

# Talk 1: What should we make of suffering?

*Peter Adam*

# Talk 1: What should we make of suffering?

## Useful Material

Suffering will happen: no one gets through life without scars.

- It will catch us out, if we do not prepare.
- These talks are for you, for other believers you talk with, and for enquirers you talk with about Christianity, and for those who object to Christianity because of 'the problem of evil' ['How can a good and powerful God allow suffering in the world?' – theodicy]
- It is complicated! Compare John 5:15 with 9:1.

### Suffering: a multi-faceted experience!

#### 1. Suffering: God's general judgement on sin

- i. *Judgement for sin on humanity and the creation. An explanation of present human experience, a warning of judgement, and an encouragement to hope in Christ and the restoration of humanity and creation.*

**Genesis 3:14-19.** The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life....To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' And to the man he said...'cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'<sup>1</sup>

**Ecclesiastes 1:2,3.** Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?

**Romans 8:19-21.** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

- ii. *The sign that God's people have broken their covenant with God.*

**Deuteronomy 30:15-18.** See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

**Psalms 1:6**...for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

- iii. *A warning to everyone to repent, not that the people suffering were particularly evil.*

**Luke 13:1-5.** At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

- iv. *The consequence of personal sin.*

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<sup>1</sup> All Bible references from NIV II

**John 5:14.** Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you have been made well! Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.'

v. *Judgement on sinners, while the presence of the righteous would mean forgiveness.*

**Genesis 18:26.** And the Lord said, 'If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.'

vi. *Death, the judgement for sin, will finally be destroyed.*

**1 Corinthians 15:25,26.** For Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

## 2. Suffering: evil human acts, which God uses for good

i. *Something evil that people planned, which God used for good.*

**Genesis 50:20.** Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good...

ii. *A wicked human act, which God will judge, but which God will use for good.*

**Mark 14:21.** For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.

**Acts 2:36.** Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.

iii. *A situation which will show God's power*

**John 9:3.** Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.'

## 3. Suffering: the work of Satan

i. *Suffering inflicted by Satan, and removed by Christ.*

**Luke 13:16.** And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?

ii. *A work of Satan to be resisted, and from which God will rescue his people, at some time in the future.*

**1 Peter 5:8-10.** Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith... And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

iii. *A sign that God is allowing Satan to test someone, so that God's confidence in that person will be shown to be justified.*

**Job 2:3-6.** The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

iv. *A work of Satan, permitted by God, so that humans, in their weakness, find Christ's strength to endure.*

**2 Corinthians 12:7-9.** Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'

v. *A work of Satan, permitted by Christ, to enable the sufferer to strengthen others.*

**Luke 22:28-32.** You are those who have stood by me in my trials...Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

## 4. Suffering: a particular warning of God

i. *To reveal the wrath of God's judgment on idolatry.*

**Romans 1:18.** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

*ii. A present judgement of God on sin.*

**Proverbs 1:19.** Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.

**Proverbs 13:1.** A wise child loves discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

**Amos 8:11.** The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.

**1 Corinthians 11:28-30.** Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

**2 Timothy 4:3,4.** For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

## 5. Suffering: the results of the sins of others

*i. Babylon, symbolising human life without God, oppressed God prophets and saints.*

**Revelation 18:24.** And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.

*ii. Workers oppressed by the rich*

**James 5:1,4.** Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you...Listen! The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

*iii. People of faith have suffered persecution.*

**Hebrews 11:36-38.** Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy.

*iv. Suffering that is the direct result of the sin of others*

**Luke 13:1** At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices...

*v. There is suffering which is the unintended result of human negligence.*

**Deuteronomy 22:8.** When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof; otherwise you might have bloodguilt on your house, if anyone should fall from it.

*vi. There may be additional suffering caused by God's agents, contrary to his will.*

**Zechariah 1:14,15.** Thus says the LORD of hosts; I am very jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. And I am extremely angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they made the disaster worse.

## 6. Suffering that is the result of a 'fallen' creation

*i. Frustration in human activity and in the whole creation.*

**Ecclesiastes 2:21-23.** For a person may labour with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labour under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

**Romans 8: 18-21.** I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

## 7. The substitutionary suffering of Christ

**Isaiah 53:4-6.** Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

**1 Peter 3:18.** For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

## 8. Suffering: how God grows believers and benefits others

### i. A trial of faith.

**1 Peter 1:6.** In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

### ii. An imitation of Christ.

**1 Peter 2:21-23.** For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

### iii. The cost of repentance and transformation.

**Colossians 3: 5-8.** Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.

But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.

