

Jesus Unleashed

Session 2: Why Am I Suffering? Is It Because Of My Sins?

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning, men, and welcome to Man in the Mirror, men's Bible study. We'll kick this off this morning with a shout out. Today goes to "Ignited Through Christ", a great name. Carlos Reynosa in San Antonio, Texas at a church called Home of the Holy Spirit, you got to love that, has a group of three men. They've been meeting for nine months on Saturdays. This is exactly the mission. I love what Carlos wrote. He said, "We have few men in our church, so the goal is to disciple these current men so they can disciple other men in our community." Don't you just love that? I wonder if you would join me in giving a warm and a rousing welcome to Ignited Through Christ this morning. One, two, three, hoorah. Men, we want to welcome you and hope you are able to fulfill your dream of reaching the men in San Antonio.

David Delk, a couple years ago, introduced the idea that every week we should tell you all a story of something that's going on in the ministry. It just didn't really connect with me. I've tried a few times. I'm going to try again. I thought maybe if I came up with a clever name for it, that every week we might have this little clever thing called a ministry memo or a ministry minute, still not working for me, but I want to try it again. So because we have something that I think would be encouraging to you to know about, and you men online as well, there is an annual conference called ReFUEL, ReFUEL leadership conference. It's put on at the Elmbrook Church in Milwaukee with a ministry called No Regrets. At Man in the Mirror, we have a kingdom-building mindset as opposed to a ministry-building mindset. In other words, we're not trying to build our organization and make that the all. It's a kingdom-building mindset so we partner with everybody. All of our ideas we give away freely.

Anyway, we're cohosting this ReFUEL leadership conference. I got a note yesterday from Brett Clemmer, our president, that we have 14 locations, 14 host sites. It's a live leadership conference, but then it's also simulcast. Our Man in the Mirror area directors are going to be hosting 14 different locations around the country and have invited church teams to come in and so forth and men's leaders, guys who are interested in doing what Carlos and his team are interested in doing, to disciple the men they have to be able to disciple other men in their churches and communities. That's a little ministry memo. That leads into the fact that Pat Leupold, raise your hand. Everybody probably knows Pat at this point here. Pat is area director here in Orlando for Man in the Mirror Orlando. Pat will be hosting this event himself at the Man in the Mirror headquarters tomorrow. It's still not too late to participate if you want. For that reason, there are some handouts on your table. If you want to take a look at it, we'd love to have you come over. It's an all-day deal. It's tomorrow. It's a little short notice for that, but still have room to take some people in, right? Yes, of course we do. We've got this huge, fantastic training room in our new headquarters. Love it.

That's a ministry two minutes. Thought it was going to be a minute. If you would, please open your Bibles to John chapter five verse one. The message is part of a series called Jesus Unleashed. We're

looking at a few of the miracles of Jesus. It's interesting because I taught you about the miracle of the healing of the boy who was sick unto death basically last week, but we used that as a teaching platform to talk about prayer and how we could rehabilitate our theology of prayer. We're going to look at another miracle this morning. We're going to look at the miracle of the healing of a man who was an invalid for 38 years, but we're not going to be looking at the healing in particular. We're going to use that in order to look more deeply into this topic of suffering, and especially its connection with sin.

The title of the message: Why Am I Suffering? Is It Because of My Sins? I am a lifelong migraine headache person. I've mentioned this here before, I'm sure. I carry a pill fob with me wherever I go. It's with me 24/7 except when I'm in the water. Inside that pill fob are magic pills. It used to be in the early days I didn't want to take, I don't like medicine, but I would resist. I would feel a headache coming on. I would say, "Maybe it will go away. Maybe it will go away," and never went away. Then I get the headache. Then once you have the headache really bad, pills don't work. Kind of have to catch it at the front end. Now, after decades and decades of migraines, almost every day have the onset of one, I take a little magic pill and goes away. I don't actually have a lot of migraine headaches because I take the magic pills, but, as you can imagine, I have, like many of you, that makes the subject of suffering intensely interesting to me. When I read the Bible, I read it to find insights in why do we suffer. Why is there so much pain? Why is there so much evil?

In Billy Graham's 1998 TED Talk, like real early TED Talk, he was talking to technology experts, some of the top technology CEOs and people in the world, and he pushed them. He said, "Use your technology to figure out why is there so much suffering. What can you do with your technology to help alleviate suffering and the evil in the world? Use technology for good." Not a new subject for me, not a new subject for you, but I think there is an insight in our text today that could be very helpful to you and perhaps even more especially to someone that you really care and love. The title of the talk: Why Am I Suffering? Is It Because of My Sins? We're at John chapter five verse one.

