Redemptive Suffering

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Preacher: Andy Lloyd

[0:00] Well, good morning all. Morning to everybody in the one and sixes upstairs. It's good to see you.! Should have said earlier probably that, Carl, it's great to have you back with us. Bless you.

It's really nice to see you. Johnny, it's equally nice to see you too. Welcome, both of you. Redemptive suffering. Ooh, get you. We'll have a little explore of this really interesting topic, but really important topic. But I just need to say what I said at the beginning again. Be expectant.
As I've been preparing this, I've been increasingly strong sense that God just wants to do some work. His Holy Spirit wants to do some work with us this morning. He always does. That's not a new thing.
But it's something that this morning I have a particular beat in my heart about. So just come with some assumption that God will speak to us this morning.
1 Peter 1, verses 3-7. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.
[1:36] This inheritance is kept in heaven for you who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

There's a whole sermon there. In all this you greatly rejoice, though for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.
These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.
Praise be to the Lord, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then the talk about the inheritance that can never be taken from you and yet you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.
In the early 1800s, a group of women in Dublin met regularly for a Bible study. One afternoon they came across a verse in the book of Malachi, which says of God, He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.
[3:05] They wondered about this image. Why did God choose to sit? What does it mean for him to be a refiner of our lives, especially when our lives hurt?

One of the women decided to find out. Without telling the others, she went down to the local silversmith. She watched him work as he held a piece of silver directly over the hottest part of the furnace fire.
She asked, why do you hold the silver right there in the flame? The silversmith looked at her and explained, to clear away the dross, the impurities, the dirt, the things that ruin the metal.
It has to be held in the centre of the fire where the flames are the hottest, because only that intense heat can thoroughly purify it.
The woman thought about the struggles in her own life and she asked a second question. Is it true that you must sit while this is happening? Oh yes, said the silversmith.
[4:18] I must sit here with my eyes fixed steadily on the furnace the entire time the silver is in the fire. If the time is exceeded, even by a single degree or a single second, the silver will not just be purified, it will be permanently destroyed.

The woman paused, beginning to understand the deep, comforting care of a sovereign God who never leaves us alone in our trials.
She began to walk out of the shop feeling satisfied with the answer. But the silversmith called her back. There is one last thing you should know.

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How do I know when the process is completed? I know that the silver is pure at the exact moment I can see my own face reflected in it.
The silversmith and the fire. You see, what that little image, that little story reminds us of and tells us of is that as part of who we are and as part of our walk with Jesus, there will be times when we need to be refined.
[5:45] There are times when our lives need to be put through the fire. Not because God wants to hurt us. Not because God doesn't like us or is some sort of masochist that likes to cause pain.

But because for whatever reason, my life, your life needs to be purified.
Because we worship a pure God. God takes the broken pieces of a fallen world and redeems them by using our pain as a tool.
This is really hard, some of this stuff, to wrap our heads around. Why would you use pain as a tool? A tool for sanctification.
Suffering is the furnace God uses to burn away pride and refine holiness. So to start with what we are talking about here and what we are exploring today is this idea that we are holy people.
[6:59] We are the people of God. We are redeemed. And yet for each of us, there are things within our lives that are dross, that are impurities, that are things that shouldn't be there.

And from time to time, we need to be refined because God chooses. And that might be through the fire.
But understand, just as the silversmith said, not a minute too long and not a degree too hot, God will not allow us to go further than purification.
We will not come out of that damaged and further needing of purification. Next slide please.
In Romans chapter 8, the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs. Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.
[8:07] Isn't that lovely? We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. We are children of God. If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. Paul, beaten, stoned, chucked out of cities, tried, flogged.
And again, we come to this theme that we must find ourselves in times of testing. We will find ourselves in times of testing.
Because we need to share in the suffering so we can share in the glory.
Let's move on. Being human is to suffer. But we all suffer in our own unique way.
[9:25] Tyler Satin, who wrote the interesting book that we're just following as this series, quotes there Anna Karenica.

Each family suffers in its own unique way. Each unhappy family. Sorry, can you go back a slide please, Josh? Thank you. I tricked you there.
Just, thank you. Your suffering is not my suffering. My suffering is not your suffering.
And what's important there is that if one of us are suffering, if you are suffering, and my response is either, I don't know what you're making a fuss about that about, so will you, just crack on, or you think that's suffering.
Let me tell you about what's going on in my life. We've misunderstood. Because if you're struggling with something, you're struggling.
[10:41] And what we're hearing here, and what we need to remember here, is that if you're struggling, my heart needs to be so soft, because the Spirit has melted my heart, that I am moved with compassion for your suffering.

