

AM Philippians 3:8 The surpassing worth of knowing Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let's now turn to God's Word and we are going to read from the book of Job. So if you turn to the book of Job, which you should find on page 498 in the Pew Bible.

And we'll be reading from chapter 1. The book of Job being the oldest book in the Bible and gives a very detailed and human look at suffering.

And we see Job and we can see that the Bible doesn't back away from describing the personal suffering that Job experiences. So we're going to look at this first chapter.

But we're going to be focusing this evening on our text in Philippians. But this is going to kind of set the scene for us. So Job chapter 1. There is a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.

And that man was blameless and upright. One who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 female donkeys.

[1 : 19] And very many servants. So that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day.

And they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them.

And he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, It may be that one of my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.

Thus Job did continually. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord. And Satan came among them. The Lord said to Satan, From where have you come?

Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it. And the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job?

[2 : 24] That there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil. Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Does Job fear God for no reason?

Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land.

But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will curse you to your face. And the Lord said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your hand.

Only against him do not stretch out your hand. So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord. Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house.

And there came a messenger to Job and said, The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them. And the Sabaeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword.

[3 : 28] And I alone have escaped to tell you. While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, The fire of God fell down from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. While he was speaking, yet another came and said, Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house.

And behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house. And it fell upon the young people. And they are dead.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. And Job arose, tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped. And he said, Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return.

[4 : 30] The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with any wrong.

And then our text for this evening is from the letter of Paul to the Philippians. In chapter 3.

This will be on page 1181. Philippians chapter 3.

We'll take up our reading at verse 8. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish.

In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law. But that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God that depends on faith.

[5 : 34] That I may know him and the power of his resurrection. And may share his sufferings becoming like him in death. That by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect. But I press on to make it my own. Because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.

But one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to that which lies ahead. I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature thinking this way. If anything you think otherwise God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to that which we have obtained.

Brothers, join in imitating me. And keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you.

[6 : 44] Even with tears. Walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly and the glory and their shame. With minds set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

By the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Amen. May God bless the reading of his word.

Please be seated. Amen. So if you were here this morning, you would have been here to see that we were in Philippians chapter 3.

And so we focused in our attention at verse 8 concerning the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus. and so this evening I would like us to turn our attention to verses 10 and 11 of Philippians chapter 3 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead and in particular I would like us to focus our attention on the idea of sharing in his sufferings Paul is expressing the idea that not only does he want to know Jesus but that he wants to identify with Jesus in everything including to suffer like Jesus in the way that Jesus suffered or his response to suffering and so what I would like us to consider this morning is not just suffering in terms of persecution but what the reaction of the Christian should be to suffering in general and how this relates to the power of the resurrection and so what I would like to do is address the question and answer the question what is the Christian to do with suffering?

[8 : 55] so the idea of suffering being an objection to the truthfulness of Christianity has been around for a long time perhaps in our culture in particular it became widespread after the First World War where many of the soldiers who returned from the war struggled to forgive the church for its general support in justifying the war which saw such cataclysmic suffering at the time the church struggled to help people make sense of suffering and so this evening what I want to do is I do want to avoid any kind of glibness in answering this question or try to offer simple answers this is perhaps a very personal issue to us all and sometimes there are no simple answers but the Bible does point us in the right direction in trying to make sense of suffering so Paul is writing what could be considered a missionary support letter while he himself awaited the death penalty in Rome and he is encouraging them on how to imitate Jesus in all things including in suffering

Epaphroditus who was from Philippi came to help Paul he himself became so ill during this time that he almost died so you can read that in Philippians chapter 2 verse 26 and so there are various kinds of suffering that Paul and the early church demonstrated that they were willing to endure for the work of the gospel so what I would like to do is consider suffering under three headings firstly sin or the origin of suffering two suffering and the reaction that human beings have to suffering and three is redemption how suffering relates to the resurrection so the first point is sin we probably couldn't address the issue of suffering without explaining its origins and one of the distinctive Christian beliefs is our view of sin we believe that sin is universal in its scope that it affects all human beings and this also includes the environment around us all life on earth that sin is complete in its depths that as we as human beings we are touched by sin completely in our bodies in our minds and in our hearts the theologian Al Mohler puts it like this the Christian operates in the Genesis 3 world view that sin operates everywhere all of the time he refers us back to Genesis 3 and as we all know