WOW! WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

Let's look at the situation that caused this text into existence. Sometime later, from the last story that we looked at in John, a lot of other things have happened that have been recorded in the synoptic gospels, which are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. "Then, sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem," remember, going up is a vertical elevation kind of thing, not a north/south kind of thing, "for a feast of the Jews. Now, there is in Jerusalem near the sheep gate a pool," which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, which means house of mercy, "and which is surrounded by five colonnades. Here, there were a number of disabled people." You've maybe driven by a place that houses maybe indigent people who have disabilities. Maybe you've seen them outside, some of them hanging out and so forth. These are people that have the kinds of disabilities that are being talked about in this text.

"Here, a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, and one who was there had been an invalid for 38 years." Sidebar, so how old was he? No, you can't say he was 38. See, this is the problem and this is part of the problem that I want to help you think more deeply about this morning. It says he was an invalid for 38 years, but he might have been like Mephibosheth, who was Jonathan's son, who when his nurse picked him up at the age of five fell down and he became crippled in both of his legs. He became an invalid like this man at the age of five. If this man had happened to be Mephibosheth, how old would he? Very good. 48 plus five. We don't know how old the man is. This is just a sidebar, but it's a good reminder that you can't just gloss over the text. You have to think a little more deeply about what it's really saying.

This man, however old he is, has been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" Are you kidding me? I mean, throughout all these other texts that we'll be looking at and have looked at, we have people coming up and pleading with Jesus, "Heal me. Heal this person for me. Heal me," but it says Jesus, wow. What just happened? Wow. What just happened here? This man is asked by Jesus, "Do you want to get well?" He said, "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred." Some of the other versions that are maybe less important talk about an angel of the Lord coming down and stirring the waters and so forth. When the water is stirred.

There was healing that was going on at this pool. There were miracles that were going on at this pool from time to time. Now, just a word about miracles. There is a professor at Ezra Theological Seminaries. He's written a book on miracles and so forth. He reports that 80% of all Americans believe in miracles. He cites a Pew Research Center survey of 10 countries in which 200 million people have indicated that they have participated in some kind of a miraculous event. He reports that 73% of US physicians believe in miracles. He also reports that 55% of US physicians claim to have personally witnessed treatment results they consider miraculous. Why should I sit here and try to persuade you that miracles are true? You already believe they're true. Many of you have seen them. If not, there's plenty of literature to help convince you of the truth of miracles.

They were going on. He said, "While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said, "Get up, take your mat, and walk." At once, the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked. Are you kidding me? What just happened? I've been an invalid for 38 years, whether it's like Mephibosheth or I have cerebral palsy or rheumatoid arthritis or I was born paraplegic, whatever it is. Are you kidding me? Look, that's not the end of it. It says, "The day on which this took place was a Sabbath and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath. The law forbids you to carry your mat.' But he replied, 'The man who made me well said: Pick up your mat and walk.' So they asked him, 'Who is this fellow? Who is this fellow that told you to pick it up and walk?'" The man who was healed had no idea who it was. He didn't even know that it was Jesus that had healed him. "For Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there."

Are you kidding me? What just happened? I think one of the reasons that this text has been preserved by the Holy Spirit is just to bust up this idea that you have to do something special to be healed. God is healing people all the time through his common grace. He's healing unbelievers all the time as well as believers. This man was certainly an unbeliever, I mean, was not a believer. Actually, I can't even say that because we don't know, but there's no indication that he was a believer, just like there's no indication how old he was. You can't say absolutely he wasn't a believer, but it does say he didn't even know who had healed him. Oh my goodness. I love it. I just love this.

This story, we know, is preserved, number one and overall, the overarching reason that the stories of the miracles have been preserved is so that we might believe in Jesus Christ. There is a second reason that this particular story has been preserved. That's because of this Sabbath controversy, but we're not going to talk about that, but just so that you'll be aware of it. You do wrong, some people don't like you. You do good, some people don't like you. There you have it. There is this next thing, which is what I really want us to zero in on, this next verse, verse 14. It says, "Later, Jesus found him. He found him at the temple and he said to him, 'See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.'"

Well, what do most people when they're just breezing by that assume? They assume he's 38 years old. They assume that he has been an invalid because of his sin. The text doesn't say that. Was he sinning? Yeah, everybody's a sinner, but he said, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." No place here can you even remotely assume that Jesus is saying the reason that this happened to you is because you sinned and so stop sinning. If Jesus wanted to say the reason this happened to you is because you sin so stop sinning, he would have said that, but that's not what he said. He said, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." For a parallel passage, you don't necessarily have to look here, but if you want to, you can, there's another situation in scripture where a similar thing takes place. It's in John chapter 21.

