

# REJOICING IN OUR SUFFERING

## CLASS 7: WHEN BELIEVERS FACE TRAGEDY

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- Suffering is a very normal part of the Christian life.
- It can be hard to comprehend how there is suffering when God, who is good, is sovereign over everything in the world.
- In other words, *how can a good God allow such atrocities to take place right before His face?*
- It has caused many to wonder where or if God is present in the midst of their hardships.
- Combined with a lack of biblical understanding and the church's failure to teach the whole counsel of God's Word, many Christians are left trying to piece together what is going on their life.
- When we are left to our own emotions and experiences to lead, believers often times find themselves staying in the pit of despair or even worse, turning away from the God who loves them.
- Our goal in this class is to develop a proper biblical view of suffering.
- While we will most likely never know why *all* of our suffering is taking place, we can know who God is and what He desires to accomplish through our hardships.
- When we have a biblical understanding of who God is and how He works in His creation, we are then better equipped to not only direct our own hearts but the hearts of those who are suffering around us.
- The Christian should be the most joyous in the world, a beacon of hope to those who are searching and to those who are walking down the same path with them.
- **Here is the schedule for the upcoming lessons:**
  - April 27th: Introduction/A Biblical View of Suffering
  - May 4th: Suffering and the Sovereignty of God
  - May 11th: The Purposes for Suffering
  - May 18th: Knowing That God is With Us in Our Suffering
  - May 25th: No Class - Memorial Day Weekend
  - June 1st: Rejoicing in the Midst of Our Suffering
  - June 8th: Growing in the Midst of Our Suffering
  - **June 15th: When Believers Face Tragedy**
  - June 22nd: Walking With Others in Their Suffering

## INTRODUCTION

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- What is a tragedy?
- The Cambridge dictionary says, “a very sad event or situation, especially one involving death or suffering.”
- Regarding the use of tragedy in the arts, it means “A drama typically exploring serious events, often including the main character’s downfall caused by personal faults and / or fate, and with an unhappy or disastrous ending.”
- I wanted to start with this because the dictionary definition is rather clinical, not putting the person in the event that happens.
- The drama version is more like how life is lived...a series of events (either self-inflicted or from God...not fate) that we are included in that tries to bring us down and has an unhappy ending.
  - If we think about this in light of what we know from the Scriptures, the believer is never facing in a tragedy in the personal sense.
  - **Why?** Because we are never going to have a disastrous ending. Not only do we have hope from God that through Christ we are going to be fully saved one day...we also know that God uses all that comes against us for our good and His glory.
  - Therefore, we may have a series of *bad* events in our life, but the end is always going to be *good*.
  - There are times when we may not be able to find joy in what is taking place, but the Christian has something that the unsaved world does not, Christ Himself.
- The question is then; in light of having a personal relationship with God, how do we handle these events.
  - How can we, as people filled with the Holy Spirit, walking in step with the commandments of Christ, face the hardships which come upon us throughout our life?
- **In other words, what do we do when bad things happen to God’s people?**
  - Theologically we know that there are no “good” people out there.
  - We know that all men are wicked, depraved, and in need of God’s amazing grace through Christ.
  - Even after we are saved, it is not that *we* are so good, but now we have true goodness in us.
  - It is not just goodness, but real holiness that then makes us holy before God.
- When we are born again, it brings us more than goodness and holiness, we are now brought into the family of God.
- **1 John 3:1 “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”**
- We have already been learning throughout this course that suffering and trials come upon everyone, they are part and parcel to the normal Christian life.

- We also have studied that Christians are to be joyous; well beyond anyone who does not know Christ.
- But sometimes in our minds, we can't help but wonder *why*, why has something come upon us the way that it has.
- It's not necessarily a sinful why, but more like a *haven't I been through enough...am I not in the family of God...* kind of why...even a *when is this going to be over...* kind of thinking.
- None of us are immune to these thoughts. None of us are so far removed from life that we don't feel the pains from places that we thought we never would.
  - This is found throughout the Psalms<sup>1</sup> and other books:
    - **Psalm 13:1** "How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?"
    - **Psalm 79:5** "How long, O Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your Jealousy burn like fire?"
    - **Psalm 89:46** "How long, O Lord? Will You Hid Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?"
    - **Habakkuk 1:2** "How long, O Lord, will I call for help. And You will not hear? I cry out to You, 'Violence!' Yet You do not save."
    - **Revelation 6:10** "...and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'"
- There are two sources that we seem to bring the most hurt and discouragement in people's lives.
- One is when we are wronged by another believer or friend.
- If you are around people long enough, you will experience **both** the pain of being hurt **and** hurting others through your own actions.
- Another common experience for people is when suffering seems to come upon us when there was already suffering upon us.<sup>2</sup>
  - This is the worldly and superstitious thought behind the number 3. The number 3 has long been hailed at the "first true number" by the Pythagoreans and associated with stability and harmony.
  - 3 as a divine triad in religion, 3 wishes, 3 bears, 3 challenges, count to 3 before a race starts, the list goes on and on.
  - This is all myth, when someone says, "bad things come in threes."

