

# -----Suffering-----

## An Unspoken Sermon

By: *B. K. Campbell*

*(John 9:1-3) "As He was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples questioned Him: "• Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "[This came about]\* so that God's works might be displayed in him."*  
(Holman Christian Standard)

Our topic is one that is important to the human race. I highly doubt that there is a man who has not wrestled with suffering to one degree or another. Good men have done their best to explain the meaning and give a reason for its existence. I am sure that we will not do much better, but nevertheless we will try.

The first thing for the philosopher to admit when he is dealing with the issue of suffering is that it is a topic infinitely beyond the powers of his limited mind. So vast is this sea of sorrow, so powerful its waves that many lives have been drowned in its currents.

Perhaps there are some in my audience this very day that are laboring under the burden of sorrow? For some these waves came early, and for many they come often. It is logical that a suffering man will seek to squelch the melancholy that drives his soul into deeper fits of emotional fire. The man in agony seeks to be rid of his agony. Likewise, the woman who travails in labor, desire that her child does not tarry. We often seek to be done with suffering when we should embrace suffering. Yet I am afraid that this is easier said than done.

Every true child of God must have his trial. In theory we know this as we find it in our bibles. We observe that men are not to faint under the pressures of God; nor is the man of God to be taken by surprise as though some strange thing is happening to him.

*(1 Peter 4:12-13) "Dear friends, when the fiery ordeal arises among you to test you, don't be surprised by it, as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, as you share in the sufferings of the • Messiah rejoice, so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory."*

It is always easier to speak of labor than it is to practice labor. Perhaps, said a little better; it is easier to hold a theory than it is to practice a theory. The suffering child stays close to his mother's breast; the spoiled child leaves and forgets his home. Christ will have us know that there is no other home for the Christian; only in Christ may men find forgiveness for their sin. Search as they will apart from Christ, but men will never find truth without the Master; for all truth is His truth.

A true Christian trial is a noble thing, false trials lead men to the pit of death, Christian sorrow leads a man to his knees. Do we think it strange that God should use such a sobering messenger to slay the moths that infest? We are told that indifferent thoughts are not warranted, we are asked to thank God for the burden that weights so heavy upon our backs. Can there really ever be any other way for sanctification\mortification to run its course?

The atheist and pagan seek answers apart from the Master, but they search in vain. Yes, it is sobering; there are no stable answers outside of Christ.

It is difficult to maintain hope when a sea of sorrow swallows all that we own, when the night is pressed in upon us so that we can no longer make sense of objects before our face. Even the very hands by which we eat are fallen dark. There is no form or clarity in the night. The suffering man will be apt to ask for a reason, he wants to know why calamity has seized his mind, why physical pain has stopped his heart? Perhaps, the greatest fear entertained by the man who suffers is that his suffering is a mere thing of vanity, void of meaning. This is the nightmare a suffering man entertains, and it is often worse than the thing itself.

But I can say that our text assures us that nothing is lost in suffering. Suffering is not a vain flight given out by a cruel God; rather suffering is like a canker bitten blossom that allows the Gardner to work His skill. Suffering is the means by which the Master displays his virtue and power, suffering is the one attribute of man that brings men closer to an understanding of their God. Can it be entirely hideous, if suffering is for the glory of God? Can it be totally arbitrary (without a concrete purpose) if suffering is God's megaphone and canvas? It cannot, and so we move into our text to make these points.

As the disciples crossed the desert lands of the East with their Master, they would often see villages full of lame and sick. Suffering was not foreign to the East, just as it is not foreign to the West, but is universal East and West, whatever else comes between.

Before us, in our text, we see that the disciples asked their master a most important question: "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" That this question did not at all hit the target, like a bullet fired by a man without aim, will be seen as we advance.

First, why should this man be any different from all the other blind men that crossed the path of their Master? Certainly, these men had encountered many blind men, perhaps, even children. So why should scripture center in on this man?

If we stood by the master that day would we have called out with the very same question? I think that many men cry out with a similar question: "Why does God let men suffer?" Certainly, I think that this is a legitimate question and I think it is what the Master has answered in our text. The bottom line is that this blind man is no different from any other blind man. He was a man and he was blind. Indeed, these are the requirements if one is to be considered "a blind man".

