

# The CORE TEACHINGS of JESUS

## Answers to Your Questions About Suffering

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

### **Patrick Morley:**

Hello men. Welcome to Man in the Mirror Bible study. For those of you online, I'm Pat Morley. And today, we're going to be talking on the topic; Answers to Your Questions About Suffering. Please turn to your Bibles to John chapter 16, verse 33.

Somebody said to me this morning, "How are you doing?" And my typical answer to that is that I'm doing fairly well. I don't have any problems that money can't solve. Usually gets a little chuckle, but when you stop and you think about it, that's actually a very good place to be in life to only have problems that money can't solve or to have not have any problems that money can't solve. Because there are excruciating problems that people are going through. Everybody in this room has some kind of suffering that you're going through, and I'm not talking about an inconvenience like me having a leak in the roof of our travel trailer and taking it over and it has to stay three weeks to get fixed. That's the inconvenience of affluence. That's not suffering.

I read a story once about a man who went deer hunting with his 18 year old son. Mistook his son for a deer, accidentally shot him, killed his 18 year old, and then turned the same gun on himself and committed suicide. One of my fraternity brothers in college, when he was a teenager not far from where we're sitting here today, was driving too fast on a dirt road, swerved to miss an oncoming car, ran into a tree and has now spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. He and I became believers about the same time. He was convinced, absolutely convinced, he believed that God was going to heal him. God never healed him. He's still in a wheelchair.

This morning I took another migraine pill. So I have been wrestling with migraine headaches since the age of 18. I've had my fair share of sufferings, as have you had your fair share of sufferings. So today, what we want to do is we want to tackle this topic, answers to your questions about suffering, and first off, I want us to look at the questions raised by suffering.

### **THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY SUFFERING**

You know them. First of all, why is there suffering at all? And then because we know that there is suffering, the classic questions: Does God know what's going on? Because if he doesn't know, then he's not omniscient. Does he know? Does he care? Because if he doesn't care, then where is this idea that God is good, benevolent and loving? Does he know? Does he care? And then can he do anything about it? Does he have the power? The Bible reports that God is omnipotent. Does he have the power to do something about all of this suffering? And then if he does know and he does care and he can do something about it, why isn't he? Why isn't he?

So these are some of the core questions that we have about suffering. Now I want us to take a look at this text, and we'll get into these questions. I mean, the idea here is that I'm hoping you'll have a fairly decent idea of the answers to these questions or other questions that you might have about suffering by the time we're done with this relatively short message.

The reason I'm wanting us to focus on suffering here this week is in the last message, whether you're here or not, we were talking about making decisions that reflect God's will. We looked at the story of

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane where he was suffering. And he said, "Father, if you're willing, please take away this cup of my suffering. Yet not what I will but you will." So the Big Idea was: A disciple asks what does the master need, not what do I want.

So I want to go to where we need to be on this what does the master need and how do we execute that, but it just seemed like we needed a pause here and talk about the reason that this came up at all, the problem of suffering.

So at John 16:33, this is the last, let's just call it the last formal teaching of Jesus. This is in the upper room after dinner I suppose. John 14, 15, 16. Right before the prayer that he prays over them, before they go out into the night. Then in verse 33, "I have told you these things." All the things that are his core teachings that Jesus has been communicating to his disciples. He's wrapping it up now, and he says, "I have told you these things so that in me you may be happy, healthy, and wealthy." I mean, there are people, there are these false gospels out there. There are many false gospels out there. But there is a false gospel. Honestly, I don't know how anybody can read the Bible and come up with this false gospel, but there is a gospel that is deep entrenched all around the world that says that Jesus has taught his disciples all these things to be happy, healthy, and wealthy. That that's the reason for becoming a Christian. I actually heard that. I actually heard that, and it was attractive. It was attractive.

So when I became a Christian, I thought that I was going to be happy, healthy, and wealthy. If I would've known, I might not have signed up for what really happened because Jesus says, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart for I have overcome the world." Now it's interesting, "In this world, you will have trouble." Troubles are inevitable, inescapable, unavoidable. There's nothing you can do to avoid suffering, tribulation, travails. "But take heart," and that is literally means courage. But have courage because I have overcome or conquered the world. Jesus says, "I have conquered the world."

The Big Idea today is this. Suffering is inevitable. In this world you will have trouble. **Suffering is inevitable, but you will not be facing it alone.** Take heart, take courage, I have overcome the world.

So I want us to look at the two aspects of this Big Idea, the inevitability of suffering and look at some of the reasons for suffering and then I want us to look at the second part as well, how you don't have to be facing this alone. So next up, some of the reasons that we suffer.

Suffering is inevitable. Why is there suffering? There is a theological, academic, scholarly argument to be made for why there is suffering. There has been a centuries long debate. I pick it up at David Hume who is called the Honest Atheist. I pick that argument up at David Hume, and there have been scholars on both sides of theologians on both sides of this talking about the problem of gratuitous evil or apparently meaningless suffering. There are reasons that we suffer that we know why we're suffering. Sometimes we suffer for doing the right thing. We had a leader here at the Bible study once whose boss kept pressuring him to change invoices for the print customers of the company where he was a salesman. He refused to do it. He got fired. He rejoiced that he was being persecuted for following Christ in his job. He was suffering. He suffered for doing the right thing.