<sup>1</sup> See also Psalm 6:3; 80:4; 90:13; 94:3

<sup>2</sup> [https://people.howstuffworks.com/bad-luck-comes-in-3.htm?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://people.howstuffworks.com/bad-luck-comes-in-3.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com) The following information is for your advantage is you are playing a game with friends and come across such questions.

## WHEN YOU'RE WRONGED BY ANOTHER BELIEVER / FRIEND

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- We live, like those who are still sinning, with others who are still sinning.
- We are not immune from others' wrath upon us or others feeling the extent of our wrath upon them.
- This is not something new, in fact we have examples in the Bible of friends (or at least those who were seemingly friends) harming or arguing with one another.

### Psalm 55

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- In the case of Psalm 55, the stanzas alternate between disclosures of the psalmist's own state of mind and his descriptions of the wicked who are causing him problems. As is usual with such psalms, the descriptions of the psalmist's state show improvement as David moves from anguish of mind and pain to quiet confidence in God. I outline the psalm like this: (1) the first disclosure of the psalmist's anguish (vv. 1–8); (2) the first description of the wicked (vv. 9–11); (3) the second disclosure of the psalmist's anguish (vv. 12–14); (4) the second description of the wicked (v. 15); (5) the psalmist's faith in God (vv. 16–19); (6) the third description of the wicked (vv. 20–21); and (7) the psalmist's final conclusion and advice (vv. 22–23). The psalm is a combination of the lament, prayer, and wisdom genres.<sup>3</sup>
- Like what was taught last week, lamenting to the Lord is a proper response in times of great distress.
- That is what David is doing in **verses 1-8**. He bears his heart before the Lord.
- In **verses 12-14** we get an up-close picture of who David's enemy was...he says in **verses 13-14** "But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend; we had sweet fellowship together walked in the house of God in the throng."
  - While we don't know who David is talking about, we know that it is someone who David considered a close friend.
- Then there is a turning point in his life. In **verses 16-19**, David again calls upon the Lord...but this time he does so not out of anguish (as in **verses 1-8**), but rather out of expectation.
  - He has steadied his heart and mind before the Lord, he knows where he needs to go.
  - This is a real turning point in all our lives. When hard times come, when we know that we are under great distress, we must work through our suffering and put our eyes on the Lord.
- In these verses is where David's (and our) faith shines brightly.
- As Boice says "This psalm is a lesson in perseverance."
  - This was not a once off prayer and answer from the Lord...it is a continual effort from David.

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<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 459.

- The final two verses (**22-23**) are similar to **1 Peter 5:7**.
- There are three reasons given as to why we can cast our worries upon the Lord.
  - He will sustain you...
    - We will never be fully beaten down and have no more to give. The Lord will sustain His people by His strength.
  - He will never let the righteous fall...
    - “We see that the righteous for a time are left to stagger, and almost to sink under the storms by which they are beset. From this distressing state David here declares, that they shall be eventually freed, and blessed with a peaceful termination of all their harassing dangers and cares.”<sup>4</sup>
    - Though the bough of a great tree may bend and twist under the extreme winds that come upon it, it will never be uprooted and crash to the ground. (paraphrase from Spurgeon)
  - He will judge the wicked...
    - It may seem that those who harm you are getting away with what they are doing.
    - It may look like you are the one who is getting the wrong end of the circumstance...but we must never put our hope in what we can see or what we think is right.
    - Our hope must be in God...who judges righteously. (**1 Peter 2:21-25**)

## WHEN TROUBLES JUST SEEM TO KEEP COMING UPON YOU<sup>5</sup>

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- **Psalm 119:49-56** “*Remember the word to Your servant, In which You have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, That Your word has revived me. The arrogant utterly deride me, Yet I do not turn aside from Your law. I have remembered Your ordinances from of old, O LORD, And comfort myself. Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked, Who forsake Your law. Your statutes are my songs In the house of my pilgrimage. O LORD, I remember Your name in the night, And keep Your law. This has become mine, That I observe Your precepts.*”
- There is only one prayer request in this stanza. It is not a prayer for deliverance. It is an expression of confidence in the faithfulness of God. Alexander Maclaren wrote: “This section has only one verse of petition, the others being mainly avowals of adherence to the Law in the face of various trials.”
- The author comes before God in humility (Your servant), knowing his place before His God.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 345.

