stone” of the new Christian. He too has been hidden away and when finally brought to light by the Gospel is presented to the Master Diamond Cutter who sees his potential and begins the process of cutting away the imperfections and chipping away the flaws, creating facets which will reflect His glory. It is often a lengthy and painful process and most of the original stone is gone and only that which can reflect the Light of the Savior remains.

I. CUTTING AWAY THE SIN: v.67 (THE FACET OF HEALTH)

A. Hurts That Heal:

ILLUS: Just as the diamond cutter only cuts away that which will enhance the stones brilliance and beauty, our Lord only cuts away that which will bring healing in the believer. Our afflictions are to help and heal us, not to hurt us.

1. First comes confession: “...I went astray”

- a. The Psalmist knew that his affliction was, in this case, a result of his sin.
 - b. These afflictions are painful, never joyful; they are not things bestowed, but things taken away.
 - c. The healing that accompanies these afflictions cannot begin until confession begins.
2. Next comes conversion: “Before I was afflicted I went astray.”
- a. The Psalmist knew that it was his affliction which brought him to God.
 - b. This “conversion” is not salvation, but repentance and “coming home.”
3. Then comes consecration: “but NOW I have kept thy Word...”
- a. Affliction which brings confession, conversion and consecration has completed its work.
 - b. If our affliction brings us to the place where we consciously keep God’s Word, we are back where we belong as His children.

ILLUS: Instead of the Psalmist getting bitter over his affliction and correction, he recognizes the goodness of God in it all. He doesn’t blame God, he praises Him. He exclaims: “*Thou art good, and doest good...!*” The child of God finds goodness in affliction if he doesn’t rebel against it.

Are you in the vise of God and is He chipping away at your sin? It is painful but it is praiseworthy! It may hurt, but it will help. It may wound, but it will bring health. It may seem bad, but God is good! We may have done bad, but He “*doest good!*” The wicked may have robbed the Psalmist of a great deal (v.61), but they couldn’t steal his Bible: he had it in his heart. v.69 In time of affliction he was able to recall God’s words. He suits the correction to the occasion; He matches the discipline to the deed.

II. CUTTING AWAY THE PRIDE: v.71 (cf. v.69-70) (THE FACET OF HUMILITY)

A. Hurts That Help:

ILLUS: In the royal ceremony of bestowing knighthood, the man kneels before his sovereign and gladly endures the humility of being struck with a stinging blow from the flat side of the King’s sword, for he knows that when he rises he will stand to his feet a nobleman. So it is when we kneel in God’s presence and He smites us with affliction to cut away our pride. When we rise from the affliction our pride will have been dealt a deathblow.

1. In our flesh we may feel we know what is best for us.
2. When the afflictions come, we humbly confess that God’s Word is best.
3. The Psalmist declares that his afflictions were good and taught Him God’s statutes.

ILLUS: The Prodigal Son had no thought of returning to his father’s house until he had been humbled by adversity. Hagar was haughty under Abraham’s roof and despised by Sarah, but in the wilderness she was meek and lowly. Manasseh lived fast and loose in Jerusalem, but when he was bound in chains in a Babylonian prison, his heart turned to seek the Lord.

QUOTE: C. H. Spurgeon: “Stars may be seen from the bottom of a deep well that cannot be seen from the top of a mountain; so many things learned in adversity which the prosperous man dreams not of. We need affliction as the trees need winter, that we may collect sap and nourishment for future blossoms and

fruit. Sorrow is as necessary for the soul as medicine is to the body. “The path of sorrow, and that path alone, leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.”

4. Adversity and affliction will help us toward reaching our goal of Christlikeness.

ILLUS: In a Florida boot camp soldiers received some “gator aid” to help them reach their goals. In the obstacle course was a pond they were to swing across. Under the blazing sun the pool looked so inviting that few of them made it completely across. But one young lieutenant placed a 15 ft. long alligator in the pond. They suddenly received new stamina to swing the complete distance...and then some. We often need an incentive to reach our goal of Christlikeness and it often includes the “alligator” of affliction!

