

Spiritual Comforts in Suffering I
(Knowing God Through Suffering #11)

I trust that the last two lessons that were taught have served you well as a helpful warning as to the spiritual “traps” we are prone to fall into as we experience suffering and/or persecution.

Perhaps you feel that those lessons were somewhat negative (which they were in the sense of what to avoid).

In the balanced Christian life, things to avoid are vital parts of our experience, but thankfully there are many positive directives to remind us of who God is/what He is like and what He has revealed to us that are designed (not so much to warn) to encourage and comfort us as we seek to know Him through suffering.

So our design is to finish up our series with two lessons that will wrap things up on a more positive/encouraging note!

As you well know by experience, suffering is never a pleasant/inviting/exciting event that we look forward to. No, it is grievous/troublesome/potentially destructive to our peace and confidence. That reality makes it of paramount importance that we be clear in our understanding of what the Bible teaches as to the comforts that belong to us as God’s people in the midst of the pain.

*Can you expect that the comforting and encouraging truth of Scripture will make your troubles disappear/“your mourning turned to dancing?” NO.

The spiritual comforts offered/the encouraging truth proclaimed in the Scriptures that are relevant to our troubles are designed to strengthen our faith/stand our ground/embrace suffering, in order that we experience the transforming power of grace as we are made more and more to look like Jesus Christ/conformed to His image/felt sense of His presence and help/deepening sense of union.

*That is our mission/that is our goal. “Know Him and the power of His resurrection.”

Allow me to make one more introductory point.

By pointing you to the encouraging comforting truths of Scripture, I do not intend to ignore/minimize or be insensitive to the pain and grief that accompanies suffering.

But my concern for you is that you do not allow legitimate sense of pain/grief/mourning to define God/or define your experience.

In our fallen state, our understanding and our emotional stability can become clouded and shrouded in a veil of tears. We can lose sight of objective, revealed truth and retreat into a subjective/emotional interpretation of events, rather than interpreting those events through the lens of Scripture.

In one sense that has been the aim of the entire study. But it becomes all the more important if we hope to receive any comfort and encouragement “as God’s waves break over our souls.” (Ps 42:7)

Here again, that is our focus for these last two lessons. Lay hold of this truth now in order to apply it when you need it.

In our study this AM I would like for us to return to some familiar territory. The doctrine that I believe to be most helpful to us as we seek to draw comfort and encouragement in our suffering. We have considered this truth in a number of ways. We will look at it again in a more practical and experimental manner.

I. Who is in Control?

One thing is certain. Don’t have to read the Bible to figure out who is not in control. That’s you and me.

As much as we might like to be and try to be in control of our circumstances, it just ain’t so!

As it was with our first parents, we are not created for independent self-sufficient living because we don’t have what it takes to supply all of our needs. They needed/we need to have a sense of our weakness and helplessness in order that we will live a life dependent upon the God who made us and provides the rules and boundaries for our lives.

*Point being, due to the fall we have the natural tendency to try and control outcomes {gym, diet, investments, etc., not all of that bad}. You know/I know doesn’t always work that way.

*Suffering reminds us who is in control. The God we serve/the Son creating/ruling God is in control/our Father runs the show.

Now we know that. We know that our God is in control, but at times we need a wake up call.

{*Suffering/pain/grief/disappointment would never enter my experience if I was running the show. {Job would never have chosen his pain}}

But suffering comes, and it comes with various purposes, but at the very least, it serves the purpose to remind us of our relationship to the sovereign purposes of God. (Ps 100:3 “Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”)

(1 Sam 3:18) “So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, “It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him.”

(Job 2:10) “But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Tripp, “Realizing we are not in control is one of suffering’s biggest blessings! The fear and pain of being out of control stand before us as doorways to something very good! It is only when we give up the delusion that we are in control that we can find rest in the one who is in control in our place!! Suffering proves that helplessness is the portal to help! It is only when we abandon our independence that we find rest in one greater! Hopelessness is the only pathway to hope!!”

{Our response to suffering must needs be deeply theological rather than circumstantial and personal.}

Now with the question of “who is in control” settled in our thinking, let’s consider some comforting and encouraging features of God’s control over our lives (even our sufferings, which we know will ultimately be for good).

II. Comfort Found in God’s Rule

1. God’s Rule is Universal in Time and Scope

The truth that God’s meticulous rule over every atomic particle and molecule of this universe from before the world was, all the way into eternity, as well as all the actions and reactions of created beings, is foundational to our comfort and encouragement.

*We learn this from the lips of a pagan king. (Dan 4:34-35)

Implication being, nothing, no thing (good or bad) happens apart from God’s rule.

