

# Walking With God in a Pandemic

## Why “Your Sufferings Are the Kisses of Jesus”

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter eight, verse 18. I pray that you are staying safe during this pandemic coronavirus situation. I have been praying for you, and I will continue to pray that as in the plagues of Moses, when God made a distinction among his people that he will create for you a spiritual Goshen for you, your family, all those you care about, and those for whom you have a responsibility.

So since I'm in the high risk group myself, we've continued to practice isolation, but I have replaced my gym trips with hiking, and so I've actually hiked over a hundred miles since the middle of March. I kind of have overdone it a little bit. I was out hiking two days in a row, right after I gave my last message to you and I bent over to tighten my boot laces, and couldn't get up. It took me several minutes to be able to straighten up and finish the hike, but then the next day I was crossing my legs to put on my socks and something happened.

I compressed a nerve and I couldn't get up for... I thought I was going to have to call 911 actually, but eventually was able to get up, and so basically I've spent about one week of the time in between these two talks in bed with bedrest, compressed nerve responds well to ice, so I've been icing and ibuprofen, went to the doctor, got some care. And that probably is a nice segue into today's topic, which is suffering, the title of the message, why your sufferings, sort of the kisses of Jesus.

So there's probably no one who is better qualified to talk about suffering and death than Mother Teresa. So at the age of about 42, in early 40, she started a hospice and she later wrote in a book that during the first 25 years of their work, they took in 36,000 people into their hospice and watched 18,000 of them die what she called beautiful deaths.

So she died at the age of 87 in Calcutta, India. Today, her ministry continues on with over 4,000 sisters around the world and hundreds of centers, hundreds of thousands of volunteers working with those who have HIV, AIDS, those who are orphans, those who are terminally ill, leper colonies. And Mother Teresa said something, which is basically the paraphrase of what she said is the title for today's talk. She said, "Pain and suffering have come upon you, but remember pain, sorrow, suffering are but the kiss of Jesus, a sign that he has come so close to you that he can kiss you."

Paul said it this way in Romans chapter eight, verse 18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. So as you know, we use handouts for the Bible study and I hope you've had a chance to download this week's handout. If not, please go ahead and do that when you have a chance. And on the left hand side is a note taking guide, and so in the first circle, if you would write the words, "What qualifies as our present sufferings?" Paul said, "I consider our present sufferings not worth comparing," so what are these present sufferings?

### **WHAT QUALIFIES AS OUR PRESENT SUFFERINGS?**

So the first thing to look at would be what would this have meant to Paul? What would our present sufferings have meant to him? Well, he tells us in his own words in Second Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 23, and following. He talks about how he's been imprisoned so frequently, how he's been flogged

severely and been exposed to death again and again. Five times he says, "I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelted with stones," and he was left for dead. "Three times I was shipwrecked and I spent a night and a day in the open sea."

He says, he's been in constant danger from rivers, bandits, fellow Jews, Gentiles, and the city and the country at sea and from false believers, and he talks about having toiled and labored and gone without sleep. He's known hunger and thirst and has often gone without food. He's been cold and naked. We know that there was a death plot against his life. We know that there was a worldwide famine during his day that he was involved in, and so that's what sufferings were for Paul, these present sufferings, but what do our present sufferings look like?

Well, they can be a lot of things. They can be emotional. This past week, there was a terrible suicide of a 49-year-old man who had done some work with our ministry, just tragic suffering and through emotional reasons because of the pandemic, and it could be for you physical, it could be financial, it could be vocational, it could be relationships. It might be fear that something may or may not happen. The pandemic certainly qualifies as our present sufferings. At this point, I think it's important just to give you a bit of a caveat.

There is no joy and there is no merit in suffering, so Mother Teresa tells the story of ministering to a dying woman who had several small children, and she said that she didn't know which was worse, the agony of leaving the children behind or the agony of the body. And then she wrote, "I told her, this is a sign that you have got so close to Jesus on the cross that he can share his passion with you, that he can kiss you," and so the woman joined her hands together and she says, "Oh, Mother, please tell Jesus to stop kissing me."

