

Message from Pastor Paul



The cross is a great mystery. How God can take the greatest expression of evil and use it for the greatest good is rarely fully grasped even by believers. Far too often we try to avoid the effects of sin which leaves us to suffer. Suffering is a powerful reality upon our planet. We have just recently been touched by a devastating earthquake in Haiti and it has touched everyone in that country with loss. The age old question of why human suffering comes to mind. Why does God allow these things? As Christians, how do we address the issue of God's love and power and the reality of suffering in our lives and in our world?

1. The Bible doesn't deny that suffering exists. We don't believe that the material world isn't real. So we don't address suffering by simply stating that it's mind over matter.
2. We don't just tolerate it. There's nothing that can be done, therefore we simply make the best of a bad situation.
3. Neither is it about escapism. Some might try to embrace things that are pleasant and try to drown out their sorrows.
4. Nor does the Bible suggest that we should simply accept it and try to deal with it heroically.

So, if the Christian understanding of suffering is neither denial, nor a stoic toleration, nor escape from it through earthly pleasures, nor resignation and heroic acceptance, then how do we deal with it?

We bring our cares to God and commit them to Him. God Himself is a fellow sufferer. He identifies with us in our suffering. Ultimately, suffering has a redemptive element to it. This is ultimately expressed in the crucifixion of Christ, where His sufferings were for our sakes.

Though our sufferings are not substitutionary in nature, like Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul tells us that they have a powerful impact on our lives as believers because of the eternal nature of our lives. 'Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.' (cf. 2 Cor. 4:16-18)

When God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, He experienced human suffering. He wept over human loss, the loss of his friend Lazarus, as told in John's gospel. He eventually died in order to rescue us from eternal suffering, the consequences of our own sin. As the apostle Paul writes to the Christians at Rome, he relates that even as the first man, Adam sinned and brought suffering and death into our world; the second Adam, which is how Christ is referred to in that letter, came and died for all of our sins in order to give us life, and ultimately remove the curse of sin— namely death and suffering.

We discover that when we leave our comfort zones and engage with people in suffering, we become not only more human, but also understand more the very nature of God.