Suffering isn't on some sort of competition. Oh, you got to a four, well done. I'm on a six. I don't know why you're suffering, struggling with that, because I've never struggled with that.
Well, well done for you. But I am. We all suffer. We all struggle. We all, this side of heaven, will find things which are challenging.
And the point of community, the point of church, the point of who we are as a fellowship in Whitby Christian Fellowship, is that between us, we can meet each other's needs.
Between us, we can be the comfort that you need. So never, ever diminish yourself by saying, I can never be any good to anybody else.
[12:05] We desperately need you to be part of who we are. Because one day you will have wisdom and insight to comfort somebody who is in need.

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And we will have, between us, comfort and insight and wisdom to care for you in your time of struggle.
How we respond to suffering, how I respond to struggle, is a spiritual practice. Led and guided by the Holy Spirit, because it's about submitting to God's holy and perfect will.
I indeed, when things are a struggle, to be willing to surrender all of my feelings to God, all of my crossness to God, all of my despair to God, all of my sadness to God.
And say, God, Holy Spirit, meet me where I am. Because suffering hurts.
[13:19] Struggles hurt. Sadness hurts. And I'll come back to this later, but there will be, there are people here this morning.

I strongly believe that you are going through real struggles. Real hurt. Real hurt. Real sadness. Real fear.
Real fear. And God, this morning, through His Holy Spirit, wants to meet with you and comfort you.
We'll come back to that. Next slide, please. Suffering is the place where we look hardest for God.
And for many, that place is where God is hardest to be found.
We seek God. And we have to work really hard. Because it doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense.
[14:26] In Numbers chapter 11, verse 11, and you'll forgive, please, the antiquated language. It's language that I, this particular verse and others, I know well, but I find it really helpful.

Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? Why have you done this, God, to me?
Why am I feeling this agony? Why is it happening like this? Fiona and I have been on holiday for a couple of weeks.
Very nice. Thank you very much for asking. It was lovely. And we were walking down into town one day, down a hill in the sunshine. Yeah, it's nice. And I found myself in tears.
As I suddenly, for reasons known probably more to God than to me, became overwhelmed with sadness at the death of my father.
[15:51] Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? Why did that happen? Why did that happen? Well, because it's things that happen.

It didn't take long to pull myself together or to find the answer or whatever it is. But we need to be able to have this heart's cry.
Why, God? Why? Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant?
It's an okay question to ask. Suffering is not a punishment from God.
It's really important that as we get into this, the meat of this, we understand really clearly that God isn't punishing you if you suffer.
[16:54] There might be correction involved in this. This is not God with a sort of dandy or beano head teacher with a bendy cane coming to thwack you.

But suffering is not meaningless. It's not meaningless hardship or struggle. And this next point is very important.
Suffering is not something we should seek or be pleased to be going through. From time to time I read things that says, we're having a really tough time in our church and there's lots of opposition and there's lots of this, that and the other.
Isn't it marvellous? No. No, it's not. No, it's not. We shouldn't be seeking suffering.
We shouldn't find suffering something which necessarily we rejoice at. Now again, be careful there. Sometimes we need to rejoice that God is pointing something out in our lives that we need to deal with.
[18:10] So there's some subtleties here. There's some subtleties and some wisdom. But going out seeking suffering is silly and unnecessary.

Suffering isn't necessarily a devilish attack. Might be. Might be. Might be. But it isn't necessarily a devilish attack.
It was a bit blowy last night, wasn't it? A little bit gusty at times. As a result of those little bits of blowiness, we have a ridge tile loose on our roof.
Which is always a good thing to happen first thing in the morning, isn't it? In fact, I heard it last night sliding down the roof. I thought, oh, here we go. Here we go. It hasn't fallen off and smashed that yet.
That's not a devilish attack. That's the wind. And actually, it's the crows that pick up the concrete around the ridge tiles.

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[19:22] All right? All right? A silly example. But we sometimes give far too much credit to the evil one. This is a devilish attack.

No, it's not. It's a fallen world. A broken world. A world in which we will suffer along with every other person who lives on this earth.
Now, there will be times where it is an attack. And we need to be wise and pray against that. The book of James tells us to resist the devil and he will flee from you.
Draw close to God and he will draw near to you. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. So, we do need to resist the devil.
We do need to recognize when there's something going on there that we need to pray and resist and draw near to God. But don't give every suffering the credit from the devil.
[20:27] Sometimes it's just stuff. Suffering can be the context in which God's redemptive work can be experienced.

