

Why, God?

Part 2: Suffering for the Supernatural

Job 1; John 9:1-7; 11; 2 Cor 4:7-10

8 March 2015

Pray

Bible: John 9

- Last week: began new series on suffering called Why, God?
- Why me? Why now? Why this?
  - All commonly asked questions when we're in the midst of suffering, pain, or faced with the realities of evil in this life.
- By looking at the life and plight of Job in the OT, we got from the question Why, God to the question of Why is there anything at all?
  - For 20 chapters Job voices his case to God as to why his suffering is unjust.
  - And in just a few words God puts Job in his place.
    - God's response wasn't a philosophical rebuttal. It was a simple question: Where were you, Job, when I laid the foundation of the earth?
      - I don't recall you being there in the beginning.
      - In fact, Job, I recall creating you--and I don't think you had anything to do with that either.

So the point I made was this: What you believe about the origins of what you see around you will shape how you live in the midst of pain as well as pleasure.

- 2 implications
  1. God is the author of life
  2. Our lives are part of a greater story.
- If God really is the author of this story we call life and history, and he's the one writing characters and conflict into the story, we have to ask of ourselves: Do I trust the author?
  - Do I trust that God, like any author worth his salt, has a reason for the suffering his characters endure?
  - Is it possible that with my limited perspective I can't see the purpose of my pain?
    - But my not being able to see the purpose doesn't mean there isn't one. --- So do you trust the author?

This week and the next couple hereafter I want to look at biblical reasons for our suffering and our responses to them.

While it may seem like it at times, God hasn't left us entirely in the dark as to why we might suffer.

As a prelude to the text we're going to look at, let's all be clear that suffering is a result of sin. And that sin is the result of man's free will to choose obedience or disobedience

- Adam and Eve had the choice of whether to eat of the forbidden tree, and they ate. That set off a chain of events, both spiritual and physical, that introduced into the world decay, disease, destruction, and death.

Now like Adam and Eve we all experience the consequences of sin physically. We will all die. We will all have aches and pains and feel left unsatisfied by our work. Women will have pain in labor. And on it goes.

- But there are also times where we experience more immediate consequences for our sins as well. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden. They saw murder within their own family. They didn't blame God for the result of their own actions.

And there are times when God allows us to feel the blowback from our disobedience.

- An F for cheating is just punishment.
- Getting pregnant, walking in shame, contracting an STD, or having a marriage implode because of sexual sin is nothing to shake one's fist at God over...it's a natural consequence, albeit one of suffering and pain.
- Contracting skin cancer from too much time in the sun...the cancer is an evil and the cause is explainable.

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But we would be misguided to assume that all of our suffering is the direct result of something we did.

Think back to last week or to your knowledge of Job.

**Job 1:1** *There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.*

There was no “this for that” to Job’s suffering. Job’s supposed comforters, his friends who came to console him, were quiet for a while and then they started in on him.

- Job, you must’ve done something awful.
- Job, think hard, is there anything you’re forgetting or overlooking, some heinous act of disobedience?
- On and on they go and Job is racking his brain to find something, but he is certain that he’s been pure and upright.

And the entire book of Job is pushing back against what’s known as retribution theology. If you do something bad, God’s going to do something bad to you.

- If you get the lightning bolt from heaven it’s b/c you zinged someone on earth.
- If you get gum stuck in your hair it was because you were mean to someone.
- God is getting retribution: this for that.

Job himself actually falls into this belief, which is why he’s putting up such a verbal offensive. He’s saying “Lord, I haven’t done anything to **deserve** this.”

And I’ve heard myself say the same thing. More often I’ve said it about other people.

- I don’t think my friend Jeremy deserved to fall off a cliff at age 26 and die.
- I don’t think our friends’ newborn girl Willa deserved to be born with retinoblastoma--cancer in her eye and be forced to have her eye removed and have poisonous chemo run through her body.

Now we can certainly argue that b/c of sin and b/c we all sin that what we endure is justified. But what if there’s something beyond the natural scope of our suffering?

What if sometimes we suffer for supernatural reasons, reasons beyond the physical scope of this life?

Let's look together at John 9. I want you to have the timeless words of God in your heart and mind the next time you face tragedy, pain, or those dark clouds roll in.

### **John 9:1-3**

**v.2** these are Jesus' disciples, representatives of common Jewish thought in the day.

- What we see is they thought about suffering in the same way as Job's friends. It had to be someone's fault. Suffering is retribution for wrong deeds.
  - So was it this guy or his parents? Who caused it?
  - We should be able to peg an earthly, natural reason for this suffering.

