

Isaiah 53 (NIV)

The School of Life The Pain and Suffering of God

Introduction: If it is your first time joining us - welcome. We have dedicated this year to Biblical Literacy; meaning we as a church are reading the Bible for ourselves to know first hand what it teaches and in order to be shaped by the story of God. In our current series - The school of Life - we have been discussing pain and suffering - how we go through it, and how we approach God in it and if you've been paying attention in your reading through the Year of Biblical Literacy you've noticed that there is a lot of suffering in the Bible - in fact I don't know of a Biblical character who doesn't experience some amount of pain and suffering in their life. So as we are reading along, and studying, the scripture is offering us many fellow travelers on this life's road of pain and suffering - it gives us words to identify and express our pain and suffering - it gives us songs to sing, and prayers to pray to bring us comfort through the dark night of the soul.. My prayer is that as we read, and assimilate this story, these characters will become our close companions and their songs and their prayers will become ours.. that we will truly be shaped by them....

It has been mentioned before - when it comes to evil - the Bible doesn't give us a discourse on the origin of Evil - it's mentioned a handful of times - in Isaiah, and then again by Jesus in the Gospel of John, then John himself - but it's not really the details and explanation that we are looking for. Anyone feel a similar thing when we read through Job or about pain and suffering?? - Job's questions of unjustly suffering are never answered - he never gets the why answered. - The Heck??

I will say Job is radically changed by his suffering - dare I say, he is even bettered, refined by his suffering - At the end Job says, - **"I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you. You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me. You said, 'Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.' I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."**
- A powerful, life altering encounter with God...

But I have to say this is still not the vindication that I'm looking for in my own life. I want encounter - But I also want answers - And I imagine that some are left wondering - is that it? Is Christianity's only answer to suffering - God is not the author of evil, God is at war with evil, God uses evil for Good, or like in Job's case you are too small to understand... and besides what doesn't kill you makes you stronger...?? Is that it?

Like Job and our Psalm from last week, Psalm 77, many of our questions don't get answered, many of our problems are not resolved. The truth is the Bible doesn't give us an answer to our pain and suffering - instead it gives us a person. Jesus

In Jesus, God enters the story of humanity, he himself suffers the fate of mankind.

Christianity is the only worldview in which God has suffered with His Creation. Christianity is also the only religion in which one cannot say - God has done nothing about the problem of evil. Rather, God has dealt with it in a just fashion and he has extended the offer of salvation to all humanity, made possible through Jesus' work on the cross. Skeptics can use evil, pain and suffering as a stone against Christianity, but there is no consolation in any other worldview. Christianity is the only religion or worldview that has an answer to evil and suffering. We are living in an abnormal world which God will restore.

Dorothy Sayers writing about the Incarnation of God, said - *"For whatever reason God chose to make man as he is - limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death - God had the honesty and the courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair and death. When he was a man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile."* - Dorothy Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church*

This morning I want to consider how the Pain and Suffering of God - speaks to our own pain and suffering.

1. The Man of Sorrows

1. Many in the modern age see the career of Jesus as a huge success with a tragic turn of events that brought about rejection, suffering, persecution and death. Jesus is a success story turned tragedy. But nothing could be further from the truth. The story of Jesus is one of suffering from beginning to end.
2. Jesus, The King of heaven and earth, the incarnate second person of the trinity, was born in the 1st century - first of all a brutal time of history to be alive. The Jewish people were under Roman tyranny and had been under tyranny for hundreds of years - which meant slavery, slaughterings, and just an uncomfortable life in general. Jesus was born in obscurity, and not in the limelight. There was a lot of controversy around his conception and birth - a pretty sketchy situation - born of a virgin - in a very socially conservative religious culture. Honestly - how many people do you think believed that story? His family would have been social outcasts - in fact when they go to their home town to have and have the baby - none of their family bring them in - that would be unheard of in that hospitable culture - but the whole situation with Jesus was taboo - so he is literally born in a barn. He is presented to the poor and insignificant and not to the rich and prestigious at his birth - the magi are not kings - they're weirdo magicians who are obsessed with stars.
3. On top of that - King Herod - a tyrant and very successful murderer - When Jesus is two years of age tries to hunt him down, causing Jesus and his family to be Jewish refugees in Egypt for a number of years. Upon return - living in Nazareth - He experienced hardship and oppression under Roman tyranny, most likely the death of Joseph, his adopted father (Never mentioned after Jesus' youth), to his rejection by his family when he begins his messianic ministry - he's out of his mind....
4. Isn't it amazing to see who Jesus identifies with in his life and ministry: Remember Jesus' Sermon on the Mount - The good news he brought was for the poor and broken, little lowly people. This is who he came for, this is who he was with in daily life - the commoner, the working class man, the sick, the poor, the outcast, the prostitute, the insane, the demon oppressed, the tax collector, the scum of the earth.... oppressed, broken people, the people that we would hide our faces from. Those that remind us of the terrible

place this world can be and the awful things that people have done and do to each other. When you picture Jesus, being followed and thronged as he went through the cities of Israel what do you see? If we're honest it probably looked something like Robin hood and his crew, or a post-apocalyptic scene, or zombie apocalypse. I'll tell you what it wasn't; it wasn't clean, it wasn't nice and put together, it probably didn't feel safe. I think it would startle us to see with our own eyes the kind of company that Jesus kept.

5. See When God came to earth, he did not immune himself to the human condition, he fully identified with it and took it upon himself. As the Prophet said - "surely he has born our grief and carried our sorrow" - He was a man of sorrows and one who was a close friend to grief...

