When Suffering Strikes

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0:00] 5, 3, 7 if you're using a red covered Bible. Starting at verse 1 of chapter 37.

At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place. Listen, listen to the roar of his voice.
To the rumbling that comes from his mouth. He unleashes his lightning belief, the whole heaven.
And sends it to the ends of the earth.
After that comes the sound of his roar. He thunders with his majestic voice. When his voice resounds, he holds nothing back.
God's voice thunders in marvelous ways. He does great things beyond our understanding. He says to the snow, fall on the earth.
[1:16] And to the rain shower, be a mighty downpour. So that all people he has made may know his work. He stops every person from his labor.

The animals take cover. They remain in their dens. The tempest comes out from its chamber. The cold from the driving winds. The breath of God produces ice.
And the broad waters become frozen. He loads the clouds with moisture. He scatters his lightning through them. At his direction, they swirl around over the face of the whole earth.
To do whatever he commands them. He brings the clouds to punish men. Or to water his earth.
And show his love. Listen to this, Job. Stop and consider God's wonders. Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash?
[2:20] Do you know how the clouds hang poised? Those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge. And our second reading is on page 1158.

Page 1158. And it's from 2 Corinthians. Chapter 1. And verses 3 to 11.
So it's on page 1158. 2 Corinthians chapter 1. Verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The Father of compassion. And the God of all comfort. Who comforts us in all our troubles. So that we can comfort those in any trouble. With the comfort we ourselves have received from God.
For just as the sufferings of Christ. Flow over into our lives. So also through Christ. Our comfort overflows. If we are distressed. If we are distressed. It is for your comfort.
[3:24] And salvation. Sorry. If we are comforted. It is for your comfort. Which produces in you. 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. We do not want you to be uninformed brothers.
About the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure. Far beyond our ability to endure. So that we despaired even of life. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.
But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves. But on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril. And he will deliver us.
On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. As you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf. For the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.
[4:22] Thank you Peter. On Thursday morning.

As I did the school run with our son Ethan. He turned to me. It's very foggy this morning dad. Very difficult to see what's coming.
Was my reply. Little did we know that within the hour flight. NM 7100. From Belfast to Cork. Would crash in Cork airport.
Due to poor visibility. A sad and tragic accident. That has left six families grieving. As they mourn the loss. Of family members.

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And others who have lost friends and colleagues. Remarkably. Six other people survived. Two of whom would walk away without serious injury.
[5:36] One of those we've learned this morning was Donal Walsh. A relay worker with Ifees here in Cork. And who works closely with Peter. And I know he's a good friend to many here.

And that's a time like this. That we begin to ask the question. Why? And as the conflicting emotions begin to settle.
On the one hand of joy. That Donal is safe. And the other hand sadness. That many are still grieving. We can't help think.
What might have been. Why that flight? Why did some not survive? And why did others walk away unhurt?
Perhaps in some of our more reflective moments. We ask. Why them? And not me? As we think back on last Thursday's tragedy.
[6:42] I want us this morning. Not to allow this suffering to pass. Without us all thinking deeply and carefully. About how we should all respond when suffering strikes.

And as we do this together. I want us to look at 2 Corinthians chapter 1. So please have your Bibles open. Ready. Ready. To engage. And to hear what God's word says to us.
This is the passage that we looked at. In our home groups on Wednesday. A study that I believe was not by chance. But one that would prepare us for the news that came the following morning.
But before we look at this passage. We're going to pray. And to ask God to help us. Let's do that now. Let's do that now. Indescribable.
Uncontainable. The ways of God. The ways of God. Are beyond our understanding. All powerful.
[8:02] Humbly. We bow before you. Humbly. We ask that you would speak to us. That your voice. That your voice.

Would speak through the suffering. Of this world. Into our lives. We ask that not one of us here this morning.
Would allow these events to pass. Without them doing the work in our lives that they should do.
Teach us. Teach us. Teach us.
Teach us. How we should respond. And may we be people. Who love you. And worship you.
In every circumstance. Of life. Amen. The first thing that we should take.
[9:02] From this air tragedy. Is that suffering. Is a reality. I'm not going to be smart. And pretend that I have answers.