We all got that, don't we? But Mother Teresa said, "But she understood so beautifully what was happening to her. She understood the blessing that suffering can be." So by all means, avoid or reduce your suffering if you can, but when it strikes, and certainly it will, remember this idea, and this is the Big Idea for the day. **Suffering can add a depth to our convictions that we simply can't get any other way.** I know this is certainly true for me. I became a Christian at the age of 24. I had already been through one major depression. I had also quit high school, so you know that there were some sufferings that were involved there, and so I became a Christian and I guess I thought that that would be the end of the suffering, you see?

It turns out though that sufferings have just continued. Two years later at the age of 26, I developed severe allergies to go with the migraine headaches that I was already suffering, and so from the ages of 26 to 40, which were some of my best productive years, I basically was in a stupor for most of those years because of these allergies. I was giving myself allergy shots. I tried every medieval remedy imaginable, and this is the fob, the pill fob that I carry around for my migraine headache medicine, which I have one that I, fortunately through the medication, am able to block out, but I have the beginnings of one almost every day, even to this day now.

But I think part of the reason is simply that because God knows me so well, and he loves me so much that he wants to keep me in his grace, and the best way for him to do that is through suffering. The widow who is always in need will put her hope in God and continue to pray night and day and ask God for help, and so that's exactly what I decided to do when I read that verse, First Timothy chapter five, verse five. I asked God to always keep some major unmet need in my life so that I might be utterly dependent on him, and sometimes I think to myself, "Man, I wish I hadn't prayed that prayer," because he has been faithful to do that. That is for sure.

And so the second circle, I want you to write the words, "What makes our present sufferings not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us? What makes these present sufferings not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us?"

## **WHAT MAKES OUR PRESENT SUFFERINGS NOT WORTH COMPARING TO THE GLORY THAT WILL BE REVEALED IN US?**

So, in the text that we have in front of us, following verse 18, are these five kisses, if you will, that make our sufferings tolerable and durable, understandable, and worth, and also not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us, and so let's take a look at these.

The first one is found in verse 19 and here's the idea. This whole thing is under God's supervision. He has a plan. Verse 19, "The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation," and that would be you and me as well as everything else, "was subjected to frustration." So, the creation was subjected to frustration? That's an odd phrase. So this word "frustration" is also translated "futility" and when the writers of the Septuagint, which is the Greek version, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, were looking for the word, the Greek word to translate the word that Solomon used in Ecclesiastes, "meaningless," meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless, they picked this Greek word, the same Greek word that translates here is "frustration."

And so the creation was subjected to frustration, to futility, to meaninglessness, and watch this, "Not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it." Who is that? That's God. And why did he do that? In hope that the creation itself, you and me and everything else, will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of light.

So, this whole thing is under God's supervision. God has a plan. That's the first kiss, that's the first conviction, and so I would just ask you, do you have this conviction? Maybe this pandemic, maybe this suffering will help you have this conviction in a deeper way, that the main thing that is always happening is that God really is sovereignly orchestrating all things, all these things to bring us into right relationship with him and right relationship with each other.

So another thing I've had all my life because of suffering is I just, I never know when my nose is going to run so I always have to have a Kleenex around. Figure. Number two, the second kiss. We groan, but not because we don't have hope, but because we do. So, verse 22, Romans chapter eight, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies, for in this hope we were saved."

"But hope that is seen is no hope at all who hopes for what he already has. But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." Do you have this conviction? This kiss, we groan not because we don't have hope, but because we do. So this is the language of delayed gratification. If you've ever heard of the marshmallow test run at Stanford University, you know they took some five-year-olds and they put them in a room individually and gave them a, put a marshmallow in front of them. And they said, "You can have this marshmallow now, but if you wait until I come back, 15 minutes later, you can have two marshmallows," And they were using this as a predictor of a future success.

There's some problems with the replicability of this test, but this whole idea of delayed gratification, a lot of people wonder, "Well, is this just a mind trick?" Our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the future glory that we'll receive. And Paul was not unaware that this was a possibility, and that's why he wrote, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we of all people are to be pitied more... We are of all people most to be pitied," but unlike the marshmallow test, the Christianity does prevail because it is replicable, because over and over again we experienced the grace, the love, the mercy, and the relationship with God himself.

So we groan not because we don't have hope, but because we do, and then the third kiss in verse 26, "We don't groan alone. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans so deep that words cannot

express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with God's will."