Genesis chapter 3 is the chapter which deals with Adam's voluntary transgression of God's law and the subsequent polluting of the whole human race and this sin was a very typical sin it's very characteristic of men and women through all generations it was typical because Adam himself is in direct opposition to God that God has set out a rule and he is refusing to submit and allow God to direct the course of his life and this is true of many even today I can remember a conversation I had with a friend when I was at university in my kitchen as a student and he took exactly this position it wasn't that he thought it was improbable that there was a God or that the story of the life of Jesus didn't happen although he would challenge this primarily the reason that he gave for not repenting and turning to God was that he found the notion that he should allow God to direct his path he found this unpalatable he wanted to live as he directed and so this is the characteristic this typical sin that human beings fall into and once sin entered the world through Adam's rebellion there was no going back there was no way that Adam or his descendants on their own without God's intervention were capable of undoing the damage done they couldn't make clean what was unclean in Romans 5.12 it says therefore just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin and so death spread to all men because all sinned or as the proverb says who can say

I have made my heart pure I am clean from my sin and the answer is no one can say they've made their own heart pure no one can say that they are clean from sin so this one sin resulted in yet more sins because we cannot just put all the blame on Adam we cannot just look back and say well I attribute all of my sin to you because we are the ones who commit sin daily we are therefore marked as sinners and the outcome of all of this sin is the general brokenness of our world so death spread to all men because all sinned when we think of death we think how is it that we die we say well generally we get sick and so when we think of sickness it could be said that through one man sin entered the world and sickness by sin illness or sickness was not part of the original design contrary to what we all may or we all will eventually experience in one way or another and I'm sure many of us already do it could seem that our bodies are supposed to cause us pain and illness but the reality is that this came to mankind only after the first sin so one of the most significant effects of sin entering into the world is that human beings will get sick and will eventually die and this brings about tremendous suffering both in those who experience this personally and those who witness this take place in others suffering in this respect can be astonishingly cruel and so this is on the personal level when we think about suffering if we pan out if we pan out to the global level we see natural disasters we see recently storm Ida which ripped through the US last month we see drought which is being currently experienced in South America we see the pandemic we don't even have to mention that or we've seen the volcanic eruption we have seen the volcanic eruption in the Canary Islands which has dislodged thousands of residents damaging homes and livelihoods and our secular media may even refer to these events as acts of God and it may be true that God has created all things including the laws of nature which allows these things to take place that Jesus is the one who upholds and sustains all of nature yet when we turn to the book of Romans again when we see in Romans 8 it says that creation itself or sorry should I say creation itself will be set free from its bondage and corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now so all of creation feels this dramatic effect of the sin of man and it groans for liberation from sin and so these events these disasters now occur that otherwise would not have occurred had man not fallen into sin and so this is another source of suffering a source which is outwith our control one of the other sources of sin not only do we suffer to sickness natural disaster but there are also the sins which are committed by people against other people whether these are sins within interpersonal relationships within marriages many many of these sins have caused a sleepless night it could be slanderous words insults gossip perceived mistreatment in the workplace

or it could be dealing with someone with a short temper or these sins which are committed by other people against people they can be far more serious they could be the kind of sins that make you lock your door at night or empty out your water bottle at airport security war terrorism violence riots so when Paul writes these words he writes these words from a jail cell he is suffering from persecution for the sake of the gospel and all over the world right now there are believers who are suffering for nothing more than that they love Jesus and want to tell others about the love that Jesus has for them and so the sins of others have an impact on our lives and cause suffering and so here's our foundation the groundwork that we're laying to understand the source of the problem of suffering and so when we ask the question what does the Christian now do with suffering we see that it originates in sin that sin is in fact an unwelcome intrusion into the world that God created where he said it is good and it may appear to us that suffering is the default that there seems like there is no other way but the reality is suffering has intruded on a world that God made to be good so suffering in light of sin next point let's look at our reaction to suffering the reaction of human beings to suffering so how do human beings react to suffering when we see suffering or when we experience suffering ourselves we very easily have the sense deep sense of injustice that suffering is undeserved and that God is responsible for this that he is to blame and that we may even conclude that God himself is unjust or unloving for allowing suffering to happen and this is a temptation that we see commonly in our culture it is a major response to suffering and where God at all other times may seem to be totally irrelevant very suddenly becomes relevant in times of suffering and God is put in the dock and he is put on trial for allowing suffering to take place there is no balance to be found in the love of

[20 : 17] God the justice of God and the suffering of human beings when I started to prepare for this sermon in September I listened to a radio interview that John Piper gave on the afternoon of September 11th 2001 a day which the Boston Globe called a new day of infamy the horrific terrorist attacks of that day resulted in many reactions and so in this interview Dr. Piper pointed out that Christians need to learn how to mourn better than we do I think this is important I think it's very true that we need to learn how to mourn better than we do that we should be able to come alongside people that we should be able to mourn with them at the grievous evils that take place in the world so we need to mourn better than we do but he also pointed out that any humility that we have before God is disingenuous unless we have a high view of God as majestic and glorious because God needs to look majestic in our lives that our purposes should be higher so that when we react to suffering we don't immediately put