I submit to you that the reason this blind man, and not a child or different blind man, is mentioned in scripture is because God would have men know the answer and reason for suffering. God would have men to know because the reason is God centered not man centered. Though the question raised by the disciples seemed directed only to this blind man, it is not; for the answer has universal interest and application. All men desire to know the reason for suffering. Of course, there might be a sadist or two in the

world who wonders why there is not more suffering. But this would escape or topic. Generally speaking most men desire to know the answer to this question.

We must notice that the disciples thought they already had found an answer to the question; and so they give our Lord two alternatives. A) This man is blind because he has done something wrong or B) this man is blind because his parents have done something wrong. A good point is to be made here: we are never wise to ask a question and then give our Lord a multiple-choice frame for which to establish His answer. No, the Master has reasons that reason knows not of.

If we will ask our Lord a question we must allow Him His answer. It has been said that men often place God into a box, and as much as I loathe the illustration, this is what we find here. To think that suffering is for the glory of God is utterly beyond the mind of the disciples. Often this is beyond the mind of good men. The reason for this confusion is that men are not naturally God centered.

Why should we think that evil can be for good? Why should we assume that God must fit into a box? The answer is here: the pain that is involved in suffering impairs the mind. That is, suffering brings with it a great amount of mental confusion. Even the strongest often break under sorrow. It is unnatural for man to think that what is so miserable could be intended for good. Preposterous! Our minds tell us, utterly unthinkable! But indeed, herein lies the answer. Not that this makes the flesh at ease from physical pain, but that it answers the perplexing question in our minds; "why do men suffer?"

Until the Master puts death under His feet, until each tear is wiped away men will live with sorrow. It is difficult to accept the conclusion that suffering brings about the glory of God. Even more difficult is it to develop an appreciation for this conclusion. One man might except but not appreciate, and even if a man has learned to appreciate this conclusion will his appreciation undo his sorrow? So what good is an answer if it cannot help? It is good if it is true, it is good in that we may understand the nature of our pain, and it is precisely in this way that such an answer helps.

Men desire to be delivered from seasons of pain, and this is only natural considering the fact that pain is painful. Knowing that God has a purpose in pain will not cure all men's physical ills, but it will bring peace to man's perplexed mind.

I cannot confess to be a seasoned veteran in the area of suffering. Many good men have suffered a great deal more. Yet I am not without my own sorrow. Perhaps, if the man of God learns how God is glorified in suffering it will further help to ease the burden of his troubled mind.

There is no other being in all of heaven and earth that deserves Glory apart from God. God is the only being worthy of glory. If the same reality should be applied (lets say) to an angel, it would be amiss, disjointed and out of place, for angels do not warrant enough glory to inflict the human race with misery. Ah! But when we speak of the Master, the Great I AM, we find that the whole human race is not worthy to suffer for His glory. The situation is reversed. God's glory is greater than man's suffering; man's suffering is utterly insignificant compared to it.

This is not apparent to us because we are forced to filter eternity through time. The mind must function in the context of time, and time has many limitations. Whenever a man views his life he is always seeing through the looking glass of time. However, should a man see his life in comparison with eternity (the very way we are asked to see it)

suffering would be an infinitely small thing. Indeed, the only thing large about it is that it brings glory to God.

We cannot argue with the Creator if He chooses one lump for honor and one lump for destruction, the latter simply to display His perfect wrath. Can we tell the maker of clay that He cannot do what He knows is right and good with the clay? May it never be my friends!

Every man asking God for a reason will ultimately be faced with many more questions, questions that God is not obligated to provide with answers. That every question has an answer is true, but that God answers every question is not. In this way God has ordained a purpose and answer for all things, but He has not given man an answer for all questions. So much is beyond us, so little is known to us, it is a great wonder that we can even question the essence of our own suffering. If God will receive glory through the destruction of the heathen, then will He not, so much more, receive glory through our suffering? Christ must tell us that we often have asked the wrong question and have often assumed the wrong answer. If we will let Him speak, we will learn the mystery and know the answer to suffering.

*“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” Jesus answered. “[This came about] \* so that God’s works might be displayed in him.”*

The master will have nothing to do with multiple-choice answers. So powerful is His answer, so quick to undo the logic that corrupts! Christ will take His disciples above and beyond earthly things to ponder the reality of Heavenly things. So will He do for us if we will observe our text.

Does not this answer have universal ramifications? Listen carefully as the Master speaks? “Neither this nor that” Jesus tells us; we have assumed what is wrong. Come above with me dear friends; see what Christ is telling us.