And then in verse 35, not only that, but Jesus is that the right hand of God and is also interceding for us and this word, interceding, it's translated into English in the continuous present tense. Right now, he's doing that. Do you have this conviction that you don't groan alone, that the Spirit is groaning for you with ways that are inexpressible in words? And then the fifth of these kisses is that pain is part of the plan. Pain is part of the plan. Verse 29, "For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he justified, and those he justified, he also glorified."

### **THE PROCESS BY WHICH HE REFINES US**

So, the process by which he refines us, there's a story in Malachi, Malachi chapter three, about how we are refined by fire. He's like a silversmith who refines us with fire. Two women, we were reading that story, I heard this story that a couple of women were reading this story in Malachi about how the silversmith refines the silver, and so one of the women went to see a silversmith and she wanted to know how a silversmith worked. She told him about the story, and then she began to ask him about his work. And she said, "Well, how do you get started?" She said, "Well..." He said, "Well, I get the fire extremely hot, and then I take the silver and I put it into the hottest part of the fire. And then I begin to melt the silver, but I have to watch it very carefully because if it gets too hot, then it will be ruined."

And she said, "Well, do you ever take your eye off it?" And he said, "Oh no, I never can take my eye off of this silver, because if I do, then it could be ruined." And she said, "Well, how do you know when it's ready?" She said... He said, "Well, that's very easy. I know that the silver is ready when I can see my image in it," and so this is the plan that God has put into place for you and me that will you be conformed to his image, sufferings are an incredible part of the Big Idea today is this, that **sufferings can add a depth of convictions that we simply can't get any other way**. Suffering can add a depth to our convictions that we simply can't get any other way.

And then in verse 31, Paul writes, "What then shall we say in response to these things," these great truths that we've been looking at here in Romans chapter eight. He says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things." You see the convictions that have come from suffering for Paul's understanding of it? "If God can be for us, who can be against us? Will he not graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies, who then can condemn. No one! Christ Jesus who died more than that, who was raised to life is that the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword or pandemic? As it is written for your sake, we face death all day long. We are considered a sheep to be slaughtered."

And then in verse 37, his parolation of this great chapter, "Know in all these things," remember he asked, "What then shall we say in response to all these things?" "Know in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loves us, through him who kissed 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 in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

So you and I can feel that depth of conviction and suffering is how it comes about, because suffering can add a depth to our convictions that we simply can't get any other way. That's the effect it certainly has had on me through migraines, through allergies, through many other things, and most recently in the last almost three years now in auto immune disease that's put me in the high risk category for the coronavirus. So the point is, suffering is what gave Paul and can also give you and me the conviction, the

conviction to say things like, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings."

Paul wrote, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only the privilege of trusting in Christ Jesus as Lord, but also of suffering for him." He wrote in Romans five, chapter three, Romans chapter five, verse three and following, "We glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance, character, and character, hope and hope does not disappoint because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." He wrote in Second Corinthians 4:17, "Had the deep conviction because of suffering for our light and momentary problems are achieving for us a far surpassing eternal glory that outweighs them all."

The Big Idea today is **suffering can add a depth to our convictions that we simply can't get any other way**, so I hope that you have been able to avoid the sufferings of this pandemic, and the suffering is tremendous, but if you are not, I pray that God will add to you a depth of convictions that you would otherwise not be able to attain. Again, the Big Idea today, **suffering can add a depth to our convictions that we simply can't get any other way**. Let's pray.

Our Dearest Father, I pray for these men. I continue to praying for you to make a distinction and create for them a spiritual Goshen for them, their loved ones, their families, the people for whom they have responsibility. And Lord, I pray that during this coronavirus pandemic, this COVID-19 pandemic, that you would use these sufferings to bring a new depth to our convictions, that yeah we groan, but we don't groan alone, that you are supervising this, that you have a plan, that the groaning that we do, Lord, it's not because we don't have hope, but it's because we do have a hope.

And also, this is bad, but you're going to do good things with it as you said in Romans 8:28, which we didn't cover today, that you are working all things together for the good of those who love you and are called according to your purpose, so let that be the final kiss for us today, Lord. Your kisses, your kisses, our suffering. Our sufferings are the kisses that you give to us, and we thank you for this. And I pray that this would be a consolation and a comfort to men who need to hear from you today, but also need to understand that there's no merit in suffering, but you do use it to bring a depth to our convictions. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen. Thank you, men.