POEM: “Though I am His sheep, I am still prone to stray; So Jesus in love sends afflictions my way. The lessons which come in that school of deep pain, Will teach me to follow my Lord once again.”

ILLUS: It is in the Diamond Cutter’s hands that we have our pride chiseled away and we can state with the Psalmist: “*The Law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of silver and gold.*” v.72

III. CUTTING AWAY THE DOUBT: (THE FACET OF HOPEFULNESS)

A. Hurts That Bring Hope: v.75

1. There are two kinds of “judgments:” the judgments of God’s mouth and the judgments of God’s hand; one is for instruction, the other for correction.
2. The Psalmist has learned that God’s judgments for correction are designed to turn “A DULL STONE INTO A SPARKLING DIAMOND.”
3. He had learned “thru it all” to “trust in Jesus” and to “trust in God.”
4. He knew now that God’s afflictions come from a loving Father, not a self-serving Judge.
5. His afflictions gave him faith that God is always right.

QUOTE: Ruckman: “We know that God is right, even when we don’t agree with Him.”

ILLUS: Scientists know that hurricanes are more helpful than harmful. They maintain a balance in nature. With winds up to 150 mph, torrential rains, glaring lightning, and rumbling thunder, they are awesome, but they dissipate the oppressive heat which builds up at the equator. They also provide much needed rain for N. and S. America.

The afflictions of God’s people also produce temporary pain, but permanent benefit. When properly seen, they build character and trust in the loving God who sends them.

POEM: “If God had kept me from all pain, I might have lived my life in vain;
But through my trials I’ve come to see The greatness of His love for me.”

6. By their very nature afflictions are not designed for our pleasure, but they are designed for our profit.

ILLUS: The concluding thoughts of the Psalmist in the light of all God’s cutting to turn “DULL STONES INTO SPARKLING DIAMONDS” is that all his former doubts are dissipated and he says that his afflictions are a part of God’s “*merciful kindness*” and for his “*comfort.*” v.76

CONCL: In the diamond cutting process for the believer the Lord is cutting away which is the sin, the pride and the doubt which plagues us and is turning "DULL STONES INTO SPARKLING DIAMONDS." He wants to place us on display one day when He makes up His jewels. In this chipping process we are becoming more and more like His Son. As the *dull stone* should not rebel against the diamond cutter for the sharp blows which are designed to turn it into a *sparkling diamond*, neither should the saint rebel against the Lord Who is chipping away at anything in us not Christlike.

"WEARING THORNS AS A CROWN"

TEXT: Heb. 5:8

Mk. 15:16-20

16 And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band.

17 And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head,

18 And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews!

19 And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him.

20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

THESIS: To show that as Jesus was crowned with thorns and wore it victoriously in His hour of suffering, so too we may be called to suffer to be a victor.

INTRO: A. Jesus had a thorn crown to wear when He was crucified for us. That crown has come to be identified with suffering in general. It was one more indignity heaped upon our Savior which He turned into victory. We too may be called upon to "WEAR THORNS AS A CROWN"...to turn sorrow, suffering, pain into victory. Can you? Will you? Look at our text:

Heb. 5:8

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

B. Often a believer must stand helplessly by and see a loved one NOT healed in spite of surgery, treatment, medicine, physicians, science, technology, therapy AND prayer! Pain is a present and harsh reality!

QUOTE: "A man undisturbed by pain suffers from one of 2 things: a hardening of the heart or a softening of the brain."

I. WHAT IS A THORN CROWN?

A. **Why Pain? (Paul wore the thorn crown. II Cor. 11)**

B. **Why Suffering? (Job wore the thorn crown. Book of Job)**

ILLUS: The book of Job asks the ques: "Why do the righteous suffer?" Job never learned why HE suffered, till he got to heaven. But we know the answer...even though it may not satisfy us. It was a lesson God was teaching Satan about His children.