### iv. The sign and proof of God's love

**Hebrews 12:5-7.** And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children— 'My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.' *The cost of ministry.*

**Colossians 1:24,25.** I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant...

**2 Timothy 1:8. 2:3.** Join with me in suffering for the gospel...Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

### v. The cost of living as a Christian.

**2 Timothy 3:12.** Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...

### vi. Suffering which produces endurance.

**James 1:2-4.** My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

### vii. Suffering as a test of faith which will ultimately be rewarded.

**Revelation 2:9,10.** I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

### viii. Part of our present experience, of which the bitterness will be wiped away when Christ returns.

**Revelation 21:3,4.** See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.

## 9. What seems like a blessing but is in fact suffering: and suffering which is a blessing.

**Luke 6:20-26.** Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you, and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man... But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

**2 Timothy 4:3,4.** For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

**Romans 1:24,25.** Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. **Revelation 3:15-18.** I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

**While these distinctions are useful for clarification, we should note that:**

1. **While God allows or sends some suffering by secondary causes, such as humans, God is ultimately responsible for all suffering, and also sends suffering without using secondary causes.** 'The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised...Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' [Job 1:21, 2:10].
2. **One incident of suffering can have more than one cause, and serve more than one purpose.** A good example of this is the plagues God inflicted on Egypt at the time of the Exodus. These were at the same time: the means of delivering God's people [Exodus 6:2-8]; punishment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians for enslaving God's people [Exodus 7:4,10:17]; judgement on the gods of Egypt [Exodus 12:12]; so the Egyptians would know the true God [Exodus 14:4]; a warning to the surrounding nations not to harm God's people and tell them of God's power, and bring them to repentance [Joshua 2:8-11]; and a warning of the final judgement of God on the whole world [Revelation chs. 15,16].

**Implications for thinking and ministry:**

1. There are different kinds of suffering, and each kind of suffering requires a different response. We do great damage to ourselves or to others when we misinterpret suffering. Job's friends provide a frightening example of misdiagnosis. The Bible infallibly interprets the suffering it describes: we are not infallible in our diagnosis or the treatment we recommend.
2. A common mistake is the illegitimate universalisation of one Bible verse, or one Bible strand. One Bible verse cannot interpret all causes and kinds of suffering. The presence of different theological reasons warns us against illegitimate universalisation of any one answer. Inapt diagnosis may be caused by theological narrowness, or a lack of theological/pastoral perception.
3. Another common mistake is the illegitimate universalisation of an individual's experience of suffering. We do this because we want to identify with the person who is suffering, but not all suffering has the same cause or meaning. We do not help by giving the wrong medicine!
4. There is great suffering caused by misdiagnosis, when people get the wrong theological interpretation of suffering, and so give the wrong treatment. The wrong interpretation may come from their own perception, from their well-meaning friends, or from defective theological/pastoral perception in a minister. We need great theological and pastoral wisdom in these situations, in both our public and private ministries.
5. In our society, many think that any suffering is wrong. So when suffering comes we interpret it negatively, and miss its particular God-given purpose. We have to learn to embrace suffering and trust God. Jesus is our great example of one who embraced suffering and trusted God [Luke 22: 39-46, John 18:1-12, 1 Peter 2:21-25]. We may need deep repentance about our fundamental world-view, because wrong attitudes to suffering influence life choices, past, present, and future. We may try to ignore suffering, and leave it unresolved in our lives: but this may have bad long-term effects. We must learn how to embrace suffering, when it is necessary or loving to do so.
6. We can respond to suffering by saying, 'just trust God'. This is not wrong, but God has given us more information in the Bible to enhance and enrich our trusting in God.
7. Our view of suffering profoundly shapes what we think about God's presence, God's blessing, God's power, God's plan, and what it means to be close to God. If we think that God is not, or cannot be present in suffering, we diminish his power, and also diminish our perception of his work in our lives.

8. Suffering will either draw us to God, or, if we let it, drive us away from God. Our view of suffering has a profound effect in our lives in the long-term. Our negative response to suffering may show that we are pursuing happiness, not holiness.
9. We should learn to confess our sins, lament their consequences, and lament the sin and evil of our world: trustful lament is a lost art we should recover.
10. We in the West have much to learn about a positive view of suffering from Christians who face persecution today, and from believers from the past.