It's the story when Peter saw John. This is the very last thing in the gospel of John where Jesus reinstates Peter. Then Peter turns to John and said, "Lord, what about him?" Because Jesus had just indicated the kind of death that Peter was going to glorify God by. By the way, there's another reason for suffering beyond sins, so that you could glorify God. Jesus said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Now, watch. Because of what Jesus said, the rumors spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die, but Jesus did not say that he would not die. He only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" Jesus didn't say in this text that we're looking at today that the reason that you have been an invalid for 38 years is because you've sinned. He merely said, "Stop sinning or something worse might happen to you."

Here's the Big Idea for the day. As the Big Idea last week related to a miracle was actually about prayer, the Big Idea today about a miracle is actually related to this subject of suffering. Here's the Big Idea for the day right after I show you this picture. Forgot about the picture. This is the excavated site of the Bethesda, pool in Jerusalem. You can go there and see it. In fact, many of the skeptical people about Christianity just assumed that this whole story was a fabrication or a parable, but then in the 19th century, they excavated the site. I've been there. It's really beautiful to see. You can go there today and see it. The Big Idea surrounding all of this, though, is that **we must repudiate any teaching that assumes your suffering must be because of your sin.** You must be suffering because of your sin.

Now, let's not make the mistake of assuming I have said to you what I did not say. I did not say that it's impossible that you are suffering because of your sins. Yeah, it's like entirely possible that you've done something sinful. You had sex with a prostitute and now you have little sores all over your little thing. Yeah, that would be suffering because of your sin. I mean, I just actually had a Christian guy, he was an elder in his church, tell me, about maybe two months ago, told me that he had been eldering by day and prostituting by night and he'd been doing this for over 40 years and hadn't gotten caught. Then he woke up and he had little sores on his little thingy. God used that, though. God used that and now he's completely come out and repented. It's a long story for another day, but he's really doing quite well.

I did not say that you might not be suffering because of your sin because you might, but we have to really be careful and even repudiate teaching that assumes you must be suffering because of your sin. I do this. You do this. I see sometimes certain people at certain intersections, not all of them, but some of them. I have this thought going in my mind, "You know, it's their fault." I was at the intersection of I-75 and state road 44 near Ocala, Florida. My light was green. I was getting off so I couldn't stop. I looked over and I saw a woman. She had a sign. It just said, "I need help." You know, most of the time I feel like I'm being ... I won't even talk about what I feel like most of the time, but I do think that there are systems, organizations in place to help these people. The reason that many of these people are out there is because of mental illness. They know that help is available. They think they can do it on their own. They're off their meds, whatever the case. I remember thinking, "I wonder what she did wrong

that has led to her being on the side of this road." God, forgive me for that. I don't know. I assume she must be suffering because of her sin. We all do this, right?

WHY THEN DO WE SUFFER?

Let's take a look at then why do we suffer. Why, then, do we suffer? I'm going to go through this real quick. There are lots of reasons. There are three categories of reasons. We suffer for doing right. This is persecution. One of our table leaders refused to falsify an invoice for his employer and got fired for it. Suffering for doing right. We don't mind that, do we? Suffering for doing wrong. Sometimes we do wrong things. Sexual immorality, like I was kidding about, not really kidding about, but talking about earlier. I mean, it's pretty serious business. All the wrong is not necessarily sin. Sometimes it can be errors in judgment. You invested in a Ponzi scheme. You didn't know it was a Ponzi scheme. Well, maybe you were there because you're greedy. Maybe that was sinful but maybe it wasn't. Maybe you just really believed the pitch. Maybe you're that stupid, so you went ahead and put your money in. We heard about a man this week, lost his life savings in a Ponzi scheme. Christian guy lost his life savings in a Ponzi scheme. He's devastated. Error in judgment, not sinful, but still, he did something wrong.

Then, the third category. We suffer for doing things right, we suffer for doing things wrong, and then we suffer for no apparent reason. This is where the pain comes from. It just doesn't make sense. Why have I had migraine headaches all my life? Why me? I'm way past why me, but, you know, for your benefit. Why me? The Bible gives us a ton of reasons why me. By the way, sometimes it's not your wrong, it's somebody else's wrong and you get caught up in somebody else's sins or somebody else's errors of judgment. Think children. It's interesting because yesterday I had a moment with God because the Lord, and this is a sidebar. I just really encourage you. I know you read the word. Memorize scripture. I've memorized a lot of scripture. I do that because I got started with the Navigator discipleship method which emphasizes scripture memory. I've memorized a lot of scriptures, but here's what the spirit of God did for me yesterday. When I decided to focus on what are the Biblical reasons that we suffer, the Holy Spirit just started bringing. Before I knew it, I had over 10 Bible reasons why we suffer that I wrote down. Well, I can't give you all 10 of these, can I? I can rifle through them and give you a word or two on a couple, right?

