

Summer Nights @



“Strong Through The Storm”

Introduction

THE PLAN/CALENDAR

- June 3rd – The Storm
 - Is God Big and Good Enough?
- June 10th – The Desert
 - What is Suffering?
- June 17th – The Valley
 - Where is God? Can God Bring Me Through?
- June 24th – The Darkness
 - How Should We Go Through Suffering?
- July 1st – The Garden
 - Does God understand? Does God Care?

DISCLAIMERS

- I won't make anyone share anything with anyone... and yet, maybe that's what you need to do the most...
- Have some grace for ME
 - No Perfect answers... because evil is evil... it doesn't make sense... that's the point!
 - This class won't fix it
 - Some things can't be undone this side of heaven
 - Understanding a wound or getting a Band-Aid doesn't fix the hole... only time and God can do that.
- Have Grace for Each other – Everyone's in a Different Place
 - Can't compare sufferings
 - Different things will help or be irrelevant to different people
 - This is one thing in theory and a very different thing in practice
- Stick with this...
 - Suffering can destroy a faith... or solidify it

THE RULES

- Our perspective, as Christians, has to be the truth of the Bible
 - Experience is important, but there needs to be a higher authority/purpose
-

Recap

IS GOD BIG AND GOOD ENOUGH?

- Jesus calms the storm
 - Do we trust that God is bigger than the storm?
 - Do we trust that God is good enough to help?
 - Is God SO BIG that he sent the storm so that he could calm it?...
- God is Sovereign
 - “The biblical teaching that God is king, supreme ruler, and lawgiver of the entire universe.” (Elwell 1131)
 - Psalm 103:19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.
 - *Though Christians are less apt to agree with God’s sovereignty when it comes to salvation (we want to protect our free will), and when it comes to suffering (we want to protect God’s goodness)*
- God is Good
 - “The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval” (Grudem 197)
 - PSALM 100:5 FOR THE LORD IS GOOD AND HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER; HIS FAITHFULNESS CONTINUES THROUGH ALL GENERATIONS.

EVIL

- It’s bad, it’s real, and it doesn’t make sense
- 2 Categories
 - Moral Evil – Sin and its consequences
 - Natural Evil – Hurricanes and floods and earthquakes and diseases, etc.
- Some Natural Evil came about because of the Moral Evil of the Fall
- But not all evil is due to sin, fault, punishment or discipline
- God hates Evil
- God often directs evil by the actions of moral free humans (I.e. Joseph (GENESIS 50:20 YOU INTENDED TO HARM ME, BUT GOD INTENDED IT FOR GOOD TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT IS NOW BEING DONE, THE SAVING OF MANY LIVES.))

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

- God is Good
- God is Sovereign
- So how can evil exist?

SOME ANSWERS (THEODICIES)

- Irenaeus – Evil is necessary so that we can grow and develop spiritually
- Augustine – It’s all a misuse of human freedom: we have a choice to choose good or evil and we choose evil
 - Weakness: Why couldn’t God create a world with freewill and no evil?
- A Story of Perspectives: Author and Characters
- A Different Angle
 - The Problem of pleasure
 - First, why do we deserve good things to happen?
 - Second, are we allowed to question God in an accusatory way?
 - Especially in light of our rebellion
 - “Why do bad things happen to good people?... That happened only once... and he volunteered (Sproul3 @ end)
- Might God be PROUD of what he’s doing through suffering, because from his perspective it’s telling his story better?
- What’s the alternative?
 - He’s not in control?
 - He doesn’t care?
 - It’s all random/fate?

THE STORM REVISITED

- There really is a storm
- God is there in the boat with you
- God is bigger than the storm
- And he loves you...

