**JESUS SUFFERING/OUR SUFFERING**

**FIND GOD IN OUR PAIN**

**4/9/17**

**I. Introduction:** We are in a series called *Discovering the Life of Jesus in You*. We are going through the story of Jesus and observing, not simply how He lived but how He wants to live out His life in us, as we go through the same kind of things He went through. Jesus came so that His story could invade our story. So that His life, miracles, His hope, joy, His victory could overtake our story, as we yield to the life of Jesus in us.

A. Today, we want to talk about Jesus’ sufferings and our sufferings. We want to see how Jesus’ life addresses the hurts, the losses, disappointments, sorrows, and misfortunes we all encounter. As a pastor of a church our size, there’s not a week that goes by that I am not in some way faced with someone I love who is heartbroken. I’m visiting with a dear Mom whose 39-year old daughter just suddenly died, or a dear friend who just discovered she has stage 4 cancer, or a long time elder who had a stroke, a friend who lost his job, others who have hit the wall with loved ones struggling with serious life-threatening addictions. The list could go on and on… Life just hurts so bad sometimes.

Yet, look at these wonderful words of Jesus as He faced unimaginable suffering. John 16:31… *These things I write unto you, that in me you might have peace, in the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.*

As we’ll see, Jesus went through all of our pain to give us His peace. He suffered in every way so that not a single tear would be wasted, that we would not have a single loss that He doesn’t redeem, or go through a single trial that He can’t use to somehow transform our lives to be better for His glory.

What we want to learn today is how to go through our sufferings like He did, with Jesus strengthening us and helping us, so the results of our suffering can be the same as the results of His suffering: victory, resurrection, and hope.

B. I like to encourage people, since we’re going to go through trouble, why not go through it in a way that makes us more like Jesus and in a way that allows more and more of His glory to be produced in our life? I think we all realize that how we handle suffering, trials, and loss really is the game changer as far as where we end up… whether we end up bitter or better, with a chip on our shoulder or a crown of victory on our head. We can’t always decide what is going to happen to us, but every day we get the most important opportunity in our life: to decide what is going to happen in us. We get to choose our attitudes, our perspectives, our purposes in our trials. We get to choose whether to worship or worry, resentment or gratitude, complaining or rejoicing, fear or faith, self-dependence or self-surrender. We get to choose whether to angrily pray, “Why me God?” or “What do you want to do in me God?” We get to decide where the winds of adversity take us.

Someone likened life to a sail boat race; we have similar boats and similar winds and waves, but we all end up a different place depending on how we navigate. Thankfully, Jesus wants to come and be the storm Navigator at the helm of our heart, if we just let Him.

**II.** **The starting point for finding God in our suffering is simple:** I love the Scripture in Hebrews 12:2, where the apostle tells us how to navigate the storms of life by: *“…fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Thomas Merton said, *“In order to suffer without dwelling on our own affliction, we must think about a greater affliction and turn to Christ.”* The starting point for handling any suffering that happens to us is to look to Jesus and His sufferings. Jesus was a *man of sorrows, acquainted with our grief.*

Joni Eareckson, a quadriplegic minister, has shown the world an example of God’s grace in suffering. She has traveled the world ministering with joy, even though she was paralyzed at age 17 from the neck down, as the result of a diving accident. Joni said: *“God wrote the book on suffering; it’s entitled Jesus”.*

Jesus was the most God-forsaken person who ever lived. Even before the cross, Jesus was rejected by his family, was born in abject poverty of a minority race that was hated by the Roman establishment. He was betrayed by a kiss from one of his best friends. The crowds he healed cried, “crucify him”. He was stripped, beaten, mocked, bearing the sin of the 50 or so billion people that have lived on planet earth. He was forsaken by God and cried, *“My God my God why have you forsaken me”.*

What was utterly unique was that He chose this suffering; He could’ve called 10,000 angels to rescue him. What is also unique, as I’ve mentioned, is that he didn’t just die as a martyr, he suffered and died as a substitute for us. He chose to conquer death by embracing sin, to destroy sin by becoming sin, to bear our sorrows, griefs, and betrayal so that he could enter into our sufferings when we suffer. He suffered so that no suffering could come between us and our Lord, nothing could separate us from his love… height or depth, life or death, persecution, nakedness, peril or sword... not broken legs, broken hearts, broken homes, marriages, lost plans, dreams…. Nothing, nothing, nothing could ever be as great as His love for us and His presence, for us who learn to receive it. He came to take our pain so we could always walk in his peace.