We DO have SOME answers. One answer is that God cannot exempt His children from suffering or salvation would become an insurance policy against pain and provide man with an improper motive for salvation.

II. WHY A THORN CROWN?

A. The Need To Trust God:

ILLUS: As a child trusts his parents so must the bel. learn to trust His heavenly Father. A 6 yr. old child goes into the hosp. as an out patient The Prep. Room is also the Recovery Room so while he is waiting his turn to have his tonsils removed he sees the other children coming out bleeding and crying, etc. The child asks why he just can't go home...The parent knows it is best for the child. The child can't understand...must just trust his parents!

We too can ask the questions, but we can't always comprehend the answers. We have to trust Him!

B. The Need for the Upward Look:

1. Thorn crown time is not a time for speeches about the grand scheme of the universe, but for the upward look and trustful silence.
2. It is a time for mute obedience.

Heb. 5:8

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

Is. 53:7

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

ILLUS: The Charasmatic says that if a Christian is sick it is because of sin in his life and if he is not healed it is because of a lack of faith. Tell that to Job and Paul! Some unthinking person tells a parent that she lost her daughter so that God could teach you patience! Better to shut up than press a motive on God we would condemn in a man.

III. WEARING A THORN CROWN:

A. Pain and Joy Are Interrelated:

Ps. 30:5

"...weeping may endure for the night but joy cometh in the morning."

ILLUS: We are conceived in joy but in pain and labor we are born. Mother love is woven in woe.

1. Some of the sweetest and happiest times we can know as humans follow great pain, sorrow or suffering.

ILLUS: The cancer patient is cured! The soldier returns home from battle. The pain is gone! The wayward child returns! The backslider comes back to the Lord!

B. Pain Often Results In Joy:

1. Ask the mother with the handicapped child.
2. Ask Fanny Crosby, Lee Roberson, Jack Hyles, Oliver Greene, Chas. Spurgeon, etc.

NOTE: The power of pain to curse or bless depends on the response of the sufferer.

3. So too in God's Kingdom...pain now, joy later; suffering now, rewards later.

POEM: I walked a mile with pleasure. She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with sorrow, And n'er a word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned from her, When sorrow walked with me!

C. Pain Teaches Obedience: Text

ILLUS: Whose names are inscribed in Hebrews Hall of Fame? Men and women of serenity? No! Men and women of adversity!

Heb. 11:37-38

37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

1. Those who question God's wisdom in thorn crowns are the spectators not the sufferers!

ILLUS: The word "strain" means stress, suffering, trouble; but it also refers to music. A Vienna prof. of music coached a girl with a beautiful voice. He told a friend something was missing, life was too kind to her. She needs pain or heartbreak, he said, to make her the finest singer in Europe.

CONCL: Now look at v.9 of our text. Only through suffering was Jesus made "perfect"! It may be true of us as well! Whatever your suffering or pain "WEAR YOUR THORNS AS A CROWN"!

"THE GIFT NOBODY WANTS"

TEXT: Rev. 21:4

THESIS: To attempt a biblical explanation for pain with a view to helping those especially who must live with it.

INTRO: A. C.S. Lewis calls pain - "THE GIFT NOBODY WANTS". Is it in fact a "gift"? If it is, shouldn't we all want it? Why doesn't God who is all powerful abolish pain...at least for Christians?

ILLUS: Brakes squeal, metal clashes, children scream, a church bus loaded with teens bursts into flames. Several are killed, others maimed for life. The driver of the car was a drunken young man. WHY?

B. Couldn't an all-powerful, all-wise God have designed a world without tragedy or pain? He did! As a result of the fall man introduced into God's perfect creation a discordant note - that of rebellion. Pain and suffering multiplied on earth as a consequence of the abuse of human freedom. Any discussion of the unfairness of suffering must begin with the fact that God is not any more pleased with the condition of the planet than we are. To judge God solely by the present state of His creation would be a tragic error.