2. The Shame and Suffering of the Cross.

1. The New Testament refers again and again to the shame of the cross, referring to it as an offense, a total and complete turn off to people. Nicolai mentioned a few moths back that decent Roman citizens didn't even talk about the cross because it was so appalling and grotesque. To this day I'm not sure humans have figured out a more brutal or painful way to kill someone and yet this is the death that God chose to die in order to redeem mankind. But it isn't just the fact that the physical sufferings of the cross or so awful - but it is also the social shame and rejection as well.

2. God Forsaken.

1. The sufferings of Jesus Christ were not only physical, but also emotional, psychological, and spiritual; He experienced pain of rejection and separation from God the Father for our sake.
2. Remember what we are told by the gospel writers? **"When the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - Mark 15:33-34**
3. Jesus sufferings are immeasurable - yet when he cries out, he never cries out about his pain - but he cries out about his abandonment, and about his thirst? Isn't that strange?
4. **"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." - John 19:28**

5. Jesus is definitely thirsty - he's dehydrated and drowning in his own blood. But I'm not convinced that this is why Jesus says this. We are told that he said this "fulfilling the scriptures" so automatically we should be looking for a deeper meaning here. Not only that but once again, we haven't heard Jesus say one word about his head, his back, his hands, his feet, his face - but all of a sudden his thirst is unbearably painful?

6. Think about the horror as we get the full impact of what John is saying at the thought of Jesus being thirsty.. The one who announced to the Jewish nation -"**Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.**"Has the living water run out? Has the water of life failed? The fulness has been emptied, the infinite has become finite, the source of life has come to death....

1. It's incredible to realize that there was a MOMENT there on the cross that for the first time in all eternity something happened in the nature of God that had never happened before - there was a tearing asunder of the Godhead - a gaping wound and pain in the very heart of God - As the Father turns his face from the sin laden son - and as the eternal son taste sin and death for us - his enslaved creation. On the cross of Jesus, God himself is crucified, but it's not just the pain and suffering of the son - The Father suffers the death of the Son he dearly loves and takes upon himself the pain and suffering of humanity. Wow. (Pause) The God of the Bible is not far off in some remote palace, far removed from our pain and suffering - But is one who himself is a victim of pain and suffering.

1. John Stott In his book - the Cross of Christ, wrote, "*I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as "God on the cross". In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?I have entered many Buddhist temples in different asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of Buddha his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world.'* But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in my imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure

on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us... The cross of Christ is God's only self justification in such a world as ours." - John Stott, The Cross of Christ

7. Here is radical thing to think about - The Son of God chose a life of pain and suffering - knowing full well that he would bear the sins of the world on himself - and in this way Jesus truly is our Immanuel - Not - God over us; God before us, or even God for us; BUT - GOD WITH US - God with us in our suffering. God with us in our forsakenness, God with us in the darkness, God with us in betrayal and abandonment; There is something incredibly consoling about someone who is with you; Who has walked in your shoes, knows the same trials, troubles, pain and suffering that you know... When Evelyn was diagnosed with her congenital heart disease, more comfort than any of the Bible verses we received were the number of people that reached out to us as a resource because they also had kids with the same condition... it brought us so much comfort - others have walked this path before us and had come through it. Our suffering was real, but it wasn't unique. We weren't alone.
 1. In fact the verses that brought me so much comfort during this time were these - **"But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." - Isaiah 43:1-2**
8. And even more so in Jesus? - as we often sing - "he has walked this path before us, he is walking with us still."
9. In the cross Jesus was identifying to the fullest extent with a suffering humanity. Humanity has suffered immensely throughout history: disease, disaster, injustice, cruelty, torture, murder, heartbreak, death – history is a long tale of suffering and woe.

Jesus in His love chose to experience the full impact of what sin had done to the human race. The cross testifies to the immeasurable compassion and camaraderie of the Son of God for suffering humanity!

1. English Poet George Herbert (1593-1633) wrote an incredible poem called - The Sacrifice. In it stanza after stanza (62 in total) he chronicles the various sufferings and affliction of the life of Jesus - every one with the refrain - "Was ever grief like mine?" It's almost like Herbert is just stacking the deck - one after another, after another.. whatever your pain is - Jesus knows, whatever you're suffering - Jesus knows - sin and injustice done to you? Jesus knows - Therefore - Go to him, seek his face when you feel alone, and overwhelmed in suffering and pain - go to him.. Jesus Knows.. tell him your sorrows!

3. **Conclusion:** But in closing - something we must remember - Jesus isn't just another victim of suffering - he didn't just suffer with us but Jesus suffers in order to end all sufferings.
 1. Paul tells us that there on the cross God was working through Jesus to reconcile all things to himself - all things. Through the work of Jesus God has dealt the justice and judgment our sin deserves - which is death - so now when God comes to restore all things (And HE WILL) he can destroy all sin - without destroying us.
 2. Jesus came and suffered for us in order to end our suffering. Your suffering, your pain, my suffering, my pain, is not the end of our story - In and through the work of Jesus God promises to fill up all our emptiness, sooth all our pain and drown all our sorrows -
 3. **"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from the earth. The LORD has spoken."** - **Isaiah 25:6-8**
 4. So even though we might feel that these trials and troubles are defining us, and that our sufferings are more than we can bear -or in Paul's words - **"We face death all day long - we are like sheep**

to be slaughtered - the resounding response is NO - In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Romans 8:36-39

4. In the Gospel God offers us a suffering companion for the road of life and a table of feasting and fulness at journeys end.