

# "The Pain of the Incarnation"

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. If you missed it Thursday night, we had the Behold the Lamb concert here. If you missed it, that was every bit as good. Aren't they awesome?

Thank you guys. It was a wonderful night. I got to have a lot of people from our community here. There were several good things. One of them is that we have delayed our plans for installing the fog machines for use on Sunday mornings.

If you weren't here, we had a fire alarm. So that won't be happening anytime soon. I think that's a plus. But more importantly, it's this beautiful story that is sung.

It's the same one that we talk about and read about in God's Word. And one of the sweet things about hearing it sung, it engages our hearts in a different way, doesn't it? To hear the music, the poetry, the stories told that way.

[ 1 : 07 ] I want to encourage you as we come to God's Word, our hearts need to be engaged. This is not going to be an exercise in giving you new information largely this morning.

And I know that's not unusual. But you know the Christmas story. We're praying and asking that God would use it in our hearts. That He would change us in the deepest parts of who we are.

That we would love Him more. That's our prayer as we come to His Word. We've been focusing on this same story they were just singing about. The King who's coming. The incarnation. The Word made flesh.

The definition we've been using for the incarnation this Christmas season. The intentional entrance of the divine Son of God into our fallen world in human flesh to secure our redemption at the cost of His life because of His great love.

That's the Word become flesh. In John's Gospel where he talks about this, he started by highlighting our need for the incarnation.

[ 2 : 13 ] The darkness of our hearts and of this world that required the light to break into it. And then we saw last week the sacrifice of the incarnation.

What Jesus left. What He set aside in order to become man. This week we're actually going to talk about the other side of that coin. Not so much what Jesus left, but what He entered into.

The pain of the incarnation. The Christmas story is a beautiful one for sure. But it's not just about carols and candy and angels and a really sweet little baby.

Although those things are true. When the Word became flesh, He was entering into pain. John shows us some of that. We're going to look at some other passages that will highlight that reality as we consider the price Jesus paid.

The pain that He endured for us. Let's start by reading the beginning of John 1. We're going to focus on verses 9 through 11 this morning. But let's read beginning at verse 1.

[ 3 : 23 ] God's holy word. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him. And without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life. And the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness.

And the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about that light that all might believe through Him.

He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world.

And the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own. And His own people did not receive Him. It gets better.

[ 4 : 26 ] And we'll talk more about that next Sunday. But let's pray and ask for God's help as we look to His Word. Father, we thank You for Your Spirit.

We call Him our teacher at times like this. But Father, we need more than a teacher. We need one who will grab our hearts and transform us from the inside out.

And so we pray that You would speak, that You would even sing into our hearts the truth of Christmas, that it might not just be something we can celebrate at a particular time of year, but that it might be life-changing.

So would You do that by Your Spirit? We know You can and we know You love to. So we ask for it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Even 16 years later now, most of us remember where we were on 9-11, when all of a sudden destruction hit.

[ 5 : 28 ] We remember watching those horrific events unfold, seeing scenes of devastation around the Twin Towers, flames billowing out of the building, smoke, debris all over the place.

Both skyscrapers crashing down just in the matter of a couple of hours, perhaps some of the most traumatic events most of us have ever witnessed.

And perhaps as we saw those images that morning, the most heartbreaking may be the crowds of people fleeing away from, in every direction they could, away from that death and destruction that was going on, running as fast as they could covered in the debris.

But even in the beginning, and certainly we heard a lot more stories come out in the weeks later, there were those who we saw running in the other direction. First responders, firefighters, NYPD officers, others who were there, emergency personnel, who were running in the opposite direction of the crowds.

They were running toward the pain, towards that devastation and destruction that was happening. They dove into the rubble. They came out covered in dust and blood and sweat.

[ 6 : 54 ] Time and again, they went back in to rescue anyone they could, right? You know that many of those first responders died that day in their efforts to save others.

Of the nearly 3,000 people who died there that day, over 400 were rescue workers who had run towards the towers from their place of safety.

They'd run into danger to help. There were many more than that who had their lives turned upside down, never the same having walked through that, even though they survived.

And we hail these people as heroes, don't we? We talk about them often. We remember them and what they've done. Because what was heroic?

It was that it was so easy and obvious to see where the danger was. The danger, the pain, the devastation, it was clearly there. And rather than running in the other direction, as many understandably were doing, they chose to run into the pain.

[ 8 : 02 ] They purposefully ran toward pain to help others, even if they were hurt themselves. That's just one picture of what Jesus is doing in the incarnation.

When he becomes flesh, fully aware of the danger and destruction that are before him, Jesus runs toward the pain.

I think that's an interesting reality for us to contemplate because I tend, by nature and by choice, to avoid pain and suffering at all costs.