ILLUS: Example: wood. A tree may bear fruit, provides leaves for shade puts oxygen into the air, shelters birds and animals. Even after cut down it provides fuel to warm us or material for our homes. The essential qualities of wood, hardness, unpliability, flammability make possible many useful things.

But as soon as you plant that tree with those properties in a world peopled by free, rebellious humans, you introduce the possibility of abuse. A free man may pick up a chunk of wood and take advantage of its hardness and bash someone head in. Perhaps God could transform its properties into those of a sponge each time He observes its misuse so that the club would bounce off the man's head. But He has set into motion fixed laws that generally benefit us, but when misused or abused, may harm us.

TRANS: How then can pain or affliction possibly be considered a gift or benefit us in any way?

I. PAIN THE GIFT:

A. Deadly Indifference:

1. Without the "gift of pain" we would be in constant mortal danger.
2. Pain is God's "early warning system" of threats to our well being.

ILLUS: Our body has an extensive network of pain receptors. Consider the skin, a flexible-yet-tough organ that stretches over the body's frame as an advance guard against the dangers of the outside world. The pain sensors are strate gically scattered, not randomly, but in precise accord with the body's specific needs. Blindfolded patients have been tested by how much pressure needs to be applied before they become aware of an object. The scale called the ABSOLUTE THRESHOLD OF TOUCH, is measured in grams...

Tip of tongue...sensitive to 2 grams of pressure.

Fingers.....sensitive to 3 grams of pressure.

Back of hand....sensitive to 12 grams of pressure.

Back of forarm..sensitive to 33 grams of pressure.

Sole of foot....sensitive to 250 grams of pressure.

The tongue must be sensitive enough to pick food particles from between our teeth.

Our fingers must manipulate a felt-tip pen, play a guitar or give a gentle love-caress, so these areas are fine-tuned. Our brain would grow weary listening to every dainty pressure report from our feet, which must stand daily stomping, support heavy weight, etc. (Let's see the evolutionist explain this!)

3. This system, sometimes called "God's great mistake" saves us from self-destruction.

B. Painless Hell:

1. Without pain we would live in a "painless hell"!
2. A painless disease is a curse not a blessing.

ILLUS: Leprosy is such a disease. It works like an anesthetic numbing the extremities. A leper can drive a nail thru his finger without knowing it! A person who is paralyzed can severely burn himself and not be aware of it. Ex. Ozzie Perez at Bus Barn, laid a hot welding rod on his leg with serious consequences.

In one leper colony patients were losing fingers overnite. Rats in the dormitories were chewing them off while they slept! Every patient was given a cat to protect them.

How would you explain the danger of matches, razor blades, etc. to children who could not feel pain? How would you punish them?

II. PAIN THE MEGAPHONE:

QUOTE: C.S. Lewis: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains, it is the megaphone to rouse a deaf world." By its nature pain shouts!

A. What is the Message?

1. The OLD TESTAMENT teaches: "wrong choices lead to painful consequences".

Proverbs 19:15

Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.

2. Some OLD TESTAMENT passages show God causing human suffering as punishment for wrong behavior, e.g. idolatry brot captivity.
 - a. This type of suffering-as-punishment pain came after specific warning.
 - b. No one sat around afterward asking "Why?" - they knew why.

ILLUS: The notable exception was Job. If anyone didn't deserve his pain and suffering it was righteous Job. A higher lesson was to be learned in his case which we will see later.

3. The most common form of pain is simple cause and effect, e.g. drive with defective brakes = auto accident, eat wrong foods = heart attack, worry = ulcer, exposed to virus = pneumonia, immoral sex = syphilis, gonorrhea, AIDS, etc.
4. What about pain in the NEW TESTAMENT and for this age for the believer?
 - a. Heb.12 makes it clear that some pain is from chastisement.
 - b. Jesus (God) used His supernatural powers to heal, not to inflict pain and suffering.
5. Jesus made it clear that suffering is not always the result of a person's sin.