Because I don't. In fact the more answers that we give. The more questions that we ask. Thursday was just another reminder to us. And to the wider community that we live in.
That we have a broken and a decaying world. Most of the tragic events that happen in this world. Pass us by without much thought. The recent floods and fires in Australia.
The unseen illness and disease that a billion children live with every day. But then something happens. Something a little bit closer to home.
It stops us in our tracks. And it makes us think. We look away from the computer screen. We put down our pen. We think. Paul knew what it was to live in a suffering world.
[10:06] We read that in verse 8. Have a look at it there. 2 Corinthians 1. We do not want you to be uninformed. Brothers and sisters. About the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia.

We were under great pressure. Far beyond our ability to endure. So that we despaired even of life. This particular kind of suffering.
Was hostility and persecution. But it was suffering all the same. It was so intense. It was so intense. He says. That it was beyond our ability to endure.
In fact they thought that through these things they were going to die. Verse 9. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.
Suffering can. And it will come in all kinds of different ways. It is inescapable. From the moment Adam and Eve pushed God from the center.
[11:07] And made themselves God. The whole world broke. Everything moved from order to chaos. It was like the cogs in the wheel began to jam.

And everything became disjointed. And out of sync. And the world began to grind. The world and its people have been feeling the effects ever since.
Physically we suffer with disease and illness. Cancers and death. Cosmologically we suffer with climate change. And destructive weather patterns.

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Socially we suffer with community and relational breakdown. These are experiences common to us all. And they are unavoidable.
Whether you are a Christian. Or not yet a Christian. We all feel these effects. No one is immune to them. And living in this world with all its pain and its hurt.
[12:12] It's like we too in the words of Paul. Feel the sentence of death. It's like death follows us round like a shadow. And when we go through our own personal suffering.

Whatever shape it may take us. We too can even despair of life. We live with the reality of a broken and a disjointed world.
Where life goes wrong. Bad things happen. Tragic events strike. People get ill. Mountains shake. And planes crash. So the first thing that we need to take from this. Is that suffering is a reality.
The second thing that I think we could take from this air tragedy. Is that suffering is ordained. For many people Thursday's crash is a sign that God is either unloving.
[13:17] Or impotent. That means he's not powerful. Or he is both. People say if he was loving he would not have allowed these things to happen.

What kind of loving God lets people suffer in a plane crash? Others say if he was powerful he would have stopped this from happening.
What kind of God is he that he can't even control the weather? They're normal responses. And if we're honest we ask them too. But as we will see rather than a God who sits immune to what goes on.
He controls everything that happens. So let me make it crystal clear what we are saying. God ordained the air crash on Thursday morning.
Look at verse 5. It says therefore just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives. We're going to come back to that verse.
[14:29] But I just want us to pick up on the sufferings of Christ. It's talking about his death. His death was not a tragic accident.

Christ's death was ordained by God. Listen to what it says in Acts 4 verse 28. This is speaking about the suffering of Jesus. People were responsible.
People were responsible. But this is what it says. They did what your power and will had decided before it should happen.
This doesn't mean that God allowed it. Or that God permitted it. But that God caused it to happen. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.
And I'm not saying these things to score deep theological points. I'm saying it because it awakens our conscience to a God who is all loving and a God who is all powerful.
[15:38] Because if God has ordained it, it means he's in control of it. The world and its people are not subjected to random chance.

Life is not a lottery. Things only happen as God ordains it to happen. Keep your finger in 2 Corinthians and flick back to the reading in Job chapter 37.
It's on page 537. Job was a man who suffered greatly.
In chapter 1 of Job we read how natural disasters caused the death of his family.
And he struggles and he contemplates. And a friend, not to be confused with the three friends that spoke ill advice, but a good one who came to him spoke these words.
[16:54] Job 37 verse 6. God says to the snow, fall on the earth.