Different Views of Suffering

"Life is pain, Highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something"
(*The Princess Bride*)

"In the United States... I encountered a society that seeks to avoid pain at all costs. Patients lived at a greater comfort level than any I had previously treated, but they seemed far less equipped to handle suffering and far more traumatized by it." (Brand 12)

KARMA AND THE MORALISTIC VIEW

- If you're suffering it's likely caused by how you lived in a previous life
- If you live well now, your future lives won't need to suffer as much
- It all gets meted out in the end, so don't worry and live well

BUDDHISM AND THE SELF-TRANSCENDENT VIEW

- Suffering is just unfulfilled desires based on the illusion that we're individual selves
- To solve the problem of suffering, we just need to get rid of desire
- Think Differently and be detached

ISLAM - FATALISTIC VIEW

- Everything is just set, by the inscrutable will of Allah
- So surrender to Allah's will without question
- Embrace one's destiny nobly and endure

DUALISTIC VIEWS

- The world is a battle ground between good and evil
- Suffering is just a casualty of war
- So be on the side of good and hope that good wins!

SECULARISM (OF THE WEST)

- Suffering and pain have no purpose
 - "In Dawkins's view, the reason people struggle so mightily in the face of suffering is because they will not accept that it *never* has any purpose. It is senseless, neither bad nor

- good – because categories such as good and evil are meaningless in the universe we live in.” (Keller 21)
 - “As Dr. Paul Brand argues in the last chapter of his book ‘The Gift of Pain’, it is because the meaning of life in the United States is the pursuit of pleasure and personal freedom that suffering is so traumatic for Americans.” (Keller 22)
- Pain is only bad
 - “I know well the typical attitude toward pain, especially in Western societies. J.K. Huysmans calls it ‘the useless, unjust, incomprehensible, inept abomination that is physical pain.’ Neurologist Russell Martin adds, ‘Pain is greedy, boorish, meanly debilitating. It is cruel and calamitous and often constant, and, as its Latin root *poena* implies, it is the corporeal punishment each of us ultimately suffers for being alive.’” (Brand 12-13)
- So just learn ways to cope, numb, avoid, and work for a better society with less suffering
- Except this is the least helpful view for sufferers
 - Doesn’t encompass all the different forms of suffering
 - Naively thinks that we can be better
 - It’s a thin version of the world
 - “As Victor Frankl recognized in the death camps, people who are their own legislators of morality and meaning have nothing to die for, and therefore nothing to live for when life takes away their freedom.” (Keller 77)
 - “‘The desire to make suffering intelligible,’ (Shweder) writes, ‘is one of those *dignifying* peculiarities of our species...’ That is, one of the things that distinguishes us from animals is that we do not simply squeal under suffering and seek to flee it. We search to find some point in the pain and thereby to transcend it, rather than seeing ourselves as helpless cogs in a cruel machine. And this drive to find meaning in suffering is not only dignifying, it is indelible.” (Keller 21-22)

	Moralistic	Self-transcendent	Fatalistic	Dualistic	Secular
Cause	Wrongdoing	Illusion	Destiny	Cosmic conflict	Accident
Response	Do good	Detachment	Endurance	Purified faithfulness	Technique
Resolution	Eternal bliss	Enlightenment	Glory and honor	Triumph of the light	Better society

HOW THE CHRISTIAN VIEW IS DIFFERENT

- "Unlike the more fatalistic view so prevalent in shame and honor cultures, 'in Christianity there is none of the ancient arrogance... none of the self-praise of the sufferer who measures the degree of his suffering against his own power to which others bear witness.' ... "Unlike Buddhists, Christians believe that suffering is real, not an illusion." ... "Unlike believers in karma, Christians believe that suffering is often unjust and disproportionate. Life is simply not fair. People who live well often do not do well." ... "Unlike the dualist (and to some degree, the moralistic) view, Christianity does not see suffering as a means of working off your sinful debts by virtue of the quality of your endurance of pain." (Keller 28-29)
- "Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine." (Keller 30)