God in the dock because we have a high view of God we don't immediately say how can you allow this to happen people willingly would go on radio programs says John Piper and do just that put God in the dock put God to blame for these things try to hold God to account for this perceived injustice of suffering but he raised the point no one would ever go on a radio program and say and call into account the injustice of the mercy of God that every time the sun comes up over our town or when commerce is flourishing or when stock prices are soaring nobody calls God to account for treating wicked people so kindly God is very patient with sinners and he loves them in this way that he provides salvation by giving his only son his perfect son to suffer for us so that our sins can be passed over so our tendency is to worry about the injustice of suffering but not the injustice of mercy or the injustice or perceived injustice of the cross but this mercy extends to all of us this mercy which is not earned by us that God gives us time to come to our senses and to repent of the treason of sin against him this sin which is the origin of this misery so whenever we encounter suffering we need to have this idea of

God of being mighty glorious and merciful in our lives so that's the first kind of layer of response that we should have as having this high view of God John Stott writes a book called The Cross of Christ and he deals with the issue of suffering and he offers the four main reactions to suffering and so we'll just maybe go through them briefly he first lays out the reaction of the secularists so how does the secularists react to suffering well the secularists doesn't believe that the universe was created with a purpose the universe was created without intention life suffering death are all equally meaningless in a cold uncaring universe there is no meaning to suffering just bad luck the existentialist philosopher

Albert Camus said that life is absurd because none of these values which we have are actually rooted in any solid external component that's just subjective and if we stop and we think about this for more than 30 seconds it might cause us to despair but many people don't but this is the secular reaction to suffering is these things happen we can't explain it it has no meaning the second reaction to suffering is a bit different it's the epicurean reaction which is where they believe that to counter suffering we just have to indulge in excessive pleasure we find those things which are most pleasurable and we do them and we distract ourselves from suffering by engaging in all kinds of frivolity with maybe concerts and chemical highs with lovers pursuing that adrenaline rush buying new cars houses kitchens just distract yourself whatever you find pleasure in that's what you should indulge so that's one reaction the third reaction the stoic so some may mistake the stoic reaction as being the Christian position to suffering since it was a feature of

British culture historically and this is the idea that you submit to the fixed laws of nature that you keep a steady footing you don't allow yourself to be consumed by your emotion fulfill your responsibilities don't sit back and feel sorry for yourself but keep going that's the stoic reaction the fourth reaction that Stott offers is the Christian reaction which is this which is to recognize that God is at work in your suffering to reveal his glory that suffering contrary to what the secularist may say is meaningful suffering is meaningful now this can be a very difficult thing to accept even for believers sometimes we just want to attribute suffering to chance or to sin or to the devil especially as we experience suffering ourselves or when suffering hurts us most it can be almost impossible to admit that God is at work in your suffering but Paul in this passage says that we may share in his suffering that is the suffering of Jesus becoming more like him in his death we as

[27 : 08] Christians have communion with Christ while we suffer when we suffer in faith we can identify with him in his suffering and more importantly Jesus identifies with us in our suffering so what are the things that we can learn in our times of suffering we can learn patient endurance Jesus sets out this example for us in Hebrews chapter 12 the author says looking to Jesus the founder and protector of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary and faint hearted so the author calls us to this example of Jesus who faces hostility against himself from creatures from human beings who are sinners that Jesus who is guiltless and yet he endured suffering so when we experience suffering and we're like oh well we don't deserve this suffering we can look to Jesus and we can see someone who suffered who definitely did not deserve to suffer and so we can draw on his grace for strength to endure and to seek his face to pray to him and to share in his sufferings in this way we can also learn holiness there are many scripture verses which teach on this point that suffering is a refining force in our lives that although an unbeliever may become bitter or despairing in suffering that for the

Christian they ought to make us more holy and more like Jesus James opening in his letter in James chapter 1 says count it all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing so James says that God uses the suffering in our lives to perfect us to refine us and he offers the supreme example of this in Jesus later on when he says of our perfect redeemer he says this for it was fitting that he for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering for he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source that is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers so Jesus who was perfect demonstrated to us that he is wholly qualified to be our savior because