God says to the rain shower, be a mighty downpour. God says to the rain shower, be a mighty downpour. So that all people he has made may know his works.
He stops every man from his labour. Verse 11. He loads the clouds with moisture.
And we can take that that's the fog as well. He scatters his lightning through them. At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever he commands them.
Verse 14. Listen to this. Stop and consider God's wonders.
[18:13] Job didn't understand it. And nor do we. But if God is in sovereign control, that means we have a God that we can trust.

What kind of God would he be if he watched helplessly as weather patterns formed that he couldn't control? He would be nothing more than a mad professor who watches helplessly as his controlled experiment gets out of control.
In the midst of tragedy, there is this mystery as to why God ordained it. But there comes with it an invitation to trust and hold on to the God who rules and controls our entire universe and all its

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powers.
Look at verse 9 back to 2 Corinthians chapter 1. The middle of verse 9.
But this happened. What happened to Paul was not a mistake. It was not a surprise. It was not out of God's hands.
[19:36] It happened. It was ordained. And it was the same on Thursday morning.

The early morning fog. The flight times. The passengers. The survivors. The fact that Donal could not move seats to the front of the plane when he requested and he had to sit at the back of the plane.
Everything that happened. Everything that happened. Was in the mysterious hands of God. And let me say this with the greatest respect and humility.
Let us banish every thought that God would be somehow less powerful, less loving, less worthy of our praise and worship if our friend Donal had passed away.
I don't pretend that any of this is easy. Every thought raises a hundred questions. But I prefer a hundred questions and all our doubts and a God who is in control than a God who is weak, impotent and fails to control the world that he has made.
[21:06] So it reminds us that suffering is a reality. Suffering is ordained.

And the third thing that I think we should take from this tragedy is that suffering has purpose. One of the comments that people have made and will make about Thursday's crash is that it was all pointless.
It was a waste of life. Amidst all the hurting and pain, we can't make any sense of it. We've been reading that Paul suffered to the point of death.
In fact, those who he was writing to were suffering. And while it doesn't ease the pain or soften the blow or end the hurt, there is a mysterious purpose in suffering.
First, I think suffering enables comfort to take place. Look at verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.
[22:28] God is not distant, cold and immune to the hurt. He is our Father. He is intimately involved with us and with our world.

And as a Father, it tells us here, He is the source of all compassion and all comfort. Compassion literally means to suffer with.
And so He enters into our suffering to bring comfort. But notice how that suffering comes. Go back to verse 5.
For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. The sufferings here of Christ refer to His death.
And I think it's saying that when it talks about the suffering of Christ flowing over into our lives, it's saying that the benefits of the cross overflow into our suffering lives.
[23:37] When we turn to Christ and receive the overflowing comfort of the cross, not just our sins forgiven, but His grace and His peace and His strength and His joy, all of these things flow from the suffering of Christ to His people.

And all of this has a purpose. Back to verse 4. This God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.
Let me read to you a quote from Stephen Saint. Stephen Saint lost his own father. His father was a pilot. He lost his father when he was very young.
In later years when Stephen married, his daughter of age 18 was suddenly taken from them, died without reason.
And this is what he says about the reasons why suffering comes into our lives. Let me quote. If we are going to emulate our Saviour, if we have to identify with the people to whom we take His good news, I don't advocate that we look for suffering.
[25:10] Life brings enough of it on its own. But what I do advocate is that suffering is an important prerequisite to ministering to hurting people.

Christ took on our likeness and subjected himself to the suffering that plagues us. I am convinced that we should not make heroic efforts and expend vast resources like the rest of society does to avoid suffering.
Not only would a willingness to experience hurt give us a credibility with suffering people, but it would also give God a special opportunity to prove His sufficiency to meet our needs.

