

SUFFERING AND GLORY

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

Atheist Richard Dawkins has said, ‘The universe we observe has ... no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. ... DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music’. In his simplistic view pain is not a problem, it just is. In his limited view nature knows no reason and suffering has no purpose. In his narrow parochial perspective man lives for a few brief years and disappears into a hopeless grave. How sad! How short sighted! How pitiful!

CS Lewis, a devout Christian, had a more positive view of suffering. In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, he wrote: “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.” Believing in God does not solve all of the problems created by suffering, but at least it offers hope that the sufferings we experience in this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory we shall experience in the life which is to come. In this view man does not disappear when he dies but has the opportunity to live forever. In fact, Christians believe that man is so significant that the Sovereign of the Universe dared to die on a cross to share in his suffering.

This teaching, of course, is woven throughout the entire fabric of Biblical teaching. Paul, for example, started a church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1 - 9). Sadly, these new believers immediately suffered persecution for their faith just as did their brethren in Jerusalem (1 Thess. 2:14 - 16). Paul used their suffering as an argument for a future Judgement (2 Thess. 1:4 - 10). If good people were rewarded on earth, and bad people were punished on earth, this argument would not be valid. The fact that the reverse is often true is proof that our just and loving Heavenly Father will rectify all wrongs in a future life.

As you know, when God placed man in Eden there was no suffering. It was a paradise! All of the birds of the air, and all of the beasts of the earth, and everything that had the breath of life, did not eat one another, they ate green plants (Gen. 1:30). Originally, there was no blood shed or death in Eden. That’s why God looked up it and said it was “very good”!

Then we are told that sin entered into the world and death by sin (Rom.5:12). Now, as a result of sin, there would be bloodshed, pain and suffering. This curse not only affected mankind, but also caused the whole creation to groan in pain like childbirth (Rom. 8:22). This metaphor, of course, hearkens back to the original curse when God warned that because of sin women would experience increased pain in childbirth (Gen. 3:16). Even this pain, however, had a redeeming virtue. It only lasted a short time. Jesus said that the mother’s pain would soon be forgotten for the joy that a child is born into this world (Jn. 16:21). Paul describes the sufferings of believers as **“Light and momentary troubles”** that enable us to achieve eternal glory (2 Cor. 4:17).

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Though Jesus was God He did not cling to His deity but emptied Himself to become a man (Phil. 2:5 - 11). As a man He suffered the same as we do. The “sufferings of Christ” are therefore an integral part of Biblical teaching. Yes! He understands what we are going through because He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet, without sin (Heb. 4:15). Please prayerfully consider the following Scriptures:

- After establishing His identity as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He had to **“go to Jerusalem and suffer many things”** (Matt. 16:21; Mk. 8:31; Lk 9:22). On this occasion, as you recall, Peter rebuked Jesus and insisted that He would never have to suffer. That’s when Jesus said: **“Get thee behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men”** (Matt. 16:23). Suffering was an integral part of Christ’s mission!
- Note! **“The Son of man must suffer much and be rejected”** (Mk.9:12).
- And again! (The Son of man) **“must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation”** (Lk. 17:25).
- Here are the words of the resurrected Christ to two disciples on the Road to Emmaus: **“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into His glory?”** (Lk. 24:46).
- Here are the words of Peter while preaching in Solomon’s Colonnade: **“But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer”** (Acts 3:18).
- Here are the words of Paul to King Agrippa: **“I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen - that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to His own people and to the Gentiles** (Acts 26:23).
- The following quotations were written to Hebrew believers in Judea: **“In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering”** (Heb. 2:10). **“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered”** (Heb. 5:8).
- Peter, who originally thought suffering was bad, came to understand that it was an integral part of God’s plan: **“Trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories that would follow”** (1 Pet. 1:11). **“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings, and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed”** (I Pet. 5:1).

IN SOME MYSTERIOUS WAY BELIEVERS SHARE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

- **“For just as the sufferings of Christ flow into our lives, so also through Christ our**

comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort (2 Cor. 1:5 - 7).

- We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body (2 Cor. 4:10).
- “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like Him in His death” (Phil. 3:10).
- “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church” (Col. 1:24).
- “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he trusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:19 - 23).
- “But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear and do not be frightened” (1 Pet. 3:14).
- “It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Pet. 3:17).
- “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed but praise God that you bear that name” (1 Pet. 4:12 - 16).
- “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

THE SUFFERINGS OF PAUL

Paul, as you know, was inspired by God to write more books of the Bible than any other man. For this reason his sufferings should be of special interest.

First, let us remember that Saul (later known as Paul) was set apart from his mother’s womb to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15, 16). Other heroes of the faith, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, were also set apart from birth to serve God, and also suffered (Is. 49:1 - 5; Jer. 1:5). Jesus was not spared from suffering, and neither is anyone else.