HOW CHRISTIANS SUFFERED

- "...our own culture gives people almost no tools for dealing with tragedy." (Keller 15)
- "Cyprian recounted how, during the terrible plagues, Christians did not abandon sick loved ones nor flee the cities, as most of the pagan residents did. Instead they stayed to tend the sick and faced their death with calmness. Other early Christian writings, like Ignatius of Antioch's 'To the Romans' and Polycarp's 'Letter to the Philippians', pointed to the poise with which Christians faced torture and death for their faith. 'Christians used suffering to argue for the superiority of their creed... [because] they suffered better than pagans.'" (Keller 41-42)

A Tool for Understanding

THE POWER OF ORTHODOX PARADOX

- The beauty of our faith is holding onto God's extremes at the same time, instead of choosing or settling.
 - Jesus is God AND Jesus is Human
 - God is Sovereign AND We are Responsible
 - God hates Suffering AND God uses Suffering

The Story of Joseph

A FATHER, SON, AND 11 BROTHERS

- Jacob was the younger twin: Favored by his mother, Least-favored by his father.
- Jacob has 12 sons by 2 wives and 2 others
 - Joseph is the 11th son, but the first born of Jacob's favorite wife
- Joseph knows he's the favorite and so do the brothers

DOWN IN A HOLE

- A Hole
- Slavery
- Prison

A DREAM THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

- Pharaoh has a Dream
- 7 & 7
- Joseph's fortunes reversed

REUNITED

- 10 Brothers visit
- 11 Brothers visit
- A Test
- Reunited
 - GENESIS 50:20 YOU INTENDED TO HARM ME, BUT GOD INTENDED IT FOR GOOD TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT IS NOW BEING DONE, THE SAVING OF MANY LIVES.

Types of Suffering and Temperaments in Suffering

JOSEPH'S SUFFERINGS' TYPES

- Caused by his parents and their issues
- Caused by himself as he treats his brother as he does
- He does the right thing, and suffers for it
- He suffers because of natural forces in the world

4 TYPES OF SUFFERING

- Caused By Us
 - When you sin, there are consequences
 - Ex. Jonah runs from God and ends up inside a big fish
 - His racism, fear, and avoidance take him to a bad place
- Caused By Others
 - Sometimes even caused by our good behavior
 - Ex. Paul isn't doing anything wrong when he is beaten, imprisoned, and attacked
- Loss
 - Grief and loss when we face decay and death
 - Ex. Mary and Martha
- None of the Above
 - And sometimes things just happen for apparently no known reason
 - Ex. Job (Keller 207-212)

JOSEPH'S POSSIBLE TEMPERAMENTS IN SUFFERING

- Woe is me
- Victim
- God hates me
- Discipline
- God meant it for good

5 TYPES OF TEMPERAMENTS (Simone Weil)

- Isolation
 - When we suffer we run. We push people away and are pushed away
- Implosion
 - Becoming self-absorbed (So that you can't give, receive, or feel love.) - You can't get out of yourself
- Condemnation
 - Comes from a shame we feel. We feel condemned. We feel like a victim
- Anger
 - Anger at oneself, others, God, or just general anger
- Temptation towards complicity
 - We become comfortable in our affliction, and even sabotage our healings (Keller 213-216)

A Bigger View of Suffering

WHAT'S GOD DOING IN JOSEPH'S SUFFERINGS?

- Growing and Preparing Joseph
- Saving Many
- Getting the Israelites into Egypt
- Changing/Maturing Joseph's brothers
- And INFINITELY more reasons

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SUFFERING

- Suffering as Justice and Judgment
 - "After Adam and Eve disobey their Creator, God describes what the fallen world will look like. It is virtually a catalogue of all forms of suffering - including spiritual alienation, inner psychological pain, asocial and interpersonal conflict and cruelty, natural disasters, disease, and death" (Keller 131)
 - And sins often carry their own consequences
 - PROVERBS 19:15 LAZINESS BRINGS ON DEEP SLEEP, AND THE SHIFTLESS MAN GOES HUNGRY. PROVERBS 13:20

HE WHO WALKS WITH THE WISE GROWS WISE, BUT A
COMPANION OF FOOLS SUFFERS HARM.

