

Why is life riddled with so much suffering and brokenness?

1 Peter 3:18a; September 20, 2015; Page 1016

Introduction:

- Most, if not all of us, have experienced suffering to one degree or another. For many people, the presence of so much evil, suffering and brokenness in the world is what poses their biggest problem with Christianity. The reason being is there are so many other questions that underlie this initial question. What are we really asking? It's this:
- God, if you're there, why? Why is there so much suffering and brokenness? Is this really the world that you created? Is this how you intended for things to be?
 - 7.9 magnitude earthquake hits Nepal and kills more than 9,000 people and injures over 23,000.
 - The Syrian Refugee Crisis: not only have over 220,000 people been killed through this civil war (half of these being civilians), the U.N. estimates that nearly 7.6 million people are internally displaced.
 - I could continue: what about ISIS, the church shootings at Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, the light that's been shed on Planned Parenthood and the killing and selling of fetuses, the tragic death of Baby Doe, now known as Bella, the 153 millions orphans in the world, the 400,000 in the US foster care system, the 30,000 who age out of the system every year, the many children enslaved in sex trafficking, child labor, and the millions who have little to no food to eat. I could keep going.
 - What about suffering that might be a little more personal: broken marriages through divorce and affairs, broken relationships, someone close has died, someone close has betrayed you, a lost job, sickness, aggressive and incurable cancer, a disability.
- God, if you're there, do you even care? Why aren't you doing anything? If you're good and all powerful, why do you allow so much suffering and brokenness to continue?

You see, underlying our questions and concerns about suffering and brokenness is really an attach and finger pointing to God. What we need most today is to hear God clearly speak to us on this matter.

Context: So here's what we're going to do. We're going to camp out in just one verse this morning in the NT book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter was a letter written by Peter, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, to Christians who were facing some pretty intense suffering. He wrote to teach them how to think about suffering in light of their new faith in Christ. While there's much to learn about suffering from 1 Peter, we're just going to focus on 1 Peter 3:18. Specifically, this verse takes us to the climax of all redemptive history, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to help us understand suffering and brokenness.

Read 1 Peter 3:18

There are four truths from this text I want to share with you today about how we should think about suffering and brokenness.

I. God is not the author of your suffering.

Explain the text: Christ suffered *for sins*.

- Jesus Christ came to this earth, suffered and died in order to solve the problem of sin. In a nutshell, suffering exists because of sin. But it was not always this way.

God's Design:

- Everything that God made was very good (Gen. 1:31).
- The people of God enjoyed the presence and rest of God in the place of God.
- In the beginning, there was no pain, suffering, sickness or death. Nothing was broken.

Sin:

- God gave Adam and Eve a certain amount of freedom to make decisions and govern the earth except for one rule: don't eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you will die.
- Yet, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and ate from the tree. Instead of trusting God for good and evil, they wanted to determine right and wrong for themselves.
- Their rebellion had cosmic ramifications. Sin not only entered into their hearts it spread like a virus effecting all of creation. Sin was passed down from generation to generation and all of creation was distorted from its original design (cf. Rom. 8:18-25). Not one square inch has been spared. Enter "*Brokenness*."

Implications and Conclusions:

- God is not the cause of suffering and brokenness, sin is.
 - Though our first inclination is to point our fingers straight at God, we actually need to turn it on ourselves. Suffering isn't God's fault. It's our fault.
 - But you say, "Why did God allow Adam and Eve to rebel?" But for God to have stopped them, he would've had to have removed their freedom, making them mere robots. And by removing freedom, he would've been removing the possibility of humans to love and worship him freely from their hearts.
 - But you say, "Why does God allow suffering to continue, especially the kind of suffering that seems pointless? If God is good and powerful, wouldn't he stop it?"
 - ◆ Tim Keller in his book, *Reason for God*, spends an entire chapter addressing this topic and he notes, along with other philosophers, a flaw in this reasoning. He says that there is a hidden premise in this argument that says, "If evil appears pointless to me, then it must *be* pointless" (Tim Keller, *Reason for God*, 23).
 - ◆ Here is how he responds: "Just because you can't see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn't mean there can't be one. Again we see lurking within supposedly hard-nosed skepticism an enormous faith in one's own cognitive faculties. If our minds can't plumb the depths of the universe for good answers to suffering, well, then, there can't be any! This is blind faith of a high order" (Tim Keller, *Reason for God*, 23).

- ◆ Additionally, Keller argues that on an experiential level that most of us have to admit that difficult and painful experiences have prepared us for success in life. So he concludes, “With time and perspective most of us can see good reasons for at least *some* of the tragedy and pain that occurs in life. Why couldn’t it be possible that, from God’s vantage point, there are good reasons for all of them” (Tim Keller, *Reason for God*, 25)?
- Why do you experience suffering and brokenness?
 - You live in a fallen world full of sickness, death, and brokenness (natural disasters).
 - You are also a sinner and experience the consequences of your sin.
 - Others are sinners and you experience the consequences of their sin.

Transition:

- You may be thinking, “Ok, you’ve shown that the existence of suffering and brokenness doesn’t disprove God, but I’m still suffering and I hate all this suffering in the world.
- Let’s return to 1 Peter 3:18.