Let’s watch this clip from the movie “Son of God” that shows some of this part of the story. Matthew 26:36-46

**III. What I want us to see in this passage is that it not only reveals that Jesus suffered but how Jesus overcame and found God’s power in His suffering.**

Let’s see how you can find Jesus in you, in your suffering and have his peace. Let’s see how you can discover his power to transform you, to take all the evil that can destroy you and use it to turn things for your good and God’s glory.

**5 ways Jesus handled His suffering and wants to handle it through us.**

**A. Jesus spoke His sorrow**

*“Then he said to them, ‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch and pray with me.” (Mat. 26:38)*

Jesus didn’t stuff, cover up, or deny the struggle he felt on the inside. He poured it out to God.

*Psalms 126:5-6, “Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.”*

The inner emotional struggles of grief, betrayal, distress, anxiety and loss cannot be overcome and transformed by stuffing them, denying them or trying to have a good attitude about it. The emotions of the heart need to be truly released to God so they can be transformed by God.

If your child is killed by a drunk driver, it is not likely that you are healed by just saying you forgive. There is a process of grieving and ministry to people in these situations. There may be hundreds of prayers said alone or with a prayer counselor in which the loss is spoken, the loss of every birthday, every dream. I’m so thankful that Jesus showed us this. I’m so thankful that the Bible says Jesus sends the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26 who prays with groaning’s). What you may have heard called, inner healing is when the Holy Spirit reveals an unhealed hurt, that you suddenly have the grace to take it to Jesus in prayer and God brings a deep healing and release.

I love the story in Luke 24, when Jesus revealed himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were grieving Jesus’ death. He doesn’t just jump in front of them and say, “Look it’s me” but he asks them questions and allows them to share their heart and doubts. After they have poured this out then He reveals Himself. This is what happens in our Tuesday night transformation groups; often as people are allowed to just share, Jesus shows up to heal.

Lamentations 2:19a: *“Get up, cry out in the night, even as the night begins. Pour out your heart like water in prayer to the Lord.”*

God can handle your anger. He’d rather have us wrestle in anger with him, than bury it. I like it when a friend says, “We need to talk”. I know that something that’s there is going to get released.

This is why the Bible says, confess your sins to God and others… Cast your worries... In other words, confess to God what you are worried about and tell God, while thanking him for His promises. This allows peace to come. Healing and transformation is often like emptying all of the old shelves of a dark closet, so Jesus can fill the shelves with new things.

**B. Jesus sought a miracle, to be delivered from the circumstance.** As we suffer, we know all things are possible and it is always right to be praying for a miracle. God wants to do more miracles than we have seen.

**C. Jesus reached out and shared with friends in his time of suffering.** Jesus often comes to us through others. If Jesus felt he needed friends beside him during his sufferings, how much more we need them. It is especially powerful if it can be beyond just our natural family. There is something about the faith of people who are close but are not right in the thick of things that can be so powerful. Again, this is why we do everything. We can try and help everyone have a life group.

We see not only did Jesus reach out for help but in hours before the cross, he reached out to help. Jesus washed the disciples’ feet including the feet of his betrayer, Judas. I believe this was Jesus in a physical and tangible way choosing the path of forgiveness towards the one who would betray him.

Here is what I know, all of us will be hurt. One of the greatest sufferings we will go through in life is to be let down by friends or loved ones, people we’ve trusted. Psalms 55:12 is a psalm of Jesus’ suffering. It says, *“If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend.”*

It is inevitable to be hurt but it is a choice whether we will be offended. The Bible is clear, we get hurt, we take offense. An offense is that reaction to a wrong that we allow to become a root, a closed off area. Larry Stockstill describes an offense this way, *It is a hurt that becomes a judgment that becomes a vow that becomes a resentment that becomes a curse on my life.*

It quite often takes a physical action to keep a hurt from becoming an offense: a conversation, an intentional act of kindness and blessing, some way of cleansing ourselves from what could become hidden anger and resentment.

**D. Jesus saw through the suffering.** The verse in Hebrews 12:2 says it so beautifully, *for the joy set before him he endured the cross.* God redeems suffering when we choose to look beyond the pain, to the purpose we believe and lay hold of from Scripture, that God has for suffering.