- THEREFORE: When we face suffering we must recognize that we don't deserve the good world that God created. It's also worth looking to see if there is sin at the root of our suffering
- THEREFORE: Don't be proud
- Suffering is often mysterious and unjust
 - "While the Bible tells us that suffering in the world is the result of human sin in general, it is just as emphatic that individual instances of suffering may not be the result of a particular sin." (Keller 132)
 - The best people often have terrible lives (I.e. Job)
 - ECCLESIASTES 4:1-3 GAIN I LOOKED AND SAW ALL THE OPPRESSION THAT WAS TAKING PLACE UNDER THE SUN: I SAW THE TEARS OF THE OPPRESSED-- AND THEY HAVE NO COMFORTER; POWER WAS ON THE SIDE OF THEIR OPPRESSORS-- AND THEY HAVE NO COMFORTER. ² AND I DECLARED THAT THE DEAD, WHO HAD ALREADY DIED, ³ ARE HAPPIER THAN THE LIVING, WHO ARE STILL ALIVE. ³ BUT BETTER THAN BOTH IS HE WHO HAS NOT YET BEEN, WHO HAS NOT SEEN THE EVIL THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN.
 - Blind Man - "not in that condition because of his sin or that of his parents, but in order to fulfill God's inscrutable purposes." (Keller 135)
 - While people want to believe that people get what they deserve, this is just not the reality that we see
 - But this also probably stems from our desire to know that we can be in control of our own lives. I can good-life my way out of suffering. But that's just not the case.
 - THEREFORE: We must be slow to assume that others who are suffering are getting their just desserts. And when suffering comes upon us, and there's no sin to be found, we can be confused and cry out in distress.
 - THEREFORE: Don't judge and don't be trapped by guilt

A World Without Pain

A WORLD WITHOUT PAIN

- “A world without pain? Can such a place exist? It not only can – it does. But it’s no utopia. It’s a colony for leprosy patients: a world where people literally feel no pain, and reap horrifying consequences.” (Brand Back Cover)
- “Tanya suffered from a rare genetic defect known informally as ‘congenital indifference to pain.’ She was healthy in every respect but one: she did not feel pain. Nerves in her hands and feet transmitted messages about changes in pressure and temperature – she felt a kind of tingling when she burned herself or bit a finger – but these carried no hint of unpleasantness. Tanya lacked any mental construct of pain.” (Brand 5)

PLEASURE AND PAIN

- The Oxford English Dictionary defines pleasure as a condition ‘induced by the enjoyment or anticipation of what is felt or viewed as good or desirable... the opposite of pain.’ Leonardo Da Vinci saw things differently. He sketched in his notebooks a solitary male figure splitting into two, about belly height: two torsos, two bearded heads, and four arms, like Siamese twins joined at the waist. ‘Allegory of Pleasure and Pain,’ he entitled the study, commenting, ‘Pleasure and Pain are represented as twins, as though they were joined together, for there is never the one without the other... They are made with their backs turned to each other because they are contrary the one to the other. They are made growing out of the same trunk because they have one and the same foundation, for the foundation of pleasure is labor with pain, and the foundations of pain are vain and lascivious pleasures.’” (Brand 289)
- Agreeing with Da Vinci, Brand writes, “One reason, as I have made clear, is that I no longer see pain as an enemy to flee. From pain-deprived people I have learned that I cannot easily enjoy life without the protection provided by pain. There is another factor, too; increasingly I have become aware of the curious intertwining of pain and pleasure. I would redraw my graph of the range of human experience to show a single central peak with a

surrounding plain. That peak would represent Life with a capital L, the point at which pain and pleasure meet, emerging from a flatland of sleep or death or indifference.” (Brand 289-290)