John 9:2-3

2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

B. Hearing the Echoes:

1. Jesus focused on another facet of suffering in Luke 13 concerning those murdered by Pilate and those upon whom a tower fell. v.1-5
 - a. He never explains "why?" - but He makes one thing clear: they did not occur as a result of specific wrongdoing.
 - b. He implies that a tragedy should alert us to make ourselves ready in the event the next tragedy happens to us; esp. the tragedy of losing our soul!
2. The disciples (and we) focus in the wrong direction; we want to look back and ask "why?" as to cause, Jesus refocuses on the forward view which transforms suffering into something meaningful to display God's grace and glory.

III. PAIN THE SOUL-MAKER:

A. Not "Why?" But "To What End?":

1. If Job teaches anything it is that pain has an end result in view even if we are not meant to interpret that result.
 - a. Job did not seek the Giver because of His gifts; when all the gifts were removed he still sought the Giver.
 - b. "Faith like Job's cannot be shaken because it is the result of having been shaken." Rabbi Abraham Heschel
2. Job endured undeserved suffering to demonstrate that God is ultimately interested in freely given love.

ILLUS: A 'kept woman' or mistress, who is pampered and bribed and locked away so that the lover can be sure of her faithfulness doesn't prove her love. God does not 'keep' his people. He loves us, lives Himself to us, and eagerly awaits our free response.

A father determined to protect his child from all pain would never allow his daughter to take a step because she might fall down. Instead he picks her up and carries her everywhere. Of course such a pampered child will become an invalid...totally dependent on dad. That father, no matter how loving, would have failed in his most important task: to nurture an indep. person into adulthood.

It is to this end our Heavenly Father nurtures us and permits some painful experiences in our lives.

3. We make two major errors:
 - a. We attribute all suffering as coming from God as punishment for human mistakes.
 - b. We assume the opposite; that life with God will insulate us from all suffering.

B. The Pleasure of Pain:

1. Pain can only have pleasure if we have the end result in view.

ILLUS: The mortality for believers and unbelievers remains the same: 100%. One pastor said: "every time a non-Christian gets cancer, God allows a Christians to get cancer so the world can see the difference."

2. Something is to be produced in the believer's suffering:

- a. James said: "count it all joy when you fall into manifold temptations (testing)..." Jas.1:2-4
- b. Peter said: "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial ...but rejoice, inasmuch you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when His glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." I Pet. 4:12-13
- c. Paul said: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us." Rom. 8:18

NOTE: By using words like "rejoice" and "count it all joy" the apostles are not advocating a "grin-and-bear-it" attitude or act-tough-like-nothing happened spirit. Nor is there any masochistic hint of enjoying pain for itself. They are speaking about goal-directed suffering. Like that of an athlete in training. Like that of a pregnant woman.

John 16:21

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

CONCL: The suffering person faces choices. He can get angry and deny God. Or he can accept the trial as an opportunity; to "redeem" the pain. Our loving Father understands both those who struggle and scream and those who transform their suffering into a means of grace and ministry. (God had far more sympathy for Job's honest ravings than for his friends' phony piety.)

Nobody wants the gift of pain, but if you get the gift, what will you do with it? Blame God? Curse God? Allow it to work a work of grace in you and redeem it? The choice is yours.

CREDIT: Credit for much of the above material is given to Philip Yancey's book "Where is God when it hurts?" - Zondervan Publishers

“NO MORE PAIN!”

TEXT: Revelation 21:4

THESIS: To show the problem, presence and power of pain in the believer’s life.

INTRO: A. One of the blessings of eternity will be NO MORE PAIN! Along with tears, death, sorrow and crying, the Lord will do away with pain. The question is, if God can erase pain then, why doesn’t He do so now? The answer is that there is purpose in pain, now.