Sometimes we suffer for doing the wrong thing. We know that we did something we shouldn't do. It might've been immoral, but it might've just been an error in judgment or an honest mistake. But nevertheless, we suffer. We ran a traffic light, and we hit another car. There was a little child in the car, and that little child has suffered immensely because of the mistake. We did something wrong, and we're suffering for that. They're suffering for that. But the biggest reason that troubles us is suffering for apparently no reason at all. That's something that seems to be for no apparent reason. It seems futile. It just doesn't make any sense why we would be suffering.

Why have I suffered with migraine headaches my entire life? Why at the age of 26 did I get allergies so severe that I was crippled until the age of 40 when suddenly they went away? Giving myself shots,

having my neighbors coming over and giving me shots, going to these weird cooky kinds of doctors trying to find some kind of a solution to that problem. Why did my brother die of a heroin overdose at the age of 31? Apparently meaningless suffering.

So what are some of the reasons we suffer?

### **REASONS WE SUFFER**

Now there are a number of ways for you to consume this knowledge. We're not going to be looking at the theological debate between the atheists and the theists. We're going to be looking at what the Bible says. Now I did write a paper in seminary called The Problem of Gratuitous Evil for my apologetics class. Our professor for many, many years after that used this paper as an example to give to other students on how to write a decent term paper. So I took it this week and just did a few little updates to it, and Brian Russel has agreed to post this on the Bible study website as a download. So you can download that for the two of you that might be interested in this. You could understand the deductive problem of evil, the inductive problem of evil. You could look at the difference between the theoretical problem of evil and the psychological problem of evil and actually come away with a fairly decent understanding of meaningless evil or suffering if you want. But we're not going to do that.

What we're going to do is we're going to do a fairly quick review of some scriptures that give the reasons why we suffer because we're biblicists. We're not trying to decide whether or not we believe that evil exists because Jesus has already told us in this world, you will have trouble or tribulation or suffering. Jesus has already told us that. So we already believe in Jesus, so we don't need to decide whether or not we believe that God and evil can coexist. Jesus says they can.

Now you could take a picture of this if you are watching it, and by the way, last week I said take a picture. I forgot that a lot of you are listening to this by podcast. So you couldn't do that. This also you will find on your tables, and we'll be putting this on the website as well so that you can download it if you wanted to have these to look over. But some of the reasons that we suffer. In John chapter nine, there was a young man who had been born blind. The disciples of Jesus asked Jesus, "Why is this man blind? Why is he suffering? Is it because of his sin or his parents' sin?" You see, the presupposition they were making there. And Jesus said, "Neither. This man was born blind so that the works of God might be put on display." And then he healed the man. He spat and put some thing on his eyes and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. I've been to that pool. I bent over. I dipped my finger in the water, in that pool at the end of Hezekiah's Tunnel. I've wiped that filthy, dirty water across my brow so that I might be able to see too.

First Peter chapter one, verse six. One reason that we suffer is so that God may receive praise. I'll go lightly into most of these. I'll do a little more on a couple of them.

Romans chapter five. One of the reasons we suffer, we rejoice in our sufferings so that our character might be developed.

Second Corinthians chapter one, verse four. So that we might draw close to God, and so that we might comfort. And Paul says one of the reasons we suffer is so that we might comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received. Second Corinthians 1:9. He said, "We've suffered these things. We have been really at the point of despair. We've even despaired of our very lives, but this happened, this suffering that's happened to us has happened so that we will not rely on ourselves."

Second Corinthians 12:7. Paul has this thorn in the flesh. We don't know what, but whatever it was, it was something like a migraine headache that he had to struggle with all of his life. Some long term suffering that he had. He said, "Three times I pleaded with God to take it away." He said that, "But to keep me from being conceded, God... or to keep me from becoming too proud, God has given me this thorn in the flesh, this long term thing that I have to deal with that keeps me from becoming conceded because of the surpassing great revelations that I've had."

Hebrews chapter 12, seven to 13 talks about how God disciplines us as a father disciplines the son that he loves so that we may share in his holiness.

Deuteronomy 9:4-5. Oh, that's a good one to read because you wonder about why there's so much killing in the Old Testament, that's your answer. You can read it for yourself.

Romans 8:20-21. The whole creation's been subjected to futility, not by its own will but by the will of God. We talk about God's will. The whole creation has been subjected to futility by the will of God in hope that it might be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of light. So futility's a gift to keep us from destroying ourselves. Oh, as a young businessman, lot of pressure trying to balance a business, be a good husband, be a good dad, be a good steward. A lot going on.