It's not just because I'm a wimp to the point that I don't even like getting flu shots, which is true. But I also design my whole life around avoiding pain and suffering.

I want to be comfortable and predictable. I want to be away from all the mess and the chaos around me. I want life to go the way it's supposed to, which is the way that I plan it.

[ 9 : 07 ] Don't we design our schedules, our neighborhoods, our finances, even our parenting around avoiding pain and suffering?

Maybe like me, you only take on projects you're good at so that you can avoid the pain of failure. I used to avoid roller skating rinks as a kid because I was terrible.

And now as an adult, I avoid house projects for the same reason. I'm not good at it. I don't want to fail. So let's stay away. Maybe that's why I only let my kids do the same thing.

Only the places you're going to succeed. Maybe you only enter into relationships or situations that seem controllable or predictable. So you can avoid the pain of just mess, of draining conversations and time-consuming people that you just don't want to get involved with.

Maybe you try to make enough money to avoid any pain that does come along by buying the best treatment to take care of it. There are lots of ways to avoid pain and suffering.

[10:23] Many of us tend to do it by activity, by getting so busy with things we think we can control or have success in, that we'll just busy ourselves so we don't have to acknowledge the difficulty.

You can also do it by inactivity, can't you? Just checking out on Netflix or on the computer and ignoring the difficult conversation across the room or across town.

I'm just going to check out. I don't want to deal with the pain, the suffering of the world around me. I hold on so tightly to comfort and plan to steer clear of any pain every chance I get.

See, when John tells us that the Word became flesh, it's not merely that Jesus sacrificed the glories and the riches and the status of heaven, although what an incredible sacrifice that he gave those things up.

But even more, he left those comforts to run into enemy territory, as it were, knowing that there would be great cost, great pain on a number of levels.

[11:38] We're going to do this the same way we did last week as we considered his sacrifice. First, considering how Jesus did this in his incarnation. Then we'll ask what that means for us.

And finally, return to the uniqueness of his incarnation that wins our hearts. So what was the pain that Jesus ran toward in the incarnation?

Can we define it a little bit? First, John tells us that Jesus enters the world. A world, in fact, that he was in, but the world did not know him.

Verse 10. Yes, it's the world that he made, but now it's not that perfect world anymore. It's not the way he originally made it. It's a fallen world that doesn't even recognize its creator anymore.

It's broken in many ways. Suffering is everywhere around us. When John uses the word world, it often has a negative connotation.

[12:47] It's broken and in rebellion against the creator king. It's a place that didn't know him, that didn't love him. That's the world into which Jesus comes.

And that in itself is part of the pain, the humiliation, the lowering of Jesus from creator of all to tiny baby.

But as a result of the world's rebellion, this baby is entering a world now full of suffering. Isaiah 53 is a great prophecy of the coming Christ where he's depicted as a suffering servant.

Verse 3 says it this way. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, familiar with suffering.

Some versions translate. A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, familiar with suffering, weeping, thirsting, hungering, hurting.

[14:01] These things were not a part of his existence in heaven. But they become everyday realities for the son of man who has no place to lay his head.

He will experience all sorts of things. Unjust leaders. Betrayal by friends. The death of loved ones. Things that were not meant to be a part of his good creation. And Jesus sees that billowing cloud of smoke and he runs toward the pain of humiliation and suffering that he knows is there.

But there's another pain. Jesus knows he's running into. The pain of rejection. Look at John 1.11. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him.

Yes, the world hated him. Stood in rebellion against him. But now he comes to the people who are supposed to be God's friends. Who have been praying and longing for his coming.

[15:13] And by and large they reject him too. Isaiah says it as well. He was despised. Rejected by men.

He was despised. And we esteemed him not. despised. Rejected. I think we all know the pain of those things, don't we?

We've experienced those in different ways. But add to that the disappointment. That these were the ones who should have welcomed him and celebrated him.

His own people. It's one thing not to get picked. Not to get invited to something. It's another thing altogether for your supposed friends to be the ones running you off.

Jesus should have been invited to a party. To celebrate the long awaited king is here. But one leader after another is looking to kill him.

[16:15] He was rejected. Despised. We esteemed him not. Certainly the rejection that hurt the worst. It's the one Jesus must have dreaded from an early age.

The one that caused him to sweat drops of blood. It was the rejection of his father. His father turning his face away from Jesus.

As Jesus became sin for us, he experienced the wrath and rejection of a holy God towards sin and rebellion. And he cries out what?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? So as we've been considering this morning, Jesus was born not merely to live, but quite purposefully to die.

The pain of death itself as a result of the rejection of the people was certainly daunting. It wasn't for Jesus merely a possibility when he entered the world, as it would have been for those first responders who were risking their lives to go in after others.

[17:32] For Jesus, it was an absolute certainty. He came to die. We've seen him in Luke as we've been studying over the last few months.