B. Up until the New Heavens and the New Earth, tears, death, sorrow, crying and pain will still be a reality. Even for those of us who die in Christ or are raptured before, we will still have to deal with these things.

ILLUS: You say “I always believed that immediately upon entering heaven our tears will be wiped away and there will be no more pain.” But the Bible says that doesn’t happen till the N.H. and N.E. – after the 7yr. Tribulation and the 1000 year Millennium. Could it be that even in heaven up till that time that we will mourn for lost loved ones, agonize over those going thru the horrors of the Tribulation, and shed tears over lost rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

I. THE PROBLEM OF PAIN:

ILLUS: Pain did not exist on the planet till the fall of man. There were no diseases, no death, no pain in childbirth, etc. - these are all the result of sin. But since the fall...

A. We Are Born Thru Pain:

1. Wherever there is life there is pain in this sin-cursed world.
2. Our mothers went down into the jaws of death to give us life!

Gen. 3:16

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

3. Pain is our partner through out this life, beginning with infancy and stalking us thru old age, till we face the final pain of death.

B. We Are Born-again Thru Pain:

1. Jesus had to travail in pain on Calvary to give us new life.
2. The One Who was so sensitive to pain and cured it thruout His ministry, had to endure pain to make us His children.
3. Jesus had to endure pain when He clothed Himself with humanity.

ILLUS: It is likely that as God He knew about pain before Bethlehem, but until He became flesh, He had never felt pain. In fact, till Calvary, we never read of Jesus being sick, injured or experiencing pain. He agonized over sinful humanity, but there is no record of Him experiencing physical pain.

4. Our first birth introduced us to pain; our second birth brought more pain to us:
 - a. The painful reality of the unsaved headed to hell!
 - b. The painful reality of rejection by loved ones.
 - c. The painful reality of our own sin and imperfection.

II. THE PRESENCE OF PAIN:

A. Pain Is A Fact Of Life:

ILLUS: Dr. Sam Gipp in his book "Living With Pain" says "If you suffer from protracted pain but haven't trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, your real suffering hasn't even begun yet" – and – "If you don't like your present discomfort, you're going to hate hell!"

1. From the first pain in infancy of being deprived of something we want or think we need, to a life of painful experiences, down to the final pain associated with the death of loved ones or our own death...
2. Pain is our constant companion in life.

B. Pain Is A Product Of Sin:

1. Pain and suffering, tears and death were born in Eden.

Gen. 3:17-18

17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

ILLUS: Strange new plants began to grow in Eden (“thorns” Gen. 3:17-18), sweat began to form on Adam’s brow as he worked; his muscles began to ache, perhaps he cut himself for the first time or broke a bone or experienced a fever. As their sons fought and one killed the other, they tasted the salt of tears and the bitterness of sorrow. They now feared the animals which were formerly their friends. The flowers were not as fragrant, the sky was marred with dark clouds, the birds sang in the minor key, plants faded and died and the teeth, claws and fangs of animals were used to kill. Pain became a constant reality.

2. Pain will continue unabated throughout man’s earthly history: it all seems so purposeless!

ILLUS: In a perfect world (Eden before the fall and heaven and earth after the Millennium) pain will be absent. Till then pain is incessant. As sinful humans we tend to overrate our afflictions. We are all spared many painful experiences. We do not have to deal with what others may and no one experiences all the woes, miseries, diseases, discouragements, wars, plagues, etc. possible. Who can compare with Job, Jeremiah or Jesus? There is both purpose and power in pain...

III. THE POWER OF PAIN:

A. Suffering Is A Purifier:

2 Cor. 4:16-18

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

1. Pain often helps us put our values in perspective.

ILLUS: Pain and suffering reminds us of our mortality and alerts us to the fact of eternity. In light of eternity there are decisions we must make as to our lifestyle and life choices. Knowing that we will soon stand before the Lord thru the Rapture or death will help us purify our lives.

