

God Has Promised Suffering

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Date: 13 January 2019

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] your love, and that they would not only know but experience you walking with us through these times. Father, as we turn to your word now, we ask that you would help us, that we might hear clearly what you are saying, and that you would give us grace that we may apply it to our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, this morning we're looking at the theme that God has promised suffering, and learning how to grieve well.

Very often our experiences are that in times of struggling, and Pete mentioned this, is that we immediately want things to change.

We want things to end. Sometimes we want the suffering to come to a conclusion. Well, sometimes we need to learn to grieve.

In fact, I think it's important that we learn to grieve. So three big things we're going to look at this morning. First, grieving will come.

[1 : 20] We stood by side, dressed in our school uniforms, and as we stood alongside each other, we watched as the coffin was being carried out.

Richard was liked by everyone. He was a fun kind of guy. He loved his sport. He was generous and he was kind, but yet a tragic accident ended Richard's life, and he was no longer with us.

In the car park, I remember walking over to Richard's dad. No words were ever exchanged. We just embraced and cried.

As a young teen, that was my first real experience of grief. And Psalm 90 reminds us, Our days may come to 70 years or 80, if our strength endures.

Yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass and we fly away. It's a solemn reminder that we live in a broken and disordered world that ends in death.

[2 : 43] It's unavoidable. And the message of the Bible from beginning to end is very clear. Live long enough and you will suffer.

Listen to God's word through Isaiah the prophet. But now this is what the Lord says, He who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel.

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. The flames will not set you ablaze.

Not if, but when. When you pass through the waters, when you walk through the fire.

[3 : 46] James tells us the same. He says, Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

Not if you will face trials, but whenever you face trials. Now both Isaiah and James are writing to God's people, those whom God has redeemed and called to himself followers.

Yet they are told to prepare for days of suffering. We should never assume that just because we trust God, that we won't suffer.

You will go through the furnace. You will walk through painful trials. You will face the darkness. We will all grieve.

So first, grieving will come. Second, grieving is painful. It's painful because when we grieve, it's because we're mourning the loss of someone or something.

[5 : 01] A mother grieves because she has lost her son through cancer. Pete grieves because he's lost a cousin and a brother.

A husband can grieve because he's lost the family home through unemployment. A young couple can grieve because their hopes and dreams are crushed when a tragedy strikes.

You see, when suffering comes, it takes the people we love and the things that we most value. And in a moment, they are gone, ripped from the clutches of our arms.

And it is terribly painful. There are three ways, I think, that the Bible speaks about our grief.

Three emotions we experience in times of struggle. And to help us look at this, we're going to look at the Psalms together. And one of the things about the Psalms is they show us and they record for us the personal experiences of those who are going through hard times.

[6:19] And as we listen to these experiences, as we listen to these true life accounts, they help us to grieve.

The first emotion, the first kind of grief I think we encounter in times of loss is anger.

When we go through the waters, we can be angry. Look at Psalm 77 with me. Psalm 77.

Psalm 77. Psalm 77. Psalm 77. Psalm 77. Psalm 77.

Starting at verse 1. I cried out to God for help. I cried out to God to hear me.

[7:26] When I was in distress, I sought the Lord. At night, I stretched out untiring hands and would not be comforted. In other words, the comfort didn't come.

I remembered you, God, and I groaned. I meditated and my spirit grew faint. You kept my eyes from closing. I was too troubled to speak.

I thought about the former days, the years of long ago. I remembered my songs in the night. My heart meditated and my spirit asked, Will the Lord reject forever?

Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?

Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion? Question after question.

[8:27] Why are you doing this? Where are you? What's it all for? This is raw emotion. He's angry at God.

Look back at verse 5. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago. I remembered my songs of joy.

There are songs of joy he's talking about in the night. I looked back on my life, all those good times. I remember when my life was happy, when we were together.

But now she's gone. I remember when we walked and talked. But now they don't even recognize me. The writer of Psalm 22 says what we all want to say.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? So far from my cry of anguish.

[9:34] My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer by night, but I find no rest. Isn't that how we often feel?

Angry with God. Job certainly did. Just have a look back to Job 19. It comes just before the Psalms. Job 19. And verse 7. So this is a cry towards God.

He says, Though I cry violence, I get no response. Though I call for help, there is no justice.

God has blocked my way so that I cannot pass. God has shrouded my paths in darkness. God has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head.

[10:48] God tears me down on every side till I am gone. God uproots my hope like a tree. God's anger burns against me. God counts me among his enemies.

God's troops advance in force. They build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent. Remember from last week that Job had lost all his possessions.

He had lost his family. He had lost his health. And here he expresses his anger. He shouts at God and accuses God of being like an invading army that is swept into his life, taking away and destroying what is most valuable and precious to him.

Anger is an expression of our grief. So I wonder if somebody wouldn't mind closing the doors. I think there's doors open there.

Thank you. So second, so first, response in times of struggle and suffering of grieving is one of anger.

[12:02] The second is sorrow. When we go through trials, we can be full of sorrow. Have a look at Psalm 13.

Psalm 13, verse 1. Psalm 13.

How long, Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?

How long will my enemy triumph over me? How long has God forgotten me? He doesn't love me. He doesn't care. And with unanswered questions, all we are left with is sorrow. Broken hearts that seem to find no comfort.

[13:14] Flick back to Psalm 6. Here the psalmist again pours out his sorrow. Psalm 6, verse 6.

I am worn out from my groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.

