

Overcoming Some Of Life's Problems # 6

The Problem Of Suffering

Introduction:

1. Sometimes I hurt!
 - a. You do too.
 - b. I hurt when I suffer.
 - c. I suffer when I:
 - i. Am sick.
 - ii. Experience pain.
 - iii. Face tragedy.
 - iv. Have a loved one die.
 - v. When someone I care about does wrong.
2. "Sometimes", I say, not always. In fact, the times of suffering don't begin to compare with the times of joy.
3. There is much to be learned from suffering that will help us endure.
 - a. Jesus learned from his suffering (Heb. 5:8).
 - b. We have already learned in lesson 1 (*Why Me Lord?*) why we suffer and who suffers.
 - c. In this lesson focus on what we learn from our suffering.
4. Look at two examples (Job & Paul).

I. Job - A Patient Man

- A. *Job was a righteous man and well blessed* (Job 1:1-5, 8).
- B. *Job's suffering:*
 1. Lost all his animals (wealth) (Job 1:13-17).
 2. Lost his children - all of them (Job 1:18-19).
 3. Lost his health (Job 2:1-10).
 - a. Boils (2:7).
 - b. Itching (2:8).

- c. Drastic change in appearance (2:12).
- d. Difficulty eating (3:24).
- e. Worms and running sores (7:5).
- f. Shortness of breath (9:18).
- g. Darkness of eyes (16:16).
- h. Bad breathe (19:17).
- i. Loss of weight (19:20).
- j. Pain (30:17).
- k. Blackened skin - peeling (30:30).
- l. Fever (30:30).
- m. Nightmares (7:14).
- n. Continued for months (7:3; 29:2).
- 4. Wife was no help (Job 2:9).
- 5. Friends accuse him of sin - are miserable comforters (Job 4-27; 16:2).
- 6. Suffering so great - laments his birth and life (Job 3).

C. *What do we learn from the Job's suffering?*

- 1. **Sufferings are not a trial of God but of man.**
 - a. God is not on trial here; Job is.
 - b. The question is not, "Where is *God* when Job hurts?", but "Where is *Job* when Job hurts?"
 - c. Today, it is not "Why did God do this to me?", but "How will I react when God allows me to hurt?"
- 2. **We must serve God for *who* he is, not merely for *what* he does.**
 - a. Satan said Job only served God for what he can get out of God.
 - (1) Job. 1:9-12
 - (2) Job 2:4-5
 - b. Sad, but true that some only serve God for the good they receive, but when times are hard - they are through with God.
 - c. Job proved Satan wrong. He endured.
- 3. **Not knowing why we suffer or what the future holds is part of the value of suffering.**
 - a. Job never sees what the reader of the books sees.
 - (1) We see the discussion and challenge between God & Satan.
 - (2) We see a divine purpose in suffering.
 - (3) Job sees neither.

- b. Job didn't know how things would turn out. If he had, enduring would have been easier.
- c. What Job did not know is as important as what he did know.
 - (1) "We cannot understand the meaning of many trials; God does not explain them. To explain them would be to destroy its object, which is that of calling forth simple faith and implicit obedience. If we knew why the Lord sent us this or that trial, it would thereby cease to be a trial either of faith or of patience" (Alfred Edersheim, *Explore The Book*. Vol. 3, p. 24).
 - (2) "The fact is, Job was *not meant* to know the explanation of his trial; and on this simple fact everything hangs. If Job *had* known there would have been no place for faith; and the man could never have come forth as gold purified in the fire. We are meant to understand that there are some things which God cannot reveal to us at present, inasmuch as the very revealing of them would thwart His purposes for our good. The Scriptures are as wise in their *reservations* as in their *revelations*. Enough is revealed to make faith intelligent. Enough is reserved to give faith scope for development. In this, we repeat, lies the message of the book - that there *was* an explanation, but that Job did not know it and *was not meant* to know it" (J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore The Book*, Vol. 3, p. 27).
 - (3) The book ends without Job knowing.

4. **God is in control and expects us to trust him.**

- a. At the end of the book God overwhelms Job with his greatness and power (Job 38:1-42:6).
- b. Point: God is saying to Job, "I know what I'm doing. Trust me!"
- c. We must be reminded that we serve the Almighty.
 - (1) He is on his throne and in control (Rev. 4).
 - (2) He knows what he is doing (cf. Isa. 29:15-16).
 - (3) Must cast our cares upon him (1 Pet. 5:7).

5. **Patience / Endurance.**

- a. Jas. 5:11 - "You have heard of the patience of Job..."
 - (1) Patience is endurance. "Perseverance" - NKJV.
 - (2) James 5 is about enduring oppression.
- b. Job did endure. He never lost faith in God. He didn't give up. He

- continued to serve God.
- c. If Job could do it, so can you!

- 6. **How to comfort those who suffer.**
 - a. Silence is golden (Job 2:13).
 - b. Don't be insensitive (Job 5:25; 8:4).
 - c. Those who are suffering greatly, may say things they don't mean (Job 6:3, 26).
 - d. Those who suffer don't expect you to make it all well (Job 6:22).
 - e. Don't try to play God (13:7-8).

II. Paul - *An Humble Man*

- A. *Suffered a thorn in the flesh* (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
 - 1. Many speculations as to its identity: (Eye trouble, headaches, earaches, gout, malaria, epilepsy, lust, personal enemies, difficulties in the churches, his temper, speech impediment, etc.).
 - 2. We don't know what it is.
 - a. Some think that is by design.
 - b. May help us to plug in our own thorn.
- B. *Why did he suffer?*
 - 1. Lest he be exalted above measure (v. 7).
 - a. Paul received many revelations.
 - b. He had a vision of Paradise (2 Cor. 12:1-6).
 - c. Under those circumstances it would be easy to be filled with pride!
 - 2. To buffet him (v. 7).
 - a. Literally "strive against".
 - b. To keep him humble.
 - 3. The needs for thorns today:
 - a. If Paul was in danger of spiritual pride, who is not?
 - b. If it was necessary to adapt some external means to keep him humble, we should not be surprised if the same should accompany us!
- C. *How did Paul handle it?*

1. **Didn't blame God** (v. 7)
 - a. Many are will cry, "How could God do this to me?"
 - b. Job himself accused God of shooting arrows (Job 6:4).
 - c. Didn't allow this to cause him to be bitter and turn from God nor use it as an excuse to keep him from service.

2. **Prayed for its removal** (v. 8)
 - a. Being human, he wanted to get rid of it. Who wouldn't?
 - b. Basic lessons about prayer:
 - (1) Troubles force us to pray.
 - (2) First response - (note Paul did say suggest that he tried to remove it).
 - (3) Lord doesn't always answer the way we want.

3. **Learned to live with it** (vv. 7-8).

4. **Looked for some good in it** (v. 7).
 - a. Barnes: Viewed it as a gift - (v. 7).
 - b. Strength is perfect in weakness: weakness drives us to dependency upon God and keeps us humble.

5. **Gloried in it** (vv. 9-10).
 - a. God's strength is made perfect in weakness (v. 9). We ought to be thankful for any calamity, trial or struggle that humbles us and keeps us on the road to heaven - The reward compensates for all the trouble.
 - b. Applied what he learned to other hardships (v. 10).

Conclusion:

1. Yes, sometimes we hurt.
2. When we do, may the example of Job and Paul help us to be better Christians because of the problems we face.

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