

OUR EXAMPLE

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” (1 Pet 2:21)

It is important to understand that we are involved in spiritual warfare. The cosmic conflict is between God and Satan, or good and evil. Satan specializes in suffering. It is one of the major weapons in his arsenal. He used it in Eden. He used it against Job. He used it against Jesus. He will use it against you and me. God, however, attacks Satan at his strongest point. Instead of running from suffering, or seeking to avoid suffering, He allowed Jesus to suffer, and then used Satan's own weapon to destroy him. By His stripes we are healed. Through death, God destroyed him who has the power of death, that is the devil. The Scriptures point out that not only did Jesus suffer for us, He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. Obviously this means that we too will suffer. Remember the story of Benaiah who snatched a spear from the hand of an Egyptian and then killed him with his own spear (2 Sam. 23:21). This is precisely what Jesus has done to the devil. This is precisely what we can also do to the devil.

God is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5). He will not give His glory to another (Is. 42:8). When Gideon, for example, went to war against the Midianites, the Hebrews had so many soldiers that they may have falsely concluded that their victory came without God. To preclude this possibility, God instructed Gideon to send away all the soldiers but 300. Then, as you know, when the victory came, God got all the glory (see Judges 7:1 - 8). This is the way it should always be!

The law forbade the Hebrew people to worship at an altar of dressed stones (Ex. 20:25). Perhaps this prohibition was to prevent man from looking at his own works and inadvertently losing focus on the majesty of God. True worship is uncluttered by the works of man. We are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Nothing in Scripture is more important than this!

When God created the heavens and the earth there was no suffering. Suffering comes from sin. It is devil who is responsible for suffering. It is the devil who inspired Pharaoh to enslave and torture the people of God. It is the devil who prompted Pharaoh to pursue the Hebrews to the Red Sea. It is the devil who wanted to destroy the Children of Israel before they had a chance to inherit the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Note however, that God turned the devil's desires into a deadly trap. God used the suffering and vulnerability of the Hebrews to lure Pharaoh to his death. God parted the waters of the Red Sea for His people, and used the same waters to destroy the armies of the Egyptians. What happened to the Hebrew here is specifically said to be an example for us (1 Cor. 10:5, 11). At the very time when the forces of evil seem to inflict the greatest suffering, God was about to gain the greatest victory. We should not be surprised that the glorious resurrection of Christ was only three short days removed from the humiliation and suffering of the cross.

Jesus was not destroyed by the suffering He experienced. In fact, the “Man of sorrows” was made perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10). Remember! He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. When viewed through the prism of faith our suffering is actually a cause for rejoicing. Note! **“we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” (Rom 5:3-5)**

Over and over Jesus emphasized that He didn't come to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent him (see John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 6:40; etc.) This too is an example for us. What happens to us is significant only if it results in glorifying God. While this may seem on the surface to be an overstatement, or exaggeration, please consider that it may very well be the defining consideration when we stand up before God in Judgement. Remember that Jesus will come to be glorified and admired by His people (2 Thess. 1:10). But even the glorification of Christ is only temporal. Ultimately, Jesus too will surrender everything and God will be “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).