- “Currently, I sense an uneasiness in the United States and much of the West. The good life does not seem quite so good as promised. ... To me, at the heart of the issue lies a basic confusion regarding pain and pleasure. I may risk sounding like an old man reminiscing about ‘the good old days,’ but nonetheless I suspect that affluence has made the modern industrialized West a more difficult place in which to experience pleasure. This is a deep irony, because no society in history has succeeded so well in eliminating pain and exploiting leisure. Yet happiness tends to recede from those who pursue it. Ever elusive, it appears at unexpected moments, as a by-product rather than a product.” (Brand 291)
- “‘Everywhere a greater joy is preceded by a greater suffering,’ Augustine concludes. This insight into pleasure is one that we in the affluent West need to remember.” (Brand 300)

“For good and for ill, the human species has among its privileges the preeminence of pain. We have the unique ability to step outside ourselves and self-reflect, by reading a book about pain, for example, or by summoning up the memory of a terrifying ordeal. Some pains – the pain of grief or emotional trauma – have no physical stimulus whatever. They are states of mind, concocted by the alchemy of the brain. These feats of consciousness make it possible for suffering to loiter in the mind long after the body’s need for it has passed. Yet they also give us the potential to attain an outlook that will change the very landscape of the pain experience. We can learn to cope, and even to triumph.” (Brand 13)

What Suffering Does

“According to Christian theology, suffering is not meaningless – neither in general nor in particular instances. For God has purposed to defeat evil so exhaustively on the cross that all the ravages of evil will someday be undone and we, despite participating in it so deeply, will be saved. God is accomplishing this not in spite of suffering, agony, and loss but through it – it is through the suffering of God that the suffering of humankind will eventually be overcome and undone.” (Keller 163)

SUFFERING BRINGS GOD GLORY

- “So one of the purposes of suffering is to glorify God by simply treating him as the infinite, sovereign, all-wise, and yet incarnate and suffering God that he is. This glorifies God – the most fitting thing that can be done. And if we do what fits God and our souls, we will find ... a rest not based on circumstances.” (Keller 174)
- ROMANS 8:17-18 NOW IF WE ARE CHILDREN, THEN WE ARE HEIRS-- HEIRS OF GOD AND CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST, IF INDEED WE SHARE IN HIS SUFFERINGS IN ORDER THAT WE MAY ALSO SHARE IN HIS GLORY. ¹⁸ I CONSIDER THAT OUR PRESENT SUFFERINGS ARE NOT WORTH COMPARING WITH THE GLORY THAT WILL BE REVEALED IN US.
- 1 PETER 4:13 BUT REJOICE THAT YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST, SO THAT YOU MAY BE OVERJOYED WHEN HIS GLORY IS REVEALED.

SUFFERING SHOWS GOD’S GLORY

- “Trusting God in suffering also glorifies him to others. When believers handle suffering rightly, they are not merely glorifying God to God. They are showing the world something of the greatness of God – and perhaps nothing else can reveal him to people in quite the same way.” (Keller 175)
- 2 CORINTHIANS 4:17 FOR OUR LIGHT AND MOMENTARY TROUBLES ARE ACHIEVING FOR US AN ETERNAL GLORY THAT FAR OUTWEIGHS THEM ALL.
- EPHESIANS 3:13 I ASK YOU, THEREFORE, NOT TO BE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE OF MY SUFFERINGS FOR YOU, WHICH ARE YOUR GLORY.
- 1 PETER 1:6-7 IN THIS YOU GREATLY REJOICE, THOUGH NOW FOR A LITTLE WHILE YOU MAY HAVE HAD TO SUFFER GRIEF IN ALL KINDS OF TRIALS. ⁷ THESE HAVE COME SO THAT YOUR FAITH-- OF GREATER WORTH THAN GOLD, WHICH PERISHES EVEN THOUGH REFINED BY FIRE-- MAY BE PROVED GENUINE AND MAY RESULT IN PRAISE, GLORY AND HONOR WHEN JESUS CHRIST IS REVEALED.