## **Talk 2: Suffering for personal transformation**

***Peter Adam***

# Talk 2: Suffering for personal transformation

## Useful Material

**Luke 9:23-26.** Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.'<sup>2</sup>

**James 1:2-4.** Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

**Hebrews 12: 4-11.** In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.'

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18.** Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

**Romans 8:35-39.** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**1 Peter 1:3-9.** 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 Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. 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. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may

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<sup>2</sup> All Bible references from NIV II

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. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

**1 Peter 2:20-25.** But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.' For 'you were like sheep going astray,' but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Jonathan Swift: 'It is remarkable with what Christian fortitude and resignation we can bear the suffering of other folks.'

Adoniram Judson: 'If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings.'

Adoniram Judson: [Facing death]. 'The future is as bright as the promises of God.'

Charles Spurgeon: 'If everything works together for our good, then nothing is left to work for our ill.'

Charles Spurgeon: 'All the way to heaven, we shall only get there by the skin of our teeth. We shall not go to heaven sailing along with sails swelling to the breeze, like sea birds with their fair white wings, but we shall proceed full often with sails rent to ribbons, with masts creaking, and the ship's pumps at work day by both night and day. We shall reach the city at the shutting of the gate, but not an hour before.' *Sermons 3:6,37*

Amy Carmichael:

'Hast Thou No Scar?

No hidden scar on foot or side or hand?

I hear thee sung as might in the land;

I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star.

Hast thou no scar?

No wound? No scar?

Yes, as the master shall the servant be.

And pierced are the feet that follow Me

But thine are whole. Can he have followed far

Who has no wound? No scar?'

Hast thou no wound?

Yet, I was wounded -- by the archers spent.

Leaned me against the tree to die, and rent

By ravening beasts that compassed me, I swooned.

Hast thou no wound?

John Bunyan: [Mr Valiant for Truth] 'And though with great difficulty I am got hither, I do not repent me for all the I I have been to arrive at where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. May marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who will now be my rewarder.'

C.S. Lewis: 'That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, "No future bliss can make up for it" not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.' *The Great Divorce*.

C.S. Lewis: 'Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased.' *The Weight of Glory and other addresses*.

George Whitefield:

'When religion began to take root in my heart, and I was fully convinced my soul must totally be renewed...I was visited with outward and inward trials:

I incurred the displeasure of the Master of the College who threatened to expel me if I ever visited the poor again. I said, if it displeased him, I would not. I immediately repented, and visited the poor the first opportunity...My relations counted my life madness...I daily underwent some contempt at college. Some have thrown dirt at me, two friends forsook me.

These, though little, were useful trials. They inured me to contempt, lessened self-love and taught me to die daily.' *Journals*, simplified.

Brian H Cosby, *Suffering and Sovereignty: John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence*

'[God] ordered the very malice of Satan, and the wickednesses of men, as an occasion of eternal good to [our] souls'. 28.

'All secondary causes, good and bad, necessarily depend on God's other ability and are under the permission of his supreme power.' 41.

'Godliness cannot secure you from affliction, but it can and will secure you from hell, and sanctify your afflictions to help you to heaven'. 48.

'Troubles and afflictions are of the Lord's framing and devising'. 49.

'Jesus Christ limits the creatures in their acting assigning them their boundaries and lines of liberty' 'That God is sovereign over all suffering also includes the suffering experienced God's own Son Jesus Christ.' 49,50.

'In all the sad and afflictive providences that befall you, eye God as the author and orderer of them'. 51.

'God is but killing your lusts, weaning your heart from a vain world, preventing temptations and exciting desires after heaven' 'when a sharp affliction comes, then the pride, the impatience and unbelief of the heart appear'. 62. 'Some afflictions on the body...prevent a worse sin'. 63.

'[God] had rather their hearts should be heavy under adversity, than vain and careless under prosperity'... 'These providences speak the jealousy of God over us, and his care to prevent far worse evils by these sad needful strokes.' 64.

'[Afflictions] pull down pride, refine the earthliness, and purge out the vanity of the spirit'... 'a sanctified affliction may, in the efficacy and virtue of Christ's blood, produce blessed effects upon the soul.' 65.