<sup>5</sup> For a full study on this text and topic, see <https://hbcharlesjr.com/resource-library/sermon-outlines/keep-trusting-when-trouble-comes-psalm-11949-56/> (Parts of the study taken from the above website and modified for this study)

- The content of this prayer, *remember the word*, is not an indictment against God, rather it is about the author's feelings.
- When our feelings are wrong, we may start to think wrongly. God has not forgotten anything that He has said to His people through His Word.
- Notice that even though his feelings were wrong (that God had forgotten), his actions were right, his response was to go to the Lord.
  - There was no panic, just a cry out to the Lord in his trial.
- "The psalmist did not ask for another word. He asked God to remember the word God had already spoken. He prayed that God would remember his word, not because he was desperate, frustrated, or panicked. He prayed that God would remember his word because his hope was in God's word."
- When we run from God in our trying times, we are leaving the very source that God has given us to find our hope and comfort.
- Even when our tribulations seem to never end, even when it is just wave after wave of hard times, we must resolve not to allow our emotions and thoughts to take over but look at what God has already said.
- **Verse 50** "This is my comfort in my affliction, That Your word has revived me."
- How many times do we go outside of God's gracious means to us and search for comfort?
- As the Psalmist says, it is God's Word that has brought a revival to his soul.
  - This can also be translated as life, to give or preserve life.
  - It can also be translated to revive or to restore, to refresh or to cause to grow.
- Yes, we may be in a sustained time of hardship, we may have a long season in the valley and winter may never seem to go away.
- Regardless of our circumstances, we can find true life when we go to the Word of God.
- Something that was taught last week that I think is very helpful and important to remember.
  - Suffering will always change us, but we have to be intentional as to where it does.
- We are all changing every day. From a simple biological perspective all the way to our spiritual state, there is nothing which is left unchanged day to day.
- We can allow our trials to harden us, make us callous against God and other people. We can begin to think that we are owed something or that someone has wronged us and needs to be punished.
- Or we can take the time in those trials to make sure that we are in a good place with the Lord.
- Yes, the pain is still there, yes, the difficulties still exist, most likely our circumstances are not going to change at the pace we really desire.
- But we can change. We can put our arms around our Savior and hold onto Him.

## DIVINE COMFORT FOR THE CHRISTIAN

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- What does it look like to have comfort from the Lord?
- We may think that it should happen in one way, but the Lord is really using other means that we are either not looking for or really not ready for.
- I think that the Apostle Paul is a great study in God comforting His people in the midst of great sorrow.

### The Apostle Paul went from Athens to Corinth

- **Acts 18:1** “After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.”
- When we went to Corinth, we know that He was not doing well.
  - **1 Corinthians 2:3** “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.”
  - He was beaten and run out of Philippi after spending a night in jail. Chased out of Thessalonica and fled to Berea, where the Thessalonians chased after him. He then sailed South to Athens where he was met with no fanfare, no love and not really any fruit for his hard work.
  - Paul spends a couple of weeks in Athens and nothing really happens. Most scholars believe he spent the time debating and arguing with the intellectual elites and came out with not a lot to show for it. Up to this point, Paul travelled all-over modern-day Syria and Turkey and was making his way West to go to Greece. Paul didn’t leave Athens under pressure or from persecution, it seems he left b/c the people there were just not as receptive to the gospel as he’d hoped.
- In **Acts 18:1-11**, God encourages Paul when he is down and out. What are some ways of encouragement?
- In **verses 1-4**, there are other believers that come around Paul. By God’s grace and kindness towards Paul, this is when he met Aquila and his wife Priscilla.
  - This couple became very dear to Paul. In fact, he writes in **Romans 16:3-4** “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house.”
  - Never underestimate God’s power in our divinely ordained friendships. We were not built to be alone, we need other people, and God will send them your way.
- In **verse 5**, Paul not only had a new friendship, but God sent some fellow ministry workers.
  - Both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia to give Paul a gift of money.
  - We know that they brought money **2 Corinthians 11:9** “And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.”

- Paul had been working to support himself in the ministry, now he was being paid by the church at Philippi to do his ministry work.
- If you think about this, Paul may have thought that his “failure” in Athens and being chased out of various cities could have been a sign that he was done in the ministry.
- But God sent to him, not just friends to have fellowship with, but also two very close ministry companions with money to keep going.
- In **verses 6-8** God allows Paul to see some fruit that was coming from his ministry.
  - There is nothing worse for a minister to labor and suffer for the work and not see any fruit.
  - While our labor is unto the Lord, it can be disheartening to think that all our hard work is not bearing any fruit for the Lord.
  - God gave him a glimpse of what was happening, and Paul started to see people getting saved. No just saved, but there was a church that was planted there (Rom 16:23).
  - There was fruit from Paul’s ministry...something that helps the minister keep going even in the darkest of seasons.
- In **verses 9-11** we have the most intimate way that Jesus encouraged Paul, He came to him again.
  - Jesus came to Paul in a nightly vision and gave three commands and three promises.
  - Do not be afraid...I am with you
  - Go on speaking...no man will attack you in order to harm you
  - Do not be silent...I have many people in this city
  - While Jesus is not going to come to us in a vision at night, we too have these same promises (and more) from Jesus Himself.
- In seasons of hardship, we have the opportunity for our relationship with Christ and a reliance on His grace to grow more than in seasons of plenty.
- The unsaved person does not have the same resources that we do. While they can find comfort from this world, as was taught last week, these are just coping strategies. There is no real substance in them.