My eyes grow weak with sorrow. They fail because of all my foes. You see, when all the shouting is done, when the anger subsides and no answers come, then all that is left is sorrow.

All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. Listen to this account written by Dustin.

I don't know him, but read his story this week. He recounts his family's sorrow. He says, This was certainly what my wife and I experienced after our son Owen died in 2003.

[14:34] We were living in the Middle East and as Kelly went into labour we were medically evacuated to Istanbul, Turkey where premature babies have a better chance of survival.

He was born October the 3rd but he only lived for 20 minutes. I saw him kicking and moving and heard him give one little cry but that was it.

Our firstborn had died. The pain was unlike anything we had ever experienced. We felt alone. A few nights after Owen died my wife stayed up for hours scouring the scriptures for hope and comfort.

She finally fell asleep more discouraged than ever because she found none. Of course it was there but when we are in the depths of pain we often can't see it let alone feel it.

Sorrow is an expression of our grief. The third expression of our grief I think is one of despair.

[15:54] Turn to Psalm 88. As we face into the darkness of our struggles sometimes our grief is one of just utter despair.

The Hebrew title of this Psalm is the suffering of affliction. It's almost like the suffering of suffering. It's the most discouraging and despairing Psalm written perhaps the most discouraging in all of Scripture.

Follow with me as I read verse 1 Lord you are the God who saves me day and night I cry out to you may my prayer come before you turn your ear to my cry.

I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death. I am counted among those who go down to the pit.

[17:04] I am like one without strength. I am set apart from the dead like the slain who lie in the grave whom you remember no more who are cut off from your care.

Verse 15 From my youth I have suffered and been close to death. I have borne your terrors and I am in despair.

Your wrath has swept over me your terrors have destroyed me all day long they surround me like a flood they have completely engulfed me. You have taken from me friend and neighbour.

Darkness is my closest friend. This writer is grieving. In fact it seems he has been grieving most of his life.

Look at verse 15 From my youth I have suffered. There seems to have been no let up throughout verse 17 all day long.

[18:12] They surround me like a flood. Every day is like it's going to be his last. But he's done with being angry. There are no more tears to be shed at night.

The tears have run dry instead it is now just despair. Look at the end of verse 18 Darkness is my closest friend.

The psalm ends without any hope. There is no Oh but I will yet praise the Lord. There is no yet this I know God will deliver me.

The suffering has extinguished the light and all that is left is hopeless darkness. One writer said this about the psalm whoever devises from the scriptures a philosophy in which everything turns out right has to begin by tearing this page out of the Bible.

Now some of you here know what this writer is talking about. Some of you have been in this darkness.

[19:38] Despair is an expression of our grief. But why do we have these expressions of grief? Why have they been written down for us?

Well three reasons I think they are here for us. First they give us permission to grieve.

burning up.

we experience no comfort or relief. So how can God say he is with us? And how can he say the flames will not touch us?

[27 : 29] Well, what God has promised has been fulfilled. He came and entered into our grief to redeem us so that he might call us and might say over us mine.

You belong to me so that you might know me forever. Have a look at Isaiah 53, just a couple of chapters on.

Keep in mind the promise that God says we will walk through those rivers, we will go through the furnace. Isaiah 53, this is speaking of God, but yet pointing forward to the God man Jesus Christ who was to come.

God knows what it is to suffer. He enters into our grief. Chapter 53, verse 3. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised and we held him in low esteem. But more than that, God entered our grief to deal with our sin so that we might know God with us.

[29 : 06] Verse 4, surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds, by his sufferings, we are healed.

How do we know this is true? How do we know this is what God has done for us? Well, have a look at Matthew chapter 26.

The first book in the New Testament, Matthew chapter 26 and verse 37.

Matthew 26. Here, God, in the person of Jesus, is facing his own death and suffering on the cross and uses those very words from Isaiah 53 as his own as he cries out, his own grief to God.

[30 : 33] Verse 37. Jesus took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him and he began to be sorrowful and troubled, an expression of grief, of sorrow and despair.

Then he said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. stay here and keep watch with me.

The agony of death and judgment stares him in the face. It doesn't just bring sorrow, but it's a complete overwhelming of utter despair.

Verse 39, going a little further, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, my father, if it is possible, take this cup from me, yet not as I will, but as you will.

Jesus grieves for us. He is willing to go through our death and our suffering for our sin, because here is Jesus hung on the cross.

[31 : 45] He passes through the river for us. He walks through the fire for us. He is overcome by the waters of judgment. The flames of God's wrath consume him.

Jesus dies, but as he dies for us, he dies so that by his sufferings and by his wounds we are healed, forgiven of all of our sins so that we might belong to him and never lose him.

We have been redeemed so that we may experience a new creation where there is no more grieving and we will receive our new bodies that will never suffer again.

You see, whatever we lose because of our suffering, whether it's our health, our loved ones, our dreams or our joys, because Christ suffered for us, we will never, ever, ever, ever lose God.

He is with us today and we will enjoy him for an eternity because by his wounds we are healed.

[33 : 04] And so whatever our grief, whatever our struggle we may be in today, whatever lies in the future, we can confidently say, when I pass through the waters, he will be with me.

And when I pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over me. And when I walk through the fire, I will not be burned.

The flames will not set me ablaze. We may lose much in this life, but we will never ever lose God.

He will be with us and we will be with him for all eternity. Learn, my friends, my brothers and sisters, learn that we at times need to grieve and cry out to God.

Let's pray. go and to to