'If you reckon [the church's] glory to consist in its humility, faith, patience and heavenly-mindedness, no condition in the world abounds with advantages for these, as an afflicted condition doth'... 'the power of godliness did never thrive better than in affliction'. 66.

'Times of common suffering are times of reconciliation, and greater endearments among the people of God; never more endeared than when most persecuted, never more united, than when most scattered'. 68.

'Eye the wisdom of God in all your afflictions.' 69.

'Set the faithfulness of the Lord before you under the saddest providences'. 70.

'Own and admire the bounty and goodness of God manifested to thee in this affliction' 71.

'This affliction for which thou mournest, may be the greatest mercy to thee that ever befell thee in the world'. 71.

'Eye God in the whole process of the affliction...as a sovereign hand, which hath the right to dispose of thee, and all thy comforts, without they leave or consent'. 71.

'Eye the all-sufficiency of God in the day of afflictions'. 72,3.

'Sanctified afflictions discover the emptiness and vanity of the creature'. 74.

'If God be your God, you really lost nothing by the removal of any creature-comfort'. 75.

'If we do not keep our eye intently fixed upon the invisible and eternal things in the coming world, we shall feel ourselves fainting and dying away under the many troubles and afflictions of this world'. 77,8.

'My name is blotted out of the earth, but still written in heaven. God hath taken my only son from me, but he hath given his only Son for me, and to me. He hath broken my hopes and expectations as to this world, but my hopes of heaven are fixed sure and immoveable for ever. My house and heart are both in confusion and great disorder, but I have still an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure'. 78.

## **Talk 3: Suffering for others**

*Peter Adam*

# Talk 3: Suffering for others

## Useful Material

### Love and the example of Christ

#### Serving others

Mark 10:37-45. 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.' 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?' 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'....Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'<sup>3</sup>

John 14:14,15. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

#### Accepting others

Romans 15:1-3,7. We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me'...

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

#### Caring for others

Romans 12:4-18. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves...Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

#### Forbearing with and forgiving others

Matthew 6:14,15. For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

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<sup>3</sup> All Bible references from NIV II

Matthew 19:21,22. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'

Colossians 3:12-14. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

### **Valuing others**

Phil 2:3-5. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mind as Christ Jesus.

### **Love in action**

1 John 3:14-18. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death... This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

James 2:14-17. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

### **Comforting others**

2 Cor. 2:3-7. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

### **Suffering persecution for the gospel**

Philippians 1:17-30. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel... For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

2 Timothy 1:8. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

2 Timothy 3:12,13. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Revelation 12:10-11. Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Nellie and Topsy Saunders, missionaries in China 1893-95:

Topsy: 'And as for talking about the self-denial and discomfort, my experience is that God is never our debtor, and we would jump around this little boat, we are so overflowing the joy, only there is not room, for one thing, and besides, it would shock the boatman.'

Nellie: 'The highest of all honours...that which Paul prayed for, to know the fellowship of his sufferings.... It is only in this life that we shall have the privilege of being partakers in Christ's sufferings, and the priceless honour of glorifying him in suffering.'

Sokreaksa Himm, on forgiveness:

'I had to move on.'

'I had to live for the glory of God.'

'I had to pass on the forgiveness that I had received from God.'

'I had to imitate the example of Christ, to be like Christ.'

'I had to love my enemies as God loves his enemies.'

C.S.Lewis: 'To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. *C.S. Lewis Essay collection and other short pieces.*

'All that pleases is but for a moment.'

'All that grieves is but for a moment.'

'Nothing is important save that which is eternal.'

Milan Cathedral

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

'Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, Baptism without church, community without confession, absolution without personal confession, cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ for who sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies sinner. Above all it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.' *The Cost of Discipleship.*

## **Books:**

### **Ancient**

Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, Banner of Truth.

Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, Banner of Truth.

Brian H Cosby, *Suffering and Sovereignty, John Flavel and the Puritans on afflictive Providence*, Reformation Heritage Books.

Michael Parsons, *Luther and Calvin on Grief and Lament*, Mellen.

Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*, Banner of Truth. Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good*, Banner of Truth.

**Modern**

DA Carson, *How long, O Lord?* IVP.

DA Carson, *Love in hard places*, Crossway.

Paul Grimmond, *Suffering Well*, Matthias Media.

Sokreaksa Himm, *After the Heavy Rain*, Monarch Books.

Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through pain and suffering*, Hodder and Stoughton

John Piper and Justin Taylor, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, Crossway.