Titus 2:11-13

***11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;
13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;***

2 Cor. 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

A. Suffering Is A Tenderizer:

1. Pain is a 2 edged sword: fight it and it will consume and destroy you; absorb it and it will ennoble and strengthen you.
2. Suffering may not be the agent of heaven smiting us, it may be the love of heaven blessing us.
3. Pain and suffering may tenderize our hearts and open us to the Gospel and or the comfort of our Savior.

B. Suffering Is A Sweetner: (It can either make us bitter or better!)

1. Pain loosens our roots and makes us long for our loved ones in heaven.
2. Pain teaches us dependency on the Lord.
3. Pain reveals God's faithfulness in our time of need.
4. Pain sorts out our friendships.
5. Pain conforms us to Christ.
6. Pain opens up ministries to us.

CONCL: We all look forward to NO MORE PAIN! In the mean time God may have some lessons to teach us thru whatever pain He permits in our lives. Perhaps the pain or heartbreak in your life will be the instrument God is trying to use to bring you to salvation. Whatever He is doing, it is for your blessing and benefit! He is too wise to make mistakes and too kind to want to hurt us.

"WHEN THE WORST HAPPENS TO THE BEST"

TEXT: Job 1:6-12

INTRO: A. Job suffered more than any mere human, it seems. The question is Why? It was surely not because he was sinful, just the opposite seems to be true. cf. v.8 He was not as his friends supposed suffering due to his secret sin. What was going on in Job's life which can help supply us with some answers for pain and suffering in our life?

B. Perhaps the best explanation is found not in the opening chapters of Job but in the closing chapters. After over 30 chapters of attempted answers by Job and his friends, God finally breaks his silence and speaks. As someone put it, "GOD DOESN'T EXPLAIN, HE EXPLODES!" For 4 chapters God asks Job question after question, with- out giving Job a chance to reply or to again bring up the subject of his own suffering.

TRANS: My purpose today is to attempt to use this setting to offer some solution as to the "Why" of our pain and suffering...

I. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY:

A. His Power:

1. God's response to Job's suffering is a series of over 80 questions dealing with various aspects of His creation. 38:1-4
2. These questions settle once and for all the issue of the power of God.
 - a. God is not powerless, but powerful and could but doesn't always prevent suffering.

- b. God is not stupid, but all-wise and He alone can separate our circumstances, producing the highest good.

ILLUS: Our problem is that we are so short-sighted and self-centered. We think that everything revolves around us and that every ache or pain we have is because somehow God is "dumping" on us. The book of Job shows that not only did Job not suffer due to His own sin, but that God often has motives beyond our comprehension.

B. His Love:

1. In the final chapter of Job, God demonstrates in a way that Job and his friends can see, the love He has for Job.
2. This does not mean however that in the period preceding this that God loved Job any less.
 - a. God is sovereign, but He is also consistent.
 - b. The issue is not God's love, but Job's love for God!

C. His Purpose:

1. Job does not deserve his tragedy, but God still deserves Job's loyalty.
2. God shows in Job that evil and good are not always punished and rewarded in this life; often evil goes unpunished and good goes unrewarded and good may appear to be punished and evil may appear to be rewarded!

ILLUS: Satan reveals himself as the first behaviorist. He claimed that Job's faith was a product of his favored treatment by God, his wealth environment, circumstances and family. He reasoned that if they were removed, Job would curse God. (He came close, but didn't!)

3. Job endured undeserved suffering to demonstrate that God is ultimately interested in freely given love.

NOTE: The issue is NOT how should God respond to our suffering, but how will we respond? When we experience pain will our faith fail? When we have no explanation to our suffering will we continue to trust? When our suffering seems senseless and purposeless will we still love God?