But I was too big for my britches. I was. God humbled me. He absolutely devastated me. He brought so much futility into my life that I despaired of living even myself. I thought I would've been better off dead. I remember driving down the road, a block or two from here. Driving down the road one day and a big bolt of lightning... Because of the way the curvature of the road worked, it looked like that big, giant bolt of lightning had struck right in the middle of the road where I was driving. Although actually, it curved away. But it looked like the bolt of lightning, if I had been a quarter of a mile further down the road, that big, giant bolt of lightning... I was so in despair, I wished that I had been driving a little faster that day. I ached to be taken out by that bolt of lightning.

That futility has been God's gift to me. It's the thing that has anchored me in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Second Corinthians 4:16-17. These temporary sufferings that we have, that's what the Bible calls them. They are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Then let's look at Psalm 119 verses 67 and 72 and 75. Let's look that up together, if you want to. Psalm 119 verse 67, and I just love this so much. This is David. It's another reason that we suffer. He says in verse 67, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now I obey your word." Verse 72, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." Verse 75, "I know, Lord, that your laws are righteous and that in faithfulness, you have afflicted me." These are some of the reasons that we suffer. So that's why we're saying this Big Idea that suffering's inevitable. But you will not be facing it alone.

Suffering is inevitable because God is good and God is great. He knows what you're going through. He does care. He can do something about it. He will do something about it. He is doing something about it. He's making you, not breaking you.

## **SELF CARE**

Now let's talk about this last thing of how you don't have to face it alone, and let's just call this self care. It's not really self care. It's really God care. You're not facing alone. God is taking care of it, but there are some things that you can do to participate. That's called consecration. Consecrating yourself.

My first real life verse was Philippians 3:10. I want to know Christ, and the power of this resurrection, who doesn't? Goes on, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. So to embrace the fellowship of his sufferings because it is inevitable.

Then First Peter 4:1-2. This is my current life verse. Has been since the month we started this Bible study. I was sitting in our sun... We had like a sun room kind of a thing, and I was reading a book about zinc. Because I was at a point with my migraine headaches that I was looking at every medieval and modern potential remedy that I could find. This particular book, the author was describing the experience of someone who struggled with migraine headaches. I just started bawling. I finally somebody understands what I'm going through. I just bawled like a baby for 30 minutes.

Then I ran across this verse, First Peter chapter four, verses one and two. "Now therefore since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude. The same attitude of Christ. Because

when the body suffers, sin loses power. As the result, you will not spend the rest of your earthly life chasing after evil human desires, but rather for the will of God." I said, "That's it." I wrote in the front of this Bible, the one that my wife and our two children had just given me the year before. In the month we started this Bible study, I wrote in the front page here, right there, "I want to live the rest of my earthly life for the will of God." I did that because I finally realized that even though it seemed inevitable that I was going to suffer, I was not going to have to go through it alone.

Philippians 1:29, "Now it has been granted to you not only to believe on the name of Christ Jesus the Lord, but also to suffer for it. It is the word "Charis", for grace, for favor. You have been given the gift of suffering."

First Timothy 5:5. Oh, now I don't recommend you do this one. But this is the widow in need who's left all alone, and so because she's always in need and alone, she puts her hope in God alone. So I read that, and I said, "God, I want to be like that. I want to be like that. I want my hope to be in you alone. So God, would you always keep some major unmet need in my life so that I might remain utterly dependent upon you?" I hate that prayer. I wish I could take that prayer back. Actually, I don't wish I could take that prayer back, but God has been faithful to answer that prayer.

Second Corinthians 12:7-10. We already talked about the thorn in the flesh. Jesus answered Paul, when he asked to have this thorn in the flesh taken away three times. "My grace," this is Jesus speaking. "My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in your weakness." That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in my weaknesses. I delight in weakness in insult and hardship, in persecution, in difficulty. For when I am weak, then I am strong. This is how we take care of ourselves. We know that his grace is sufficient.

First Peter 4:19, "Commit yourself to your faithful creator and continue to do good. Do not be surprised, dear friends, that the painful suffering that you're going through. There's something strange was happening to you."

Then do we have time? Probably not.

First Peter chapter five, verses six to 11. This is the text that... Yeah, we just take a quick look at it together. First Peter chapter five, starting at verse six. So the Big Idea is that: **Suffering is inevitable, but you're not going to be facing it alone.** "Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand." This is self care. "So humble yourselves so he may lift you up in due time." So the self care there is humble yourself. Verse seven, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Does he know? Does he care? Yes, he cares. "Cast all your anxiety on him," that's part of your self care. Verse eight, "Be alert and a sober mind. Your enemy, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for somebody to roar. Resist him." That's something you can do. "Stand firm in your faith." That's something you can do because you know that the family of believers throughout the whole world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings as you are.

Verse 10, "And the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while," these light in momentary problems that we have and the grand scheme of eternity. "After you have suffered a little while..." The questions are does he know? Does he care? Can he do anything about it? Will he? If he is able to know, care and do something, will he do it? "After you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever, amen."

The Big Idea: **Suffering is inevitable, but you will not be facing it alone.** We'll let the last text stand as our prayer for the day.