### **v.3**

Jesus isn't saying the guy never sinned or that his parents were perfect. But he is saying that this man's blindness was not the result of their sins.

- This man's blindness was to serve a supernatural purpose.
- **This man's blindness was meant to broadcast God's glory and might!**
  - And we cannot overlook the possibility and likelihood that **our suffering may very well be a supernatural showcase for God's glory and grandeur.**
- What better way for God to get the attention of Jesus' disciples and to challenge the assumptions of the religious crowd in that day than to do something that has never been done.
- The Pharisees end up being outraged that this man would claim he's been given sight.
  - That's never been done! they say.
  - And they cast him out of the synagogue.

"Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."

- John Newton penned those words in the last years of his career as a slave ship captain, transporting slaves across the Atlantic Ocean.
- I can't imagine that as the slaves on his ship were being transported that they could ever fathom their ship's captain writing the most known hymn in all of history.
  - Their suffering was at the hands of human evil.
  - But God also did some extraordinary things in the process of stopping that slave trade.
  - And the witness of the likes of William Wilberforce and John Newton rang loudly throughout England as those ships were docked once and for all.
- And in a bit of bittersweet providence, while pastoring a small church in England, John Newton went nearly fully blind just before his death.
  - So he felt the full weight of those words--*I once was blind but now I see.*

John Newton didn't go blind, as far as we know, b/c of any particular sin he committed. He went blind because sin has marred our physical beings and the physical world around us.

But even so, things such as blindness, in the case of John Newton, Hellen Keller, and this man in John 9, these things can become display cases for God's divine work....and even in blindness His glory is seen.

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Flip over a page or so to John 11.

- Here we find the story of the death of Jesus' dear friend, Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha.

### **John 11:1-4**

- Does Lazarus die?
- So what is Jesus saying this doesn't lead to death?
  - Jesus is about to show his power over death, a divine foreshadowing of his own coming resurrection in a perfected spiritual/physical body.
- Now as far as we know Lazarus fell ill just like other people fall ill. There wasn't a pattern of habitual sin and devious behavior.

- Jesus knew Lazarus well, so well that Jesus wept when he saw the body.
- **But there's a twist to this one: look at vv.14-15**
  - *for your sake...*
  - Isn't that a strange thing to say? For YOUR sake, I'm glad he died.
  - So this raises another possibility for how your suffering might be for supernatural purposes.
    - **Your suffering may well be for the spiritual good of someone else.**
- There are blessings for you in suffering well, but what if you aren't even the point of your suffering?
  - How does that sit with you?

I want you to hear me when I say this:

- **The way you endure suffering may be the loudest words you ever speak for God in this life.**
  - Even if God doesn't deliver you from it, are you walking with him through it?
  - Remember, Jesus raised Lazarus, but the day would come for Lazarus to die again.
    - Being rescued from one evil doesn't mean more pain or suffering won't come.
    - So how will you respond when it comes?
- If you're bent on trying to find a reason for why you're suffering or like Job are presenting your case for why you shouldn't be suffering, you'll likely never set your eyes on God's glory and provision in that time.
- But if you will suffer faithfully and point others to Jesus in the process, it may very well be said of you, "I am glad he/she suffered that I might believe."
  - You could meet someone in this life or in eternity who tells you that the way you walked through the fires of life shown a bright light on the person of Jesus Christ.

Your suffering...my suffering...your sickness, the untimely death, the difficulties with your work, struggles in your marriage, brokenness in relationships---these are all suffering, and while there may be simple

explanations for them, they are also opportunities to open the eyes of others to the goodness and glory of God.

- I've told you before about pastor Matt Chandler in Dallas who had a seizure on Thanksgiving morning a few years ago, leading to the discovery of a cancerous brain tumor.
  - A large section of his frontal lobe had to be removed, and through it all he beat the drum that God is good and does good, whether there's healing in this life or eternity, God is good.
- Just more than a week ago our friends Steven and Allison found out their infant girl Willa (**PICTURE**) has retinoblastoma...cancer of the retina. It affects only 1 in every 20,000 babies.
  - But the odds don't really matter when you're the 1.
  - There were any number of ways Steven and Allison could have responded. But amongst other words they've spoken and written, they recorded these lyrics in a recent post on their blog:

***God moves in a mysterious way; His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea And rides upon the storm; Deep in unfathomable mines; Of never failing skill; He treasures up His bright designs; And works His sovereign will.***

***Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.***

***His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain.***

***-William Cowper (1774)***

William Cowper, the man who penned these timeless words, wrote alongside John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace. They had an acute awareness of

God's glory in the midst of the unknown, the unexplainable, and the unexpected.