*“This has come about so that God’s works might be displayed”*

Man could not invent a greater reason. Man could not conceive of a greater purpose for pain. God’s purpose and work is the highest reason and purpose for pain. The heathen are without direction and must despair of life itself, because they do not have reason in their pain. Let it not be so with the godly, we do not endure agony for nothing; we endure for God, we suffer to manifest the attributes of our Maker.

I do not look away from the reality that many men have deep burdens, that life is often cast into the cruel shadows. But I cry out to you, no matter your condition of sorrow: “think naught that the struggle avails naught!” Each whimper in the night is a compliment (more than a torment) to the attributes of God in eternity.

Does this drop your spirits? Does it make you seethe with anger that God is glorified through your suffering? Does it not rather increase your joy? Does it not make us fall to our knees and cry out with Job?

*“I am so insignificant. How can I answer You? I place my hand over my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not reply; twice, but [now] \* I can add nothing.” [Job 40:4-5]*

Man is of the dust and often asks question that are too great for his frail frame. Only Christ can lift suffering above and beyond the notions of earthly men far out of the

reach of mystics and sages, only Christ can give reason to suffering. In our text we find that man has asked and God has answered, we find that suffering is not a passing moment of arbitrary affliction, but that it is a stable, solid foundation for the Master to stand and display His attributes.

Let religions of the world scoff as they will at the answer provided for the Christian! Let the pagan and atheist delude their senses into believing that suffering will end at the grave! Man-made religions cannot provide us with sufficient reason; none of them are authentic.

Whatever burden lies upon your breast do not seek to turn from the Master; do not seek refuge in dark caves of solitude and introversion. Cry out that God has need of your vessel; suffering is working an Eternal weight of glory! Feel privileged that you can work for the glory of your Master. Only in Christ we find the question of man's suffering provided with an answer, we find that God is gloried thereby, and that this is the greatest of all answer.

What is it to us if God will do as He pleases? What is it to us if the Master has so ordained the fall of man that He might display His moral glory? Even if a man should take violent offence to God's use of suffering, his offence is nothing. God will do as He pleases and man is in no position to object. As Children we did not like the rule and will of our parents, but there is nothing a child can do; and more often than not a Master knows what is good far better than His pupil.

“Why do men suffer”, “Why should pain be a reality when God could prevent it?” Because in His wisdom He has chosen that it should remain, because suffering is pleasing to God in that it brings about the Glory of God. God does what is good and if He has ordained pain then we are wise to leave the purpose in His hands, knowing that God is good. To this I am afraid that no man can raise a legitimate objection. It is the common sense found throughout the Word, all scripture resounds with it; and if we are wise we will let our own life permeate with it.

The question pain cultivates in our lives, as to why men suffer, is a man-centered question and cares nothing for God. Yes, it is hard when our Children meet death before us; it is hard for the leper and paraplegic. But I submit that it is so much harder without the text in John 9, it is so much more difficult in a world where men make the rules, where men invent the answers.

The man immersed in the *agonia* (that dark night of the soul) soon discovers that invented reasons are not reasons at all; they are mere indulgences of imagination. It is painful to suffer, but it is worse to be immersed in delusion. The Christian finds comfort in the truth of our text, the atheist boasts of his method and evil inventions, but can never devise a greater reason in all his schemes.

Reason is given to the Christian; for God will have His people know His mind. Evil is a problem, but not without remedy; suffering is often the product of evil, but not without reason.

The reason (which we must not allow ourselves to overlook or devalue, but should come to terms with the full weight of its implication) is this: God must display His attributes and if you have been chosen for this purpose, if you are suffering in a dark night for the soul, do not despair that you have been placed on the chopping block. For God uses you to achieve His highest end: that He might bring out (make manifest) His Holy Nature. As Christians we do not find the question of suffering is raised without an

answer; we find that God is glorified thereby. My travailing one, this is the greatest answer; it is the only answer.

Just as new shoots of grass spring up so old ones must die. Suffering is not without purpose; death is not without order. Whatever dark night your soul is in, whatever portion of your body physical pain takes hostage; do not despair of life. The Master knows what He is doing with His vessel. Suffering is not an arbitrary visitor, not an accidental happening, but a companion; misery comes about so that God's great works might be displayed with power. In this the Christian may comfort, may find reason in his suffering and pain.

Amen.

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