Mark chapter nine verse one, won't go into this because we'll be covering that in this series on Jesus, but this is the healing of the man born ... What was he born? Man born blind? John chapter nine verse one? Anyway, I think he was born blind. Anyway, it said, Jesus said, "Why did this happen?" So that the ergon, the works of God, might be displayed. They asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this has happened so that the works of God might be put on display." There's a reason we suffer. Then, Lazarus is raised from the dead and Jesus said that this happened, in John 11 verse four, for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified. A man died, really? Just so that Jesus could be glorified? Yeah.

John 15 verse two, "So every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit gets pruned off, but every branch in me that does bear fruit gets pruned." Why? So that it will bear even more fruit. Sometimes we're suffering because it's a pruning process to make us more fruitful. Okay, thank you, Jesus. Romans 8:20 and 21, "For the whole creation, you and me, we've been subjected to futility, not by our own will, but by the one who subjected it. God, why in hope, the whole creation, we, might be liberated from our bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of light." For the purpose of salvation, God has introduced futility. If your life was always perfect, would you want God? I mean, I think that's what the text is sort of hinting at. If your life was perfect, if you already had heaven, would

you want heaven? Huh? Did I just say that? If you already had heaven, would you want heaven? I think this is not heaven. I probably should save this for another time, but I'm going to say it anyway. Earth is heaven's womb. We are all in gestation. You get it? Yeah.

Another one, Romans 5:3 to 5. "We rejoice in our sufferings." Are you kidding me? Paul says, "We rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character produces hope, a hope that doesn't disappoint." There's another reason for suffering. Another one, the one that really helped me so immensely in my own migraine issue, 1 Peter chapter four verses one and two, "Now, therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude because," watch this, "when the body suffers, sin loses power." You know this is true because when you're sick, you just don't have as much lust for other women, right? Am I right? I mean, I know I'm right. I know I'm right. I believe I'm right for you too. When the body suffers, sin loses power. Watch this. Watch this. Then the text concludes, "As a result, you will not spend the rest of your earthly lives chasing after evil human desires, but rather for the will of God." Wouldn't you like that? Wouldn't you like to not spend the rest of your earthly life chasing after evil human desires, but rather for the will of God? That's one of the reasons that we suffer. Suffering empowers us. Isn't that weird? I mean, it's just downright weird. Suffering empowers us to do the will of God.

There are lots and lots of other reasons. We're just way out of time. Why, then, do we suffer? Well, there are lots of reason. For that reason, we must repudiate any teaching that assumes you must be suffering because of your sins. Do you see it? Of course you see it. Christians believe that everything happens for a purpose. As you can see from these texts, there are lots of purposes very different from sin. By the way, those verses we looked at and other verses like it, that's what empowers us to be able to say, "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Even when we don't feel like rejoicing, we can rejoice as an action because of the truth of these scriptures that we have, the joy that we have from them. That's why 1 Thessalonians 5:16 to 18, "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks," because that is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. That's why Romans 8:28 says, "All things work together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes," even these sufferings that we're talking about here.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO NEEDS TO BE SET FREE?

Then, finally, who do you know who needs to be set free? Somebody that thinks that they have done something so egregious, so sinful that God could never forgive them, and the reason that they're suffering is because of this horrible thing that they've done. It might be you. We need to help those people, and those people could be ourselves, to repudiate this idea that there is a causal connection between sin and suffering, a necessary causal connection. There may be a connection, but to assume there is a necessary causal connection between sin and suffering is itself ... Is it too much to say that that is sin, to tell people that you're suffering because of your sin? Oh, yeah. I think that works. The Big Idea today. **We must repudiate any teaching that assumes you must be suffering because of your sins.**

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for this story, a unique story in the Bible where Jesus doesn't say anything like this to anybody else. We glean a very unique perspective on the scriptures here. Also, the way that he was healed, Lord. Just help us to understand, wow, what just happened here. Help us to understand, Lord. There's so many layers of meaning, Lord, and this text that I suppose we could teach on this every week for a month. We won't do that, but I do pray that you would superintend other lessons too that you would have for us, each of us individually, that might bubble up from this text. We ask this in your wonderful name, Jesus. Amen.