**Is there anything about that implication just stated that gives you pause??

What about evil?? {Difficult theological knot for sure}

Perhaps we don’t think about it/perhaps it is something we don’t deem necessary to try and understand until some evil is perpetrated against you or a loved one. Let’s try and get some understanding by looking at the greatest evil ever perpetrated in the history of mankind.

(Acts 2:22-24), (Acts 4:27-28), (Rom 8:32)

*God’s rule stands behind good and evil. But not in the same way (asymmetrical)

There is mystery/tension, but the great comfort/encouragement rests in the truth that the greatest evil can be transformed into the greatest good by the One “who does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, and no one can stay His hand or say to Him, what have you done.”

Look to the cross!! (Rom 8:28)

Not only is God’s rule universal.

2. His Rule is Individual and Detailed

Think with me a moment. Consider how it is that you reside here in NC. Consider how it is you are part of a certain family. A particular ethnicity (DNA), a unique individual personally. Consider the number of years you have had in this life.

Let me give you the simple answer and explanation to those musings that the Apostle Paul gave to the pagan worshippers in Athens. (Acts 17:22-28)

*Our God/our Father is not just a “big event” God. The Apostle wants you to know that He cares about and orchestrates the details of your very existence. {lineage/years/your address}

*He is telling these pagans and us that God is not some austere/unknowable diety. He is a God involved with the intricacies of your life/my life, and His rule is exercised in this way to communicate to us that He is near!

{Paul knew God was transcendent, but here he is stressing His nearness for our comfort.}

Tripp, “Paul wants us to know this because whatever we see, whatever we are going through, God is so near that we can reach out and touch Him. He is sovereignly close!! He is reachable, touchable in your time of need! The God who is your hope in suffering is near because He has been and will ever be involved with even the little details of your life! His sovereignty guarantees that God is reachable in those moments when there is no helper who can reach you with what you need.”

Brethren, preach to yourself. God’s rule promises that He is always near.

3. His Rule is Never Divorced from His Character!!

Much of the comfort that we gain from God’s sovereignty rests in this truth. No matter what we face/no matter how dark and difficult and confusing.

Our God has not changed. You can rest assured the One who rules over every hard thing is trustworthy/perfectly holy/wise/loving and good in every way.

Regardless of your situation, our Lord remains (Heb 2:17) “ a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.”

4. His Rule is Exercised for Our Benefit

(Eph 1:15 -)

This text tells us that the sovereign rule of God in Christ as He exercises power and authority over all things/everything, He does so to benefit you/me/us, the children of God.

Not only does God do all things for His own glory (we happily contend), but also for the good of His people. Everything that happens, everything that unfolds in the providence of God throughout the world has you in view. Ultimately everything we see (good/bad/ugly), everything we experience is working to the end for which even the creation waits. (Rom 8:19) “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.”

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31)

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.” (Ps 139:6)

Now for just a few minutes I want to shift gears and point out another dimension of our lives from which we draw comfort.

III. Comfort Found in Christ's Church

Obviously, this point could be a lesson in itself, but we won't go there.

I only want to make one point clear with a few qualifications and leave you to work it out for yourself as to how you respond in any peculiar situation you face.

The point is simply this:

****We are together. The children of God/the family of God/the body of Christ.**

You are not alone in your pain and suffering.

Brethren, as we live in the tension of the already/not yet, God has given to us a resource of comfort that we ignore at our peril. The comfort of God's people and to derive the

benefit from that comfort we must needs be transparently humble/honest in communicating our pain.

(2 Cor 1:8-11)

Here is Paul the Apostle (super Apostle) confessing his experience and his needs in a most humble, transparent way. {You would not think he would struggle like this}

Notice that he doesn't go into detail about the situation itself, but the impact it had upon him.

Tripp, "We tend to enjoy telling people in detail about the thing we are suffering, while we tend to be more guarded about how we're suffering!! Experiencing the gift of the body of Christ in the middle of suffering isn't about reporting suffering but about confessing the struggle in the midst of it! It isn't just about communicating what you're going through but also being honest about how you're going through it."

That's what you see in this text.

Here's the question we must face when we suffer (and we will). Will it drive us inward/go it alone? Or outward in humble/transparent dependency and need?

{If you go it alone you will miss out on comfort that God has provided}

{If you reach out, do so with wisdom and grace (expand on qualifications – don't need to reveal all, different levels of relationships).}

Questions

1. What about evil?? (God controls evil? God responsible for the evil?)
2. Benefits of the church?? (developing relationships)
3. Benefits of theological rather than circumstantial/personal responses to suffering?