Jesus can identify with us in our suffering Jesus knew suffering which means he is altogether qualified to uphold you when you are suffering he can sympathize with us in our weakness and this is our savior so Jesus is the source of our sanctification he sanctifies us through suffering he builds us up to be single minded in our pursuit of him he burns off all the dross in our lives and he teaches us to be pilgrims in this world again I'm leaning heavily on Hebrews here it says these all died in faith not having received the things promised but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth because suffering teaches us to look heavenward it reminds us that we were made for something more it teaches us that we are to rely on the goodness of God and it ought to produce a character of meekness and gentleness another point that Stott noted which is very true that those who have endured great suffering in their lives they often have a way about them a kind of gentleness and this can be very useful because people are willing to listen to someone who has that gentle spirit and so it provides an opportunity where someone can say well yes such and such happened in my life and it was awful but let me tell you about my suffering saviour who was my strength who was with me every step the author

David David Powlinson says this when you've suffered or when you've passed through your own fiery trials and found God to be true to what he says you have real help to offer you have first hand experience of both his sustaining grace and his purposeful design he has kept you through pain you have learned both tenderness and the clarity necessary to help sanctify another person's deepest distress if you have suffered God has given you unique experience to reach into the lives of others and bring comfort and hope so suffering forms us it refines us it makes us holy meek patient and it allows us a unique perspective to help those in distress now there may be times when we can't fit a situation an experience of suffering into one of these boxes and I'm not trying to box things in

I'm not offering simple solutions here and there may be times when we feel that it's hard to find meaning or anything good that could result in this particular kind of suffering and in those situations where the meaning of suffering is unknown we have to trust the sovereignty of God that we admit that we know very little and that he knows all things trusting in our God who is rich in mercy abounding in steadfast love for us and that we can know that we have a holy qualified saviour to be our rock in times of distress final point redemption so redemption sin suffering redemption so we have looked at the sharing in the sufferings but now look at the words that are before and after this phrase where Paul sees the suffering in light of the resurrection he says in verses 10 and 11 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible

[34 : 49] I may attain the resurrection from the dead now at Easter when Christians around the world gather for worship many of the opening words of the traditional liturgies are Christ is risen and the response from the congregation reverberates he is risen indeed because the resurrection changes everything because we live in a world in which a man was dead truly dead and three days later he came back from the dead just like he said he would and he gives us a message of hope it is the resurrection which is the grounding of personal hope in our lives so that we can face suffering of all kinds all of the suffering that we have discussed this evening we are able to say joining in with the great multitude that have gone before us because he lives we shall live also that because

Jesus suffered and rose we too though we will suffer we too will be raised the Christian is to live in light of the power of the resurrection we are to experience the power of the resurrection in our lives and this is unique to Christianity because the leader of every other religion is dead but Jesus is alive he rose bodily from the grave he conquered our most feared enemy death was swallowed up in victory vanquished and the early church based their belief of the future general resurrection on the validity and the factuality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ first Corinthians 15 chapter which probably explores resurrection more than any of the other chapters in the bible it says at verse 22 for as in Adam all die so also in

Christ shall all be made alive Jesus promises that if we are willing to follow him to trust him then we will have victory over sin and suffering he offers to us the hope of glory that one day we will have redemption from all all all without exception all suffering we as human beings have been allocated a very short lifetime James calls it a breath what is your life you are a mist that appears for a little time then vanishes your life is short but there is a future eternity that awaits you and you will encounter suffering in this life you will have burdens that you have to bear you will experience loss you will experience pain Paul says in Romans for I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us so we ought to meditate on these realities that in eternity past God loved you that he chose you that he sent his son to die for you to redeem you from all your sin and suffering that God intervenes in your life to lift you from sinfulness upholding you when you are in the valley and there is a future eternity where these troubles and suffering will appear so insignificant compared to the glory that you will find in the presence of God forever where we will sin no more and our bodies will no longer be subject to sickness the whole universe is waiting to be made new again for this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things which are seen but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal the resurrection of Jesus changes everything it demonstrates to us that the suffering has been defeated and that one day there will be a time in which suffering will cease the resurrection is the central truth to apostolic teaching the resurrection is the energizing force that caused the explosion of growth in the church and the resurrection offers us hope while we suffer and redemption to a world filled with suffering so what is the

Christian to do with suffering we first understand that it is an unwelcome intrusion into the world that suffering does in fact have meaning that we ought to imitate Christ in how we faced suffering and we should draw on his grace to lean on him as our holy qualified saviour and that we are to live in light of the resurrection that there is a future that awaits us that we will be in the presence of God forevermore Amen We'll now close our we'll now close for the sermon today may be for the times who remember we'll know what's going after we ask