In this case, I believe it was the joy of our salvation. I believe as Jesus prayed He was in some way praying, *Father if there is any other way for Dale to be saved, please make it possible…* *There’s no other way than for the joy of the salvation of my children, I will endure the cross.*

**What are some of the purposes He may want to help us see beyond our suffering?**

1. **A redirection of our life.** Often it is not until we are flat on our back that God has our attention to show us things that we are too comfortable or too busy to see.

* *“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.” (Ps. 119:67)*
* *“Since Jesus went through everything you’re going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you’ll be able to live out free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.” (I Pet. 4:1-2 MSG)*

2. **A refocus on eternity and the hope of a real life to come.**

*“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but* *on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:16-18 NIV)*

The Bible teaches us that meaningfulness in life comes when we are not earth bound in our thinking but living today in light of eternity, in joyful anticipation that our real life is so much bigger than what we have and can do now. We are to keep a light touch, even with our expectations, understanding that in life there is much we won’t understand and even much that we won’t receive. This is the appetizer. This is the good night kiss before the wedding, this is the preview. Much of what is happening here, we won’t understand here, because it is something God is doing to prepare us for up there.

I remember hearing about a carpenter working on a part of a steeple for the church they were building. He was working on it by the front door of the half completed church. A little boy said, “I don’t understand what you’re building, it doesn’t fit here by the door”. The carpenter said, “What I am building here is not for down here; it is for up there”.

We are to remember through the suffering that this world is not our home. We should stay focused on what will be perfect and complete, enjoying and being thankful for what we have but not mistaking it for the ultimate joy. This allows us a resiliency to navigate life. I think this mindset is beautifully portrayed in the “Serenity Prayer” by Reinhold Niebuhr. *“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can change; and the wisdom to know the difference.*

It is living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as the pathway to peace, taking life as Jesus did; embracing this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. It is trusting that He will make all things right, if I surrender my will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.

(\*Why I want to visit my Mom’s grave)

**E. Jesus handled suffering through Surrender.**

He prayed, “*Then Father not my will but your will be done.”*

It is crucial to understand what surrender is. Surrender isn’t resignation. It isn’t abdicating hope, it isn’t becoming a victim who in discouragement says... “Whatever will be will be”, “I can’t do anything about it, I’m just a feather floating in the wind. I won’t try any more”.

Surrender is the opposite. It is, “absolute, unconditional trust, and belief in God’s control, his goodness, and purpose.” It is a belief that Father so loves me that he would not stand by and allow even an ounce of pain in my life, that in some way, He sees is absolutely redeemable and purposeful for a plan beyond what I can now understand. It is saying, “I trust you, God and I believe and praise you that you are utterly at work”.

Jesus commented on this in John 12:24, 27

*“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

He goes on in vs. 27 to say ... *“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name!”*

**This kind of surrender and trust does two things**

**1. It refines our character.** It allows the dross of the old metal to be purged, so the reflection of Jesus can be seen. When I yield, part of the grip of the flesh dies in me and the life of Jesus begins to shine. *Those who are most surrendered are most sanctified.*

**2. It allows the peace and the strength of God to replace our fear, our worry, and our despair.**

I love how Paul describes a surrender experience in his life:

(2 Cor. 1:8-9 NIV) *“We don’t want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardship we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.”*

You see this replacement in Jesus’ spirit from this point on; he is at perfect peace, under perfect calm all of the way through.

**3. Ultimately in ways we may or may not see, God redeems the loss.** He never wastes a sorrow; He causes life to flow.

2 Corinthians 4:12, *“So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”* (The story of Jim Abbott)

**Conclusion**

If you are here today, suffering and in sorrow, what I want to say to you is that you can find God in the fire. Your courageous choice to surrender, to affirm God, to worship and praise God in the middle of your storm, to offer yourself and your situation to God for Him to use for His glory has opened the door for you to experience the presence, purpose, and power of God in an amazing way.

When we suffer God wants to give us far more than an explanation or a reason, he wants to give us Himself. He has been where you are and He promises to take you to be with Him where He is. He will invade your sorrows, your suffering. As we say over and over, victory is not the absence of struggle; it is the presence of God in your struggle. He promises to be with you and in you in this suffering so strongly that you will be able to say with Paul in his sufferings, “We *are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”.*