But now let us focus on the sufferings of Paul:

- Remember that Jesus appeared to Paul on the Road to Damascus and told him to go into the city and it would be told him what to do. God dispatched a preacher named Ananias and said: **“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name”** (Acts 9:15, 16).
- Paul was shamefully treated virtually everywhere he went. Here is what he wrote to Corinth: **“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth the refuse of the world”** (1 Cor. 4:9 - 13).
- After writing about Jesus and the resurrection he added: **“And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day – I mean that, brothers – just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained?”** (1 Cor. 15:30 - 32).
- When comparing his ministry with that of false apostles he said: **“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through their hands”** (2 Cor. 11:23 - 33).
- After relating how he was caught up into the third heaven he explained: **“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me to a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’ Therefore I will boast all the more**

gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. This why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 11:7 - 10).

- Paul originally preached in Galatia because of an illness (Gal. 4:13). Please consider these passionate words of Paul: **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me"** (Gal. 2:20).
- It is quite probable that Timothy was an eye witness of Paul's suffering, including the stoning he received at Lystra (Acts 14:8 - 20). Therefore in Paul's last letter, he told Timothy: **"You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"** (2 Tim. 3:10 - 12).

THERE IS ONLY ONE BODY AND IT SUFFERS

The normal body can feel pain. There are several diseases that prevent pain from being felt. "Congenital analgesia", for example, causes its victims to feel no pain. The same is true of leprosy and various types of paralysis, Etc. A close friend from childhood, the late Jay Frank Dial, was paralyzed from the waist down by polio. He inadvertently rolled his wheel chair over a floor furnace and was totally unaware that his legs were burning until he smelled the smoke from his own flesh.

It is therefore natural and normal for a body to suffer pain. This is also true of the Body of Christ. No matter when or where, every believer becomes a part of the One Body. **"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink"** (1 Cor. 12:13).

- Consequently - **"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is part of it"** (1 Cor. 11:26, 27).
- **"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering"** (Heb. 13:3).
- **"And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but 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. 5:2 - 5).
- **"Bless them that persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn"** (Rom. 12:14, 15).
- **"I Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you"** (Col. 4:18).
- Jesus said: **"I was in prison and you came to visit me"** (Matt. 25:36).

- Just before his execution, Paul wrote: **“At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to the heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen”** (2 Tim. 4:16 - 18).

DEATH AND LIFE

True believers do not fear death for it is a stepping stone to abundant life. Jesus said: **“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”** (Jn. 12:24).

When you plant a seed in the ground it will grow. The corrosive elements of earth try to destroy that seed, but by doing so they only unleash its power and potential. Interesting, the more corrupt is the soil, the better the seed will grow. Similarly, the more water and the more sun the plant receives the better it will grow. When you plant something in the ground without life, however, the reverse is true. A pocket knife or pair of pliers, for example, will be destroyed by the very things that made the seed grow. Similarly, the water and sun so necessary for life will destroy things without life. Water will cause a dead tree to rot and the sun will even destroy the seat covers on your car.

The point is, that if you have the Holy Spirit in your heart, as Paul did, you can rejoice in your sufferings (Rom. 5:3). If you do not have the Holy Spirit suffering can destroy you!

THROUGH GATES MADE OF PEARLS

Pearls are formed when a grain of sand, or other irritant, makes its way between the shell and the mantle of an oyster. In response to this pain the oyster produces a protective coating called *nacre*. This substance is made of microscopic crystals of calcium carbonate and is referred to as “mother-of-pearl”. Sometimes it takes several years for this painful process to produce a pearl.

It is not by accident that the Scriptures teach that we enter into heaven through gates made of pearls (Rev. 21:21).

Thou sweet hand of God that so woundeth my heart,
Thou makest me to smile while Thou makes me to smart.
It seems as if God were a ball play and I,
The harder He strikes me the higher I fly.

I own it, He bruises me and pierces me sore.
But the hammer and chisel afflict me no more.
For I tell you the reason, it is that I see,
The Sculpture shall carve out an angel of me.

So I shrink from no suffering, how painful sore ere
When once I'm convinced that my God's hand is there.
For soft on the anvil the iron shall glow,
While the Smith with His hammer deals blow upon blow.

He presses me hard, but He give patience too,
And I say to myself, 'tis no more than my due,
for no tone from the organ can swell on the breeze,
'Till the organists fingers press down on the keys.

So come then and welcome the blow and the pain!
Without them, no mortal to heaven can attain.
For what can the sheaves on the barn floor avail,
'Til the Thresher shall beat out the chaff with His flail?

'Tis only a moment God chastens with pain,
Joy follows on sorrow like sunshine on rain.
So bear then what God on thy spirit shall lay.
Be dumb, and when tempted to murmur, then pray!

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