Set his face to Jerusalem and a cross and tell his disciples, I must go there. This is why I've come. He's not unclear, is he? He came to live, but he's headed to a cross because he came to die.

Let's read more of Isaiah 53. Isaiah describes this king is coming for a reason that we just heard James sing about.

He comes to be pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.

[18:36] Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people, and they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death.

Jesus knew this prophecy. It may not sound like a Christmas one to you, but there are words here that can note physical agony, the painful death of the cross.

There are words here that remind us again of the emotional agony we were just talking about, the cursed death of the cross, receiving the curse of his father.

And Jesus, just imagine him as he's sitting in heaven with the glories of heaven around him, in this perfect, intimate relationship with his father, the riches of all the world at his fingertips, and he reads this prophecy.

[19:50] He's told, this is what the Messiah will endure. And he says, I'll go. I'll rescue them.

I'll walk into that. And Jesus runs toward our pain, fully aware of what it would cost.

If we look back at our definition for the incarnation, we see that he intentionally chooses to take human flesh, to enter into this world that he knows is fallen.

He chooses even to pay the price of his own life. Why? In order to redeem us, to rescue us, to do us good.

Now I'm going to say for the third week in a row, that the incarnation of Jesus is unique, and we can't replicate it.

[20:57] We're already human. We're already living in a fallen world, so we can't become human or enter a fallen world. That's where we are. That's who we are.

It's not something that we can do as he has done, but also the primary purpose of the incarnation is to redeem, which is not our job, ultimately.

That's the primary purpose, not merely to exemplify, but here again, we're going to see in some of these passages, God has called us to similar paths as what Jesus walked in his incarnation.

We are, after all, to follow in the footsteps of our Savior, right? And while my footsteps often set a course away from pain and suffering, Christmas reminds us that's not the path that our Savior chose.

He didn't head that direction. The footprints of the incarnation travel a long way toward pain and suffering.

[22:05] If we are to love others as Jesus has loved us, and we are. If we are called to follow in his footsteps, and we are, then our footsteps will carry us toward pain, toward brokenness, toward suffering, because we're following his.

We've already said this is unnatural and difficult. So let's just make sure that God's Word tells us this, not will.

That's a very, very important thing. Does God's Word tell us this? Of course, the Bible talks in many places about our enduring suffering, and trials, and tribulations as followers of Christ.

It even says that we will fill up his sufferings for the sake of his church. But look at John 17 specifically. It's a passage where Jesus, before his death, is praying for us, for his followers, those who will believe in him.

And he prays to his Father, I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

[ 23 : 21 ] I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth.

As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. They'll be hated by all for my name's sake, Jesus will say elsewhere.

If we are following Jesus, we can expect to encounter the rejection that he received from the world. He knows it.

He prays, Father, they're going to be hated as they go into the world, and yet he does what? Sends them into the world.

And he prays for us as we go into the world. Certainly, though, we're only going to have to face the suffering and the rejection part, right?

[ 24 : 20 ] The dying, that's not really for us. That was just for Jesus. I mean, there is that one place where he says, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for them.

So, I mean, that could be, oh, but then even the women aren't off the hook because John chapter 15, the same guy, the same John, writes in John chapter 15, this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. And he says it again in 1 John, by this we know love, that Jesus laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

all the way to the point of laying down our lives parallel to what Jesus did. We're called to follow Jesus into the pain like a firefighter rushing into a burning building while others are rushing to get out.

Jesus calls us to enter into the mess of others' lives even at potentially great cost to ourselves. So let's ask the question this morning, what could following in our Savior's footsteps look like for us?

[ 25 : 47 ] Maybe start with the suffering part, especially if you're like me and running toward pain and suffering would require a course correction for you.

Just consider Jesus who became familiar with suffering. A man of sorrows familiar with suffering. Ask yourself, whose suffering are you familiar with?

Whom are you walking with long enough to understand and even feel their pain? We have mission partners around the world running toward all sorts of pain.

One that we're praying for together this month in our prayer guide is Ursula Spooner in Vienna, Austria working with trafficked women.

And you can read here requests for a Chinese girl, a Nigerian woman, a Romanian woman that she's working with.

[ 26 : 54 ] People who know deep pain. Aren't you glad? Someone with the heart of Jesus is there for them in their pain?

Isn't that where the church must be? In those places with people hurting like that? What about you here?

You know you don't have to go around the world to find pain and suffering. What about us? Are we willing to enter into it here in Huntsville? Whose suffering are you familiar with?

Some of you here have jumped into the pain of children who need parents to love them and care for them. And you've begun fostering and adopting and showing the love of God there.

Entering into that pain as I've watched several of you. Long term pain. even when you can't fix it and it grieves your heart.