- When the mystery of our suffering seems unbearable, we must press into what is undeniable, namely, that God is good all the time--whether in our pain or our pleasure.

You know, the story of the man born blind, the story of Lazarus, the story of John Newton, Matt Chandler, Willa Blackburn...they're all reminders of something the apostle Paul said in such a memorable way.

No need to turn there; it will be on the screen.

### **2 Corinthians 4:6.**

- Want to make two applications for us this morning and we'll be done.

The apostle Paul was no stranger to suffering. He endured beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, muggings, and much more, including a snake bite from a viper after one of those shipwrecks.

And in 2 Cor 4, he opens by talking about the light of the gospel of Jesus.

### **Read v.6**

So here we have the glory of God being shone into our hearts via Jesus Christ himself. That's what you possess as a follower of Jesus Christ, an intimate knowledge of the glory of God.

### **Now v.7**

- So why do walk about earth in these vulnerable shells we call our bodies? Why the limitations that come with being human?
  - SO THAT there be no mistaking with whom the surpassing (*hyperbole*--over and above, exaggerated power) belongs to God and not to us....
- We are constantly in situations and circumstances that we simply cannot overcome or outsmart or power our way through b/c of our limitations.

But listen to the confidence and consolation we have with God surrounding us: **read vv.8-10**

**Even when suffering is supernatural and unexplainable from our vantage point, we can rest assured that the surpassing, overwhelming, death defeating power over and above all things belongs to God alone, our Heavenly Father.**

Let me leave you with two applications as pertains to this kind of supernatural suffering:

**1. Suffering reminds us of our limitations:**

- Think about this physically:
  - we carry this treasure of the knowledge of God's glory in clay jars, earthen vessels.
    - Our jars have a shelf life.
    - They get cracks.
    - They break down.
    - They give out.
    - They let us down.
    - Unlike other items, they do not get better with age.

-- So those moments in which we're confronted with pain, suffering, evil, death, decay, devastation, despair, discouragement....**these are all built in reminders that our lives are fragile.**

And yet, we're not just limited physically, **how about intellectually?**

- Remember God's response to Job:
  - **Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?**
  - The apostle Paul writes in Romans 9, *Can the molded clay really question the potter as to why he made me this way?*
  - The prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before Paul asked, *Can that which is formed say of its maker, "He has no understanding"?*
  - The psalmist says of God, *"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them. If I would count them they are more than the sand."*

How silly would it be for you to walk into your house and have your favorite little decorative knick-knack start questioning your judgment on where you placed it and why it's next to that hideous decoration and how you handled it at the store?

- But that's exactly what we do with God.
- And the crazy thing is he'll entertain our conversations and questions, b/c he's a loving Father, patiently waiting for us to acknowledge that He is the one with the surpassing power.

Suffering reminds us of our limitations.

## **2. Suffering reminds us that we live for the unseen.**

### **Read 2 Cor 4:16-18**

- The clay jar is wasting away, but what's inside is getting better and stronger with age, especially if we embrace suffering under the banner of God's surpassing power.
- And we view our earthly suffering and affliction as preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.
  - That the more suffering, pain, heartache, and evil we face, the more God has to turn to good for us for all eternity.

And like Paul just said, things that are unseen are eternal, so we keep our eyes on things unseen.

Suffering in the power of God keeps our eyes set on the unseen, on eternity.

The famed British jack of all trades, GK Chesterton once wrote this:

**"The sun is the one created thing we cannot look at, but it is the means by which we look at the rest of creation."**

- The supernatural is that which we cannot look at directly, but it is the means by which we see all that is around us on a daily basis.

When the suffering and strife you face doesn't seem to have any earthly explanation, by all accounts it appears to be supernatural:

- be encouraged that God's surpassing power will be with you
- and be reminded that the eternal weight of glory being prepared for you will dwarf the darkness of this life, no matter how great.

And if you've never put your trust in the eternal God of all Creation through faith in Jesus Christ, I simply don't know how you walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

- Only in Christ Jesus do the earthly valleys become eternal victories.