

Intro: A thoughtful man once penned, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” (CS Lewis) Our resistance to suffering and to pain, particularly in the fact that God brings it to us as a gift, is usually lying dormant under the crust of our self-centered ease and comforts that saturate our wealthy culture. We don’t think about suffering too much until God brings it to us, and this resistance to it being a gift from Him volcanically explodes from beneath this shell of perceived faith. We are so quick to make cosmic history revolve around us as if a thousand yesterdays and tomorrows orbit our spheres of life in order to make us happy. It sounds strange to speak, but why do we resist with such turbid effort any kind of suffering, and why do we blame God or write Him off as ineffectual to bring us comfort? I believe that we, even as Christians, have taken our eyes off of Jesus as the ultimate center of eternity and have surreptitiously and somewhat subversively placed ourselves at the center of His desires in our own minds. We believe that we are Christ’s highest desire and that God does everything just for our expressed happiness. Now, there is no doubt that God delights in us and that He desires us to be happy, but we must note that His knowledge of our happiness and what will truly fulfill our joy bucket is much greater than ours. And sometimes, in His infinite wisdom, our joy in Him means our suffering and loss of other things. The question about suffering is: is it worth it to be roused from a deaf world to hear and see God?

I read a card the other day in a local bookstore written by a well known Christian author. It read something like this: “Next time a sunrise steals your breath, or a meadow of flowers leaves you speechless, stay that way. Say nothing and listen as heaven whispers, ‘Do you like it? I did it just for you.’” While that sounds nice, it really isn’t biblical. God didn’t create the mountains for you, or the flowers for you, He created them for His glory, and He created you for Him! He desires you to know Him and for the creation to tell of His greatness. What we truly need from God is not the warmth of a sunset or hill full of trees, but we need to know God and treasure Him as He is! We could enjoy a billion sunsets and planets of wildflowers and still be enemies of God. In this brief little poem, our view of God and creation become man-centered instead of God centered. What if God brought those mountains down in blazing fire or blocked out the sun with a cloud? Is God willing to burn up His creation to draw you to Himself? What if God gave you the gift of job loss because you talked about Jesus so much? Of family hatred because you’re a Christian? God reveals to us in His Word that these pains are gifts from God. Enduring these things with faith in Christ, together, is what it means to live worthy of the gospel of Jesus. Is suffering worth it? When it drives us to Christ, then yes. It is always worth it to hear God’s voice, to see His glory, to know His heart. And He desires you to know Him because He delights in you. And the method that He will use to pry our hands off of our self-centered idolatry is suffering. It is His gift for our good.

## 1. Fearless Gospel-Worthy Living is Evidence

- a. Holy living, grounded upon faith in the Christ, is a proof of the destruction (worthlessness, to be thrown out) of the opponents of the cross.
  - i. The opposite of faith is fear, so fearlessness in the face of persecution and threat is evidence of deep faith in the goodness of God and the veracity of His promises in Christ.
  - ii. This united boldness in the face of losing everything preaches to the world that God is real and that His judgment is real
  - iii. A holy life shames your opponents – 1 Pet 2:12
- b. A lack of fear, grounded upon faith in the Christ, is also proof of your salvation which is from God (so don’t get cocky, kid!)
  - i. Fearless faith is proof *to us* of our salvation

1. And this salvation, faith included, is a gift of God
2. Eph 2:8 – our faith is a gift of God for which nobody can boast
- ii. Assurance of the faithfulness of Christ and the sufficiency of His person and His work
  1. Fearlessness proves to us that our faith is real because our eyes are not upon what man can do, but on what God has done and promised to do
  2. Fearlessness shows that I am trusting in the Savior and that His Word is enough for me to risk my comfort and my life
  3. When I am afraid of man, it is because I doubt the promises of Christ, and therefore I doubt my own salvation (though I may not want to deal with this emotionally and so ignore its implication)
- iii. Eyes of faith upon Jesus show me that He suffered greatly at the hands of men, but God is faithful
- c. Note the juxtaposition of destruction/salvation, fear/faith, opponents/you
  - i. There is a strong contrast between all of these things
  - ii. Paul actually uses the word “oppose” to show that all of these things are opposite things, they are against one another

## 2. Suffering for Christ is a Gift from God

- a. This God-granted fearlessness of faith in Christ comes in the light of God-granted persecution *for* Christ.
  - i. “for the sake of Christ”
  - ii. This is not suffering of any kind, but of a specific kind: persecution on behalf of Christ (1 Pet 4:15-19)
    1. How do we suffer on behalf of Christ?
    2. Why did they persecute and kill Jesus?
  - iii. 2 Tim 3:12 – All who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
- b. Just like our salvation is God’s gift to us, so also is suffering
  - i. That’s hard to swallow: I like salvation...I don’t like suffering
  - ii. If it’s good enough for my Savior, then it’s good enough for me!