Suffering can be the context in which God's redemptive work, the work in your life, can be experienced. And so, let's have a think about redemptive suffering for a moment.
Jesus' suffering on the cross, this is very important. Jesus' suffering on the cross was unique, unrepeatable and fully sufficient to pay for human sin.
We do not and cannot add to Jesus' gift of salvation with our own pain. We don't offer an additionality in our suffering.
Jesus' suffering. Jesus has done the lot. It is finished, he said. It is finished.
[21:32] We can't add to it. We shouldn't try to add to it. This is not redemptive suffering. But God can use our suffering to teach us, to grow us, to mature us and to accomplish his perfection in and through us as we suffer.

The enemy intended your trial for evil. But God has redirected it for eternal good. God can use our suffering to help us become more like the people that he wants us to be.
God can take my suffering and put me through a furnace. Furnaces are hot.
Furnaces are red hot. But a skilled craftsman knows the precise temperature and knows the precise length of time that clears out the muck, clears out the dross, clears out the imperfections and the impurities.
and at exactly the right moment takes us out of the fire and we are further refined.
[23:14] God redeems our pain by using it as a tool to burn away pride and refine our holiness.

What's redeemed? Our time is redeemed. The way we use our time, our scars are redeemed. The hurt, the real scars that we have, the emotional scars, the physical scars that we have.
As we think about our lives and think about the struggles in our lives, our character is redeemed. Who we are.
Who we know ourselves to be in the private and the quiet, as well as in the public and the obvious.
Showing grace and peace in our suffering point others to the power of the Holy Spirit.
I don't know how you're coping with this, says people to Christians, not infrequently.
[24:33] If that was happening to me, I'd be responding differently. Why? Why? Because as we give our struggles to God, the Holy Spirit strengthens us, changes our character and allows us to be people of hope in times of despair.

Why? I honestly don't know how you're coping with this situation. Redundancy. Illness. Homelessness. Financial struggles. Relationship struggles. To know how you're coping. I don't know either.
Except through God. Through the Holy Spirit. Who is empowering me. I think we're on the next slide, are we?
Yes. No, sorry. Sorry. We weren't. I'm tricking you again. I'm sorry, Josh. Forgive me. Please. Please. Please. Showing grace and peace.
[25:47] We have done that. Sorry. Romans 5. Let's go to Romans 5. Therefore, since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace which now we stand.

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know, here's one of Paul's lists. Suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope.
And hope doesn't put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. You see, what we have here is suffering creates a personality

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and a character of hope.
When we suffer, we go through perseverance and character, and our character produces hope. There's an equation. Goodness me, I'd like to have the hope with maybe without the perseverance and the character building.
When I was about 19, I used to have a big beard, a big, proper big beard. I quite miss it some days when it's plowy and cold. And one day, I was on a walk with some friends and various other people, and it was snowing quite heavily.
[27:25] It was July. And my beard became clarted with snow and frozen. And I was in my characteristically cheerful fashion saying, It's terrible.

This is awful. I'm freezing. Why can't I be somewhere else like a nice warm pub with a fire? And somebody said, Don't worry, Andy.
It's character building. I just don't want my character built today. Thank you very much. A little bit like when I was a bit younger.
Not infrequently, actually, at school. One of my teachers said, I'm going to cane you. Which was, okay.
It happens. This will hurt me more than it hurts you. Nonsense. Absolute nonsense. It hurt me a whole lot, and it hurt them not a little bit.
[28:33] Was it character building? I don't know. Look at me. It didn't damage me. Suffering produces perseverance, produces character, produces hope.

Our suffering shapes our character. It deepens our faith. It throws us into reliance on God. Next slide, please.
Our pain cannot add to the finished work of salvation, but in the hands of God, of a sovereign God, no suffering is ever wasted. The Holy Spirit draws us into deeper fellowship through trials, transforming our deepest hurts into tools for holiness, ministry, and witness.
This is where we can begin to understand, why am I struggling? Why am I having this real suffering? What is going on? Wherefore, God, hast thou afflicted thy servants?
Well, because I want you to have a deepened ministry of holiness and witness, because I want you to be refined through the fire, to become more the person that I want you to be, and this is how it works.
[29:55] The Holy Spirit does his work in us through a refining fire. Let's move on.