“I saw that suffering is the inextricable basecolor thread woven through the fabric of the gospel. It is the canvas upon which salvation has been painted. Somehow in modern-day Christian circles, we tend to see God’s faithfulness as saving us from suffering. And yes, sometimes, in His great mercy, He does save us from suffering. But that is not the mark of His faithfulness. We see in Scripture that many of those He loved deeply are also those who suffered greatly. – Gigi” (Keller 185)

SUFFERING CAN GROW US

- "Suffering, as we will see, can lead to personal growth, training, and transformation, but we must never see it as primarily a way to improve ourselves. That view could lead us to a form of masochism, an enjoyment of ache, because we only feel virtuous when we are in pain. Even without such perspective, suffering tends to make you self-absorbed." (Keller 187-188)
- Psychologist Jonathan Haidt points out 3 often seen benefits in those who have gone through suffering
 1. They become more resilient and live with less anxiety
 2. Strengthens relationships
 3. Changes priorities and philosophies (Keller 164-165)
- With the caveat: "Haidt makes a crucial disclaimer when he says, 'I don't want to celebrate suffering, prescribe it for everyone, or minimize the moral imperative to reduce it where we can. I don't want to ignore the pain that ripples out from each diagnosis of cancer.'" (Keller 166)

GOD USES SUFFERING

- Passages
 - Hebrews 12:1-17
 - Romans 8:18-30
 - 2 Corinthians 1:3-12
 - 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:5
 - 2 Corinthians 11:24-12:10
 - 1 Peter
 - "The Bible teaches us that God uses suffering to remove our weaknesses and build us up" (Keller 190)
- Transforms and humbles our view of ourselves
 - Makes us examine ourselves and see our weaknesses
- Makes us appreciate the good things in life more
 - "Everyone knows they're going to die," he said again, "but nobody believe it. If we did, we would do things differently." - So we kid ourselves about death, I said. - "Yes. But there's a better approach. To know you're going to die, and to be *prepared* for it at any time. That's better. That way you can actually be *more* involved in your life while you're living." (Tuesdays With Morrie 81)
- Can strengthen our relationship with God
- Helps us when others go through trials

THE LORD'S GYM AND FURNACE

- "The common themes that tie together the metaphors of the furnace and the gymnasium are striking. Both are places of danger. Wrong responses could bring disaster. But right responses can bring beauty and strength. They must not - and, really, cannot - be avoided, nor should we panic when we find ourselves within their confines. Instead we look to the one who has passed through the ultimate furnace and race course when he went to the cross, and who now stands and walks beside us in our suffering." (Keller 196)

Conclusions

CAN WE MAYBE FIND MEANING IN SUFFERING?

- "'You desire to know the art of living, my friend? It is contained in one phrase: make use of suffering.' - Henri Frederic Amiel" (Keller 64)
- "Nothing is more important than to learn how to maintain a life of purpose in the midst of painful adversity." (Keller 13)
- "The difference came down to what Frankl called meaning. The problem is that contemporary people think life is all about finding happiness. We decide what conditions will make us happy and then we work to bring those conditions about. To live for happiness means that you are trying to get something out of life. But when suffering comes along, it takes the conditions for happiness away, and so suffering destroys all your reason to keep living. But to 'live for meaning' means not that you try to get something out of life but rather that life expects something from us. In other words, you have meaning only when there is something in life more important than your own personal freedom and happiness, something for which you are glad to sacrifice your happiness." (Keller 70-71)

"...suffering is at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is not only the way Christ became like and redeemed us, but it is one of the main ways we become like him and experience his redemption. And that means that our suffering, despite its painfulness, is also filled with purpose and usefulness." (Keller 163-164)

For Further Study

BOOKS:

- Albom, Mitch, Tuesdays with Morrie
- Brand, Dr. Paul, The Gift of Pain
- Keller, Timothy, Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering

VIDEO/CLASS

- 'Suffering and the Sovereignty of God' - Sproul



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