II. God experienced suffering for you.

Explain the text: Christ suffered for sins.

- God, in the person of Jesus Christ, experienced suffering.

Enter the **Gospel:**

- Sin, suffering and brokenness is not the end of the story. God promised Adam and Eve that one of their descendants would rescue humankind.
- That person is Jesus Christ, the suffering servant (Isa. 53:3-5), the Son of God. He was righteous and had done nothing wrong. He committed no sin (1 Pet. 2:22). He didn’t deserve to suffer and die but he willingly laid down his life.
- Think about this: God’s plan for ending sin, suffering, brokenness and death involved the greatest evil ever done, the death of the righteous and perfect Son of God. He came in order to suffer.

“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31; cf. Luke 24:26, 46).

- In Jesus Christ, God experienced the greatest depths of pain in all of history.

Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me” (Matt. 26:38).

“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44).

“And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’” (Matt. 26:39).

- There’s no doubt that Jesus knew he was about to experience the cruelest method of execution ever practiced, death on a cross. But that isn’t what made him fearful. He was afraid because he knew he was going to bear God’s judgment on the sins of the whole world and this is what led him to cry out on the cross:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46)?

- His physical pain didn’t even come close to comparing with the spiritual experience of cosmic abandonment.
- Can there be any greater agony than the loss of a relationship from someone that we dearly love (parents, spouse, child)? Keller notes, “We cannot fathom, however, what it would be like to lose not just spousal love or parental love that has lasted several years, but the infinite love of the Father that Jesus had from all eternity. Jesus’s sufferings would have been eternally unbearable” (Tim Keller, *Reason for God*, 29).
- Why am I highlighting this? Because it’s important for you to know that what Jesus experienced on the cross is the worst suffering that anyone could experience.
- Any why did Jesus do it? I love Keller’s summary, “He had to pay for our sins so that someday he can end evil and suffering without ending us” (Keller, *Reason for God*, 30).

Implications and Conclusions:

- When you look to the cross, you can’t say that God’s doesn’t love you. The cross turns our finger pointing around. Instead of asking God, “Why are you allowing this suffering?” we ask, “Why would you go through such loss, sorrow and death for me of all people?” It is by his wounds that you can be healed (1 Pet. 2:24).
- When you look to the cross, you can’t say that God is indifferent or detached from your suffering. He isn’t offering advice and perspective from afar. He cares so much about your suffering that he became flesh and experienced suffering himself on your behalf.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

- We should imitate Jesus’ prayer when we are experiencing suffering. Ask boldly (take this cup from me), surrender completely (not my will but yours be done).
- If God can use such evil for good on a large-scale, why can’t he bring about good on a smaller scale in each of our individual lives?

III. God is present in your suffering,

Explain the text: Christ suffered for sins . . . that he might ***bring us to God.***

- “The ultimate achievement of the cross is not freedom from sickness but fellowship with God. This is what we were made for: seeing and savoring and showing the glory of God” (John Piper, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 88-89).
- Show the final 3 Circles Slide (recovering and pursuing God’s design).

Implications and Conclusions:

- You don’t have to face suffering alone. God is with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. Believe this.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23:4, 6).

- God is present to do something greater in you through suffering.
 - God uses suffering to sanctify you and make you more like Jesus.

“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5; cf. James 1:2-4).

- ◆ A word of caution: there are no quick fixes to suffering and some will have no remedy until Jesus returns. God doesn’t immediately intervene to make everything better. He is more concerned to change you over time into a different kind of person.
- ◆ “Profound good in our lives often emerges in a crucible of significant suffering. . . . Often our typical sins emerge in reaction to betrayal, loss, or pain. Hammered by some evil, we discover the evils in our own hearts (Rom. 12:17)” (David Powlison, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 147).
- ◆ The question then becomes: will you learn to live with pain, suffering and brokenness in a way that is glorifying to God? Will your faith grow or shrivel up?
 - God uses suffering to prepare you to comfort others.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

IV. God will one day end all your suffering,

Explain the text: Christ suffered for sins . . . that he might ***bring us to God.***

- God has set a day when he will return and bring justice and vengeance to all evil, suffering and brokenness. The only way to escape this judgment is to embrace Jesus and his work on the cross.
- In addition to judgment, God will finally destroy all suffering and restore a new creation.
- Not only does God walk with us now through suffering, one day we'll be with him in a new creation and it will be very good. This is the point of Jesus' resurrection. Death and suffering is not the end; resurrection and new life is (show 3 circles slide).

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. . . . He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:1, 4).

“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. And he said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true’” (Revelation 22:3-6).

Implications and Conclusion:

- Next week we're going to look at what Jesus would tell us to do now, on this side of heaven, to bring about social justice even as we long for the ultimate justice and restoration at the second coming.
- The night of suffering can be long but morning is coming. Even when you don't feel like you can keep on going, know that Jesus empathizes with you and he will carry you to the end. If you don't turn to God, where else is there to turn? There is no hope anywhere else.
- Because of the gospel and especially the resurrection, we can endure suffering with powerful hope. We will one day get what we've always hoped for, but it will be so much greater than we could ever imagine.
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The Main Point: Endure suffering with powerful hope by embracing the reuniting purpose of the suffering of Christ.