## 3. How is Suffering a Gift?

- a. Suffering is a gift that reveals God
  - i. There is no greater joy to the Christian than to know God
    1. At whatever cost, through whatever shame, by whatever trials, to see and know God in the face of Jesus Christ is the goal
    2. When this is my highest desire, then suffering becomes lighter, endurable for the treasure which lies ahead
      - a. Hebrews 12:2 – Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him of sitting at the right hand of the Father
  - ii. Suffering reveals God’s sovereign mercy
    1. James 1:2-3; 5:11 – steadfast endurance is blessed for it reveals God’s mercy and compassion
    2. Job 42:5-6 – “I had heard of You with the ear’s hearing, but now my eye sees You”

- iii. Suffering reveals God's power
  - 1. 2 Cor 4:7 – “we have this treasure in jars of clay *to reveal* that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us”
  - 2. John 16:13-16 – the promise of the Spirit and His revealing of Christ and the Father is given in the context of persecution
- iv. Suffering reveals God's true life
  - 1. 2 Cor 4:8-12 – “carry death within us” so that the life of Christ would be revealed in their body

- b. Suffering for Christ assures us that we are truly heirs of God and united to Him
  - i. Enduring suffering for Christ gives us assurance that we are truly God's children and heirs with our suffering Master
    - 1. Suffering does not accomplish our salvation,
    - 2. but it gives our hearts and minds assurance that we truly treasure and trust Christ and will be glorified with Him
  - ii. Romans 8:17 – “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him”
  - iii. 1 Peter 4:12-14 – “if you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you”
  - iv. Heb 12:10 – “He disciplines us for our good, that we might share in His holiness”
  - v. 2 Thess 1:4-5 – “...all your persecutions and tribulations which you endure is evidence of the righteous judgment of God so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering...”

“All the afflictions, and all the temptations, and all the oppressions, and all the oppositions, and all the persecutions which befall a godly man, shall work for his good. Every cross, and every loss, and every disease which befall the holy man, shall work for his good. Every device, every snare, every deceit, every stratagem, and every enterprise of Satan against the holy man, shall work for his good. Every prosperity and every adversity; every storm and every calm; every bitter and every sweet; every cross and every comfort—shall work for the holy man's good.

When God gives a mercy—that shall work for his good. When God takes away a mercy—that shall work for his good.

O Christian! What though friends and relations frown upon you, what though enemies are plotting and conspiring against you, what though needs, like armed men, are breaking in upon you, what though men rage, and devils roar against you, what though sickness is devastating your family, what though death stands every day at your elbow—yet there is no reason for you to fear nor faint, because all these things shall work for your good!”

—Thomas Brooks, *The Crown and Glory of Christianity, or, Holiness, the Only Way to Happiness*

- c. Suffering is an honor and privilege to suffer for the One whom you treasure
  - i. Everybody suffers willingly for what he treasures
    - 1. Freedom for the oppressed – *William Wallace*
    - 2. Love for the romantic – *Wesley* (Princess Bride)

3. Vengeance for the mistreated – *Maximus Decimus Meridius* (Gladiator)
  4. Christ for the Christian – insert martyred saint here
- ii. There is great honor and joy in suffering for the sake of Christ
    1. Acts 5:41 – “and they were rejoicing because they were counted worthy of suffering for the Name”
    2. Phil 2:17 – “I am glad and rejoice with you all, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering on the sacrificial offering of your faith”
  - iii. Suffering looks to the eternal joy rather than the temporal pain
    1. Heb 11:26 – “He [Moses] considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt for he was looking for the reward.”
    2. Luke 6:22-23 – “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they throw you out and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets.”
    3. 2 Cor 4:17 – “light and momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we do not look to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.”
- d. Suffering draws us out of self-reliance and into dependence upon Jesus
- i. Suffering keeps us from trusting in the things of the world and from desiring those things more than God
    1. Our joy in suffering for Christ reveals that we treasure Him and His glory more than we treasure our comfort, safety, ease, etc.
    2. Our bitterness or avoidance of suffering for the sake of Christ reveals that we are idolizing something: comfort, money, whatever we’re about to lose
    3. God uses suffering to pry our hands off of these idols because they will destroy us
  - ii. 2 Cor 1:9 – Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.
  - iii. 1 Pet 1:6-7 – suffering is a testing of the genuineness of one’s faith, which is more precious than gold, and results in the glory of Christ
- e. Suffering brings us into communion with Christ
- i. 1 Pet 2:21 – called to suffering because we are to follow in the footsteps of Christ
  - ii. Heb 13:12-14 – let us go *to Him* outside the camp and suffer reproach with Him
  - iii. Phil 3:10 – “the fellowship of His sufferings”
  - iv. Colossians 1:24 – “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, the church”

I stood a mendicant of God before His royal throne  
 And begged him for one priceless gift, which I could call my own  
 I took the gift from out His hand, but as I would depart  
 I cried, ‘But Lord this is a thorn and it has pierced my heart  
 This is a strange; a hurtful gift, which Thou hast given me.’  
 He said, ‘My child, I give good gifts and gave My best to thee.’  
 I took it home and though at first the cruel thorn hurt sore,  
 As long years passed I learned at last to love it more and more  
 I learned He never gives a thorn without this added grace,

He takes the thorn to pin aside the veil which hides His face.

-Martha Snell Nicholson, *The Thorn*

Conclusion:

Jesus is worthy of the fruits of His suffering. He is worthy of the worship of all the earth, so let us proclaim the faith of the gospel of the Christ together. He is worthy of the fruits of His suffering, so let us proclaim the faith of the gospel together until all know and worship Him. He is worthy of the glory that due to His name, so let us reject together the desire for ease and comfort in order to attempt great things for His name

Counting it all joy to endure fiery trials for the sake of His name

Rejoicing in the acceptance of any who turn and worship Him through faith

Going outside the camp to suffer with Him for He is glorious and worthy to be praised

1 Peter 5:10-11