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He comforts us in our suffering. Suffering comes. It is not wasted because it enables us to better comfort those who also suffer.
The second purpose that I think suffering brings is that it ensures hope. Look at verse 9.
[26:29] He says, Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

He has delivered us from such deadly peril. And He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us.
Suffering causes us to see that we are not in control or able to determine the pattern of our life. In fact, it shows our complete frailty.
However, in the midst of our helplessness and our weakness, it is in that very weakness that hope begins to shine through.
For Paul, God had delivered him. Literally, He had saved him from death. And he is confident that God will save him in the future.
[27:36] But more than that, look at verse 10. He says, He has delivered us from such deadly peril and He will deliver us.

And on Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us. This hope that He is talking about was beyond the present.
It was beyond His immediate future. And it was taking Him into eternity for Paul knew that he lived in a world that was broken. There would be times God would deliver him but a time would come when He would pass into eternity.
His sufferings caused him to think upon the resurrection. That God has power and victory over the grave. And He will bring Him safely to a world without suffering.
Even if our life and its will and whatever form it takes it ends in death, it is not the end but the beginning.
[28:52] The sure and the certain guarantee of a new creation, of no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

No more earthquakes. No more famine. Diseases or cancer. And no more plane crashes.
Suffering is not wasted because it points forward to the resurrection, the hope of an eternity with Him.
The third thing that I think that suffering, the purpose in suffering is this, that it brings salvation.
verse 6. He says, if we are distressed and that distress is one of suffering, it is for your comfort and salvation.
Paul knew that as he suffered in his distress, God was working out his salvation in the lives of others. I can't explain it.
[30:14] I certainly don't understand it. But God's Word tells us that through suffering, God brings His salvation.

On Wednesday, we looked very briefly at the life of Joseph. Sold into slavery with his brothers. He suffered terribly. Many years later, he was able to help his brothers who had sold him into slavery and this is what he could say.
You didn't send me here, but God did. Ordained, planned and purposed.
You didn't send me here, but God. It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. God brings salvation through suffering.
But perhaps we see this most of all in Jesus. He was innocent. He only did what was right and good.
[31:18] He fed the poor. He healed the sick. He comforted the broken. He raised the dead. But yet, He died a cruel and horrible death.

Why? Well, as we look to Christ and see all that He suffered for us, not just the violent execution, but suffering hell for us.
Suffering, the ultimate suffering to bring us salvation. He suffered for us so that we might experience and know His grace in our lives.
God will take and use our suffering, shaping it and conforming it to do His work in the lives of others.
and I am convinced without any doubts at all that Thursday's tragedy that God will work His salvation in the lives of people.

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[32:39] Suffering is not wasted because God worked through it to bring about His salvation's plan. On Thursday morning, there was a terrible fog that reduced visibility.

A heavy cloud that the pilot couldn't see the runway. His vision was compromised. He was flying blind. Suffering can seem like a fog to us.
We can't see what it is all about. From our earthly perspective, our vision is blurred. We admit we don't understand the mind of God and His ways.
We struggle to comprehend. We can't see how He is working in this world. We're blinded. but we trust Him.
Look at verse 9. The middle of verse 9. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God.
[33:59] As we walk by faith through this world of suffering, may God enable us to rely on Him all the more.

One day the fog will lift. One day the clouds that blur our vision will be rolled back. And Christ will come and bring us to His eternal home where we will be comforted forever.
may God give us faith to see the purposes of His workings through a suffering and broken world.
Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's just take time to reflect ...
... ... Amen.
[35:34] Our Father God, we confess that you are God and we are not. You are creator and we are your creation.

And while we cannot understand or fathom your ways and your workings, while we have questions and doubts, joy and anger, Father, help us to submit to your ways.
Help us to rely and to trust in you, that you are working out your purposes in ways that we do not always see.
And we pray, Father God, that through these events of Thursday, that you will pour out your comfort into the lives of those who are grieving, that you will bring those who have experienced suffering so that they can comfort in a way that no one else can do so.
We pray that they will find hope and assurance and life in Christ.
[36:59] We pray that you will work your salvation. And we pray that we as people will love you and worship you and honour you, whether it is a bright, sunny and cloudless day, or whether the fog is heavy and things happen.

We ask for your help and humbly pray that you will teach us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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