- a. We are not merely to love God if we are treated well.
- b. We are not merely to love God if we stay healthy, never lose a loved one, never suffer a financial set-back, etc.
- c. We are to love God for Who He is and for what He has done for us, re: redemption.

II. MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY:

A. To Trust:

1. A world free of pain and problems would actually abort God's purpose for us and the whole faith principle.
2. The presence of suffering enrages some who believe that human beings are fully formed creatures who should be pampered by God.
3. We are not simply to reason why, but to simply respond to whatever God sends or permits in our lives as a part of an overall plan of development based on His perfections and love.

ILLUS: All suffering doesn't come directly or even indirectly from God. We live in the same universe of fixed laws as the unsaved and God does not suspend those laws for us. When we fall out of a tree we fall DOWN like everyone else, not just float harmlessly to the ground.

The charismatic David Watson contracted colon cancer and fully expected a divine healing along with his followers. The man who wrote the forward to his book "Fear no Evil" said: "The fact that David, right to his last page, hopes for supernatural healing that never comes is not important...David's theology led him to believe right to the end that God wanted to heal his body. Mine leads me rather to say that God evidently wanted David home, and healed his whole person by taking him to glory in the way that he will one day heal us all. Health and life, I would say, in the full and final sense of those words, are not what we die OUT OF, but what we die INTO."

4. God's questions to Job boil down to this: "Until you know a little more about running the physical universe, Job, don't tell me how to run the moral universe" - just TRUST ME !

ILLUS: Until we are wise enough to orchestrate a blizzard, or manufacture a single snowflake, or generate a single lightning bolt - we have no right to question God's methods, motives or His purpose.

B. To Turn:

1. God moved the focus from the origin of Job's sufferings to the future: What will you do NOW?
2. Blame is not the issue, Job needed to exercise resp. in his response, the one area, he, not God, had control over!

ILLUS: One preacher sarcastically commented, "Every time a non-Christian gets cancer, God allows a Christian to get cancer so the world can see the difference." IS THERE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR RESPONSE?

3. We again need to focus on goal-directed suffering and our response..."God meant it for good!"
4. God is in us when we hurt, not in the things that hurt!
5. God can bring good out of evil He isn't bringing the evil to produce good.

NOTE: Goal-directed suffering says that the pain may not go away, but that it has a purpose. Childbirth, etc. It may be cosmic or mundane. But for the believer it is relevant. "All things work together..."

CONCL: The strain of suffering on the person, his family, the church, the preacher, etc. is often great. We must trust in the Sovereignty of our Savior, Who also suffered. We must believe in His great love, demonstrated on Calvary. We must walk by faith in Him, instead of responding to the circumstances that hurt. I have no solution to your pain today, I have instead an answer. Jesus Christ is that Answer!

SCRIPTURES FOR STRENGTH AND COMFORT

Mark 11:24

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Ps. 27:14

Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Joshua 1:7

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

Ex. 23:25

And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.

Ps. 30:2

O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me.

Ps. 46:1

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Job 23:10

But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

Ps. 50:15

And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

Ps. 118:17

I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.

Lk. 17:19

And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

Ps. 94:22

But the LORD is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge.

Deut. 7:15

And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee.

Ps. 103:2-3

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;*

Mk. 11:24

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Mk. 9:23

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

Ps. 91:15

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

Is. 30:15

For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

Ps. 91:10

There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

Is. 30:19

For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.

Ps. 86:7

In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.

Nahum 1:7

The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.

1 Thes. 5:18

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Mt. 19:26

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

Ps. 34:4

I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

Is. 12:2

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.

Ps. 145:19

He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.

2 Tim. 1:7

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Ps. 9:10

And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.

Ps. 143:11

Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.

Ps. 71:14

But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.

Ps. 34:19

Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

Ps. 56:3

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

Ps. 86:7

In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.

Prov. 17:22

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Ps. 32:7

Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

Lk. 8:48

And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.