

Victory of the Lamb – May 16,17, 2020 – Who Told You That God Can't Be All Powerful and All Loving Because People Are Suffering – Romans 8:18-30 – Pastor Bill Limmer

At a dinner party Michelle, a friend of a friend, not realizing who she was talking to a pastor, voiced her objection. "How can there be a God of love when the world is the way it is?" She strengthened her argument with a list of pain and suffering and evil she knew about, and the things she experienced personally.

Are you experiencing suffering right now? It is said about this pandemic: "We are in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat." Have you experienced any of these over the last 7days: anger, anxiety, boredom, confinement, confusion, depression, fear, financial woes, isolation, health concerns for yourself or for others, indifference, racism, stress, and last but not least death. There is a lot of suffering going on.

Today we are continuing our series Who Told You That. We are going to turn to book of Romans, who is authored by Paul who also suffered, and consider **Who Told You that God Can't Be All Powerful and All Loving Because People are Suffering?**

Martin Luther King Jr., in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail said, "**A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law.**"_In essence, what he is saying is, if there is no God, then how can we say any historical event is unjust. If a person abandons God or even the thought of there being God because of pain and suffering, it doesn't help a person understand pain correctly. If God doesn't exist, everything is permitted from stealing, to rape, to murder. If a person doesn't believe in God, evil and suffering are an even bigger problem philosophically.

But enough of philosophy. Let's see how suffering and pain came into the world. God gave Adam and Eve free will. It was a risk of love that God was willing to take. He could have made it so there was no opportunity for Adam and Eve to choose but that would not be love. Evil and suffering are the result of making bad choices. Romans 5:12 **Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.** People don't want to talk about and want to avoid the concept of sin but its consequences are all around

That's the problem but let's look at three ways to face evil and suffering in our lives. Romans 8:18a **I consider that our present sufferings.** Scripture doesn't hide the fact of pain, suffering and evil in life. It speaks of these things are present realities. Paul knew that on a personal level. Paul has a figurative thorn in his flesh. (2 Corinthians 12:7) We don't know exactly what his was but we know about it because we all have one. It may be an illness, it may be a season in life, or it may be a temptation, but what we know is this truth: **Suffering is not unusual. Suffering is universal.**

God knows everything about suffering not just because he is all knowing but by experience - he suffered too. It is only in Christianity where God becomes vulnerable to suffering and death. So, if you are suffering look back to see an understanding Jesus. If you needed assistance, are homeless, felt abandoned and alone, abused, mistreated, misunderstood, have grief, Jesus and his naked body on the cross understands. He suffered everything we have ever suffered and more. Jesus suffered cosmically what we deserved. Jesus not only saw the flames of hell for you, he experienced them for you.

Because he loves us so much, he was willing to suffer our pain and so experience it all, so one day he could end all of evil without it ending on us. Peter 3:18 **For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. When it comes to suffering, The cross won't tell you what the answer is but it tells you what the answer is not.** The answer is not that he doesn't love us, or care for us, or he is remote, or indifferent. So look back to the cross and you will find what the answer is not.

Look into the gospel. And when you look into the gospel you will see that Jesus had everything he needed and wanted in heaven but you. You are his living hope. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He didn't wait for us to get cleaned up before he loved us. God demonstrates his love to us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom. He looks on us with compassion. He shows his love for us by being clear in his teaching, He is the way the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through him. He is our constant companion.

The promise we have from God isn't people won't have pain and suffering but that He will be with you in the pain and suffering. That is how Paul looked at his thorn in the flesh. Paul prayed for it to be gone. But God didn't take the thorn away and Paul tells us why, so he wouldn't become conceited and think he was better than others and/or that he didn't need God. Paul talks of the thorn as a gift, even though it was a messenger of Satan. How could this be? It certainly didn't look like or feel like a gift. But God took what the enemy gave to torment Paul and used it to transform Paul. God is saying, "no I won't take it away, but I will give you so much grace that you are stronger than it and you will discover a power you would have never know if you didn't have a problem." God may not take away your thorn in order that you don't become conceited so that you know you need grace. Our suffering gives us opportunity to trust in God. He offers not only his shoulders, not only his arms, but his heart, and his life. No matter whether we are on a mountaintop or in the middle of the wilderness **God is here**. God is with us. Look into the gospel and see what he has done for you and that he is here now with you.

So look back to the cross, look into the gospel, And **look forward to heaven**.

When the empress of China looked at the mulberry trees, she noticed a moth laying eggs on the mulberry leaves, eggs that of course hatched into caterpillars. After a few days, each caterpillar spun a thread that it wrapped itself in, forming a cocoon. The empress picked off one of the cocoons from the leaves and dropped it into hot water. Slowly, the delicate and beautiful thread began to unwind. It was a half mile long when the empress stretched it out and measured it. Then it occurred to her: perhaps this thread could be woven into cloth. And the silk trade was born. An empire of extraordinary wealth and beauty began with a crisis.

Sometimes it is difficult to envision a positive outcome when we are in the middle of a mess. Things may look like green and gross caterpillar instead of a beautiful butterfly, hard, ruined, hopeless. We don't even know where to start. And that's ok because it is God who is a specialist at making beautiful endings out of impossible situations. He never wastes a crisis, a trial, a suffering. He transforms it all for our good. Romans 8:28 **We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose.**

And finally know this: suffering has an expiration day. Psalm 30:5 **weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.** In the book Hope Heals: One day, we will see. One day, the arc of our

stories will all make perfect sense. One day, we will trace the lines of our scars and find them to have fallen in the most pleasant places, to see in them our great inheritance. One day, we won't need to hope, nor will we need to be healed because we will be face-to-face with the source of both, the source of everything. . . Jesus. The storm may rage through the night, but don't stop in the middle of the storm because morning is coming. God will redeem it and you. Suffering has an expiration date. You see God is going to count to three and it is going to be over. He did it once before, remember? Friday, Saturday, Sunday – victory!

And the result of that victory - Revelation 21: **I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death'^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."** Resurrection isn't compensation but restoration – purified, beautified, unfading, imperishable, unspoiled. When you know the writer and director of the play, you know how it ends so you can have hope!

Here is your take home. When I was at the Seminary, they told us, if you are having a bad day one of the best things you can do is get out of your office and go visit one of your shut-ins and it will brighten our day. You see, normally God chooses to make himself known through ordinary people like us. People are suffering so go and **serve people**. Be the answer to their prayers. Jesus said that whatever we did for the least of these we did for him. Alleviate suffering by serving.

And how are you going to find motivation to help those who are suffering by looking back at Jesus, looking into Jesus, looking forward to Jesus, and you will have it made. It helped Michelle, it helps me, and I bet it will help you.