I'm just wanting to, I'm going to move a bit faster, I'm afraid, because we're going to run out of time if we're not careful. Praise be, 2 Corinthians 1, 3 and 4. Praise be to the God and our Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort those in any kind of trouble.
Do you get it? We are suffering so that we can comfort others who are suffering in the same way. When you've been through something, you have a renewed and an increased compassion because you understand how it feels.
Yesterday we were driving home and there were three lads, three young lads in a car broken down. And they were pushing the car to the side of the road. We stopped to see if we could help. Have you got any jump leads?
As it happens, yes, we have got some jump leads. Can you help us? Yes, I can help you. They hadn't a clue. I mean, I'm absolutely brilliant at cars.
[31:08] And so I was able to help put some jump leads on and start the car, help them start the car again. Why? Because that happened to us. And kind people helped us.

So kind people helped us. I know what it feels like to be 18, 19 and driving a beat-up old car that no one really wants to be seen alive in, let alone dead in.
And it breaks down. And they go, Oh no, what do we do? And here's this funny bloke who said, Yeah, just do this. And then I said to them as they drove off, Don't stall until you get home.
That was cheerful of him, wasn't it? When we have suffered and we have been refined and we have allowed God to take us through that suffering, we ourselves then understand what that means, how it feels, so we can comfort others as God has comforted us.
Do you see the equation? Sometimes we need to have that experience to understand that we ourselves can now comfort others.
[32:19] Our suffering qualifies us uniquely to support and offer comfort to others. But it also gives us a real opportunity for testimony to God's goodness and mercy.

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2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 7. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger, excuse me, a messenger of Satan to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said, my grace is sufficient for you. My power, for my power is made perfect in your weakness. Paul's thorn in the flesh.
Three times I asked God to take it away, but it wasn't. We don't know what this thorn in the flesh is. There's lots of speculation. We don't know. It doesn't say. Paul knew God of a God of miracles and he'd seen God perform miracles.
Why haven't you taken this away from me, God? Because in a peculiar way that we only can understand when we understand what the Holy Spirit's doing in our lives, sanctifying us and purifying us, you need this to keep you honest.
[33:36] We need this to keep you humble. We need this to be part of who you are so you don't become too smarty pants and get above yourself.

the purpose was to keep Paul humble and to keep people pointing people to Jesus. I'm going to very briefly mention lament.
The numbers verse there you have, wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant, says Moses. Why have you done this? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?
Why does it hurt so much? In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We don't know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans, through groans that words cannot express.
Sometimes I don't know what to pray. Sometimes you don't know what to pray. And you can sit in wherever you do your praying or walking or whatever. You walk as you pray or whatever.
[34:48] And all I can do is go, oh! And God understands it. I don't know what to pray. I don't know how to do this. I don't even begin to understand what's going on.

But God, you are almighty God and you know. So all I can say is, oh! And God says, yeah, I get it. I get it. Groaning, lamenting, is part of who we are as Christians. And it's allowed.
It's allowed. Moaning and muttering is less great. But groaning before God, God, I just don't know. Groans that word cannot express.
The Spirit gives us to express the inexpressible. And He comes to meet our needs.
[35:52] When worldly comforts we lean on are shaken. we're forced to drop our anchor into the immovable rock of Christ Jesus.

We are forced to drop our anchors into the immovable rock of Christ Jesus. And so, would the music group come up, please?
thank you. This morning, my friends, many of us are sitting here feeling that we're in the centre of the furnace.
You feel like you're in the centre of a real trial, in the centre of a furnace. the heat of life, whether it's medical diagnosis, a broken relationship, financial collapse, silent depression, or whatever, feels like it's about to consume you.
Like Moses, we look up through the smoke and ask, wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? why is the fire so hot?
[37:16] Why does it feel so hard? And we wonder whether God has walked away from our situation. But the gospel has given us a beautiful and staggering truth.

This master silversmith is not absent. he's sitting right beside the furnace, watching the clock, measuring the heat, refusing to let the fire destroy you.
He's redeeming the pain, holding you close until the image of his son Christ Jesus is perfectly reflected in your life.
As we just listen to some music, can we just play quietly? Would that be okay? As you're listening to the music, sing along if you know the words, but just allow yourself to be washed over by the Holy Spirit.
it. And as you do, ask God to redeem you and bring you to a place where the purification process has happened.
[38:48] The Holy Spirit is here, ready to meet with you and minister to you. let's just listen for a moment.

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