[ 28 : 00 ] You've entered in there. And there are mothers and parents of those dear ones who need to know that love as well. Many of you have helped run toward the pain of joblessness and generational poverty through our Jobs for Life ministry.

Developing relationships where the light of Jesus can shine in to both of us. It could be the pain of homelessness of racism the effects of predatory payday lending and all these places where we can enter in to feel the pain first with them and then to fight to help those who are hurting.

God calls us to be familiar with their sufferings. Too often we're not. maybe you're uniquely familiar already with the sufferings of the guy next door to you or in the office next door to you.

Maybe parenting anxiety. The long hours at the office straining your marriage. The emptiness of chasing after fulfillment in the things of this world and longing to be fulfilled and not finding it.

Run toward those relationships. They don't have to be around the world. They may be next door and they may be just as frightening to you. Perhaps following in our Savior's footsteps will look like having hard conversations with a brother or sister in Christ about their relationships.

[ 29 : 44 ] When you encourage a brother or sister to forgive, in their marriage or in their friendship, you may expect to be received and yet find your counsel and even your friendship to be rejected.

But God calls us graciously and patiently to follow Jesus into those painful situations, into those hard conversations, to carry each other's burdens and call each other to follow Jesus.

whatever the sin, whatever the struggle, I'm here with you and Jesus is worth it. What's the situation where you can already see on the front end it's really going to cost you to get involved?

Who's the neighbor, co-worker, the friend whose chaos could cost you months, even years perhaps, of peace, of sanity on some days?

You won't think you have the time that you need if you get involved there. I've got to tell you again this morning what we said last week.

[ 31 : 01 ] When Jesus leaves the comforts of heaven and enters into this world to live and die for us, his great goal is not our temporal comfort but rather that we might move into uncomfortable places with uncomfortable people to share his comfort there.

Jesus calls us to enter into the pain of this world even to the point of laying down our lives if we must. He certainly did so.

He's not calling us to go anywhere we can't already see his footprints. The ones that are running toward the pain we see them. But it's also true there's a difference between his death and ours.

He said our death is not ultimately redemptive. We are to sacrifice in others lives for their good but only his death pays for their sins and restores their relationship with their heavenly father.

God is doing different work the pain that he endures is in many ways of a different order than that which we will face. And this is really good news.

[ 32 : 21 ] This is good news of gospel hope for us because no matter how hard we try we can't avoid the pain and the suffering entirely can we?

I cannot go to the doctor for years trying to avoid it and I'm still going to get sick eventually. We can try to ignore the realities around us but they don't go away.

We can try to pick really safe relationships with people who are just like me and then find out that many of those become really messy and difficult and complicated too.

the true hope is not that we can avoid pain but rather that we have a savior who enters into the pain to rescue us.

So we don't have to obsess over keeping ourselves and our kids from suffering anymore. We can obsess as it were over the one who enters into suffering and loves to rescue those who hurt.

[ 33 : 25 ] Think of the aspects of pain Jesus endured so we would never have to. Not only did he suffer humiliation in this world so that we might be honored forever but also he was rejected by his father that we might be welcomed by our father forever.

Never knowing a moment in this life or the life to come where he turns his face away from us. Our father always turned towards us in love.

Not only did Jesus die so that we might live forever but also he endured the pains of hell that we might know the glories of heaven and we never deserved and know them forever.

What an amazing savior. He is the great hero of this story. He is our rescuer. The one who has come to save us.

God, I want to leave you with this image in your minds this morning. Imagine that you've been trapped under tons of rubble.

[ 34 : 40 ] Death and destruction all around you and your friend is stuck there next to you. You're both completely helpless.

You're buried so deeply under this. You're not able to get free. And a first responder rushes into the smoke and pulls you out and rushes you out of the building to safety.

And then you look around and imagine following his footprints the way he just walked to come after you. Imagine following those footprints right back into the pain all the way back to your friend and taking him by the hand and saying, hey, I'm here.

I know how it feels to be stuck here. It's awful. It hurts. And I'm here with you.

And I'm not strong enough to pull you out. but I've got good news. There's someone who is. There's a rescuer who's strong enough to pull you out and he's coming for you.

[ 35 : 56 ] I'm going to be here with you. I want you to know him. What a great privilege that we know the rescuer who's strong enough and passionate enough to relieve the pain of everyone around us who's hurting.

who comes to rescue them. To bring him to them. What a great joy. Let's pray. Jesus, we worship you and we thank you.

You are cast off as an enemy that we might be welcomed in as God's friend. you endured torment. We might know eternal comfort and peace. You ran toward the pain so that we could be rescued from it.

We could never thank you enough. Overwhelm our hearts with what you have done for us. May our feet be eager to follow after yours.

[ 37 : 11 ] We ask it in your name. Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org).

Thank you. Thank you.