

Jesus, the answer to suffering

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Today we are going to talk about suffering and how it relates to Jesus. We are not trying to solve all the problems nor to try to pinpoint who among us has suffered the most. The idea here is to think about what the Bible says about it and how it gives us hope in difficult times.

Let's begin with the story of Joseph. Joseph had 12 brothers, but his brothers were jealous of him, so they sold him into slavery and he ended up in Egypt. While he was there, he was blamed for something he hadn't done and ended up in prison. But the story is very strange. Joseph tried to follow God and do what's right, but he kept getting himself in a situation worst than the previous one. How does God relate to us when we suffer? But the Bible says God was with Joseph.

After a while, Joseph was ascended to be the governor of Egypt, the right-hand of the Pharaoh, only the Pharaoh was above him. And God used Joseph to save many people from a huge famine that was attacking the land. Joseph even got to see his family again.

Later on, when Joseph was thinking about all the things that have happened, he told his brothers in Genesis 50:20: ***"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."***

That is the conclusion of the first book of the Bible, the conclusion of Genesis. Our God does not let evil, sin or suffering get the last word. He comes and rescues us. He does not abandon us. So we recognize that Christians are not invulnerable, not immune to suffering. We go through trials like everybody else. But we have hope, we don't suffer alone. Our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He does not let suffering get the last word.

How is God going to deliver us? We need to keep reading the Bible. Genesis gives us hope, but you have to keep reading, until history reaches its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the answer to our suffering.

Let's look at Hebrews 2:10-18 and think about this:

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who

sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,¹² saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise.”

¹³ *And again, “I will put my trust in him.”*

And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

¹⁴ *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Overview

Hebrews was written to Christians who were suffering, and the message of the whole book is very clear: “Eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith”, even in the midst of suffering.

Ok, so how does that work? How is Jesus the answer to our suffering based on the passage we just read? Today we’ll see 4 aspects of that:

1. Jesus identifies with the ones who suffered.
2. Jesus does not abandon those who suffer.
3. Jesus conquers suffering.
4. Jesus is hope in the midst of suffering.

1. Jesus identifies with us

We can see this very clearly in verse 14: *“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things...”*

The idea that God ignores what happens in the universe, that He does not care to what’s going on in this world is simply not true. Our God is deeply and profoundly interested in our lives here under the sun, He does not ignore the cry for help from those who suffer. He constantly intervenes and sustains all of creation working everything for good.

He is so interested and committed to this world that He himself has come to rescue us, He came to deliver us. The incarnation, Christmas that we just celebrated, reminds us that our God hears our cry for help and has come to live, to dwell, among us. He does not ignore us, he cares deeply for each and everyone of us. He bound himself to history, to our history, because he loves us.

Because Jesus became a baby, doesn't that mean life is precious and valuable? Since Jesus grew up like a normal child, doesn't that mean that children are important and we should look after them? Since Jesus worked as a carpenter, doesn't that mean our God cares about what we do here on earth and that our work is important for him? Since Jesus suffered, doesn't that mean that He identifies with us, cares about us and knows what we are going through? No, our God does not ignore our cries for help.

And because Jesus suffered and died on the cross, being obedient, He opened up a way for us to be reconciled to God. All we have to do to be saved is cry out for help, ask Jesus to come and save us. That's it. And in the midst of suffering, He still comes running after us.

Check out verse 18: ***"Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*** The word here for help is more than just help out when it's convenient, we're talking about someone who's ready to come running when he hears the cry, like a fireman or an ambulance. All we have to do is cry out to him, ask him for his help, and he comes running after us.

2. Jesus does not abandon those who suffer

And this leads us to the second point: Jesus does not abandon those who suffer. Verse 12 is quoting from Psalm 22 in the Old Testament, so we're gonna go there and read the whole Psalm. So, keep your Bibles opened, because we're going there. We're going to read the whole psalm. Psalm 22:

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? This is Jesus at the cross, being rejected by all humanity and calling out to the Father. But did God the Father abandon Jesus at the cross? ***² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.***

³ Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴ In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵ To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. I know, God, that you are the Creator who has rescued people in the past. So, in this moment of anguish, can you come and rescue me?

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. Suffering and pain is destroying who I am.

⁷ All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" Wait, wait, the pharisees at the cross yelling at Jesus these same words, "Come down from that cross!"

⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. ¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. ¹¹ Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

¹² Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; ¹³ they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. ¹⁴ I am poured out like water... Jesus at the cross, after he died, being pierced and water and blood coming out!

...and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; ¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws. So, Jesus cries out: "I am thirsty", and we gave him vinegar.

You lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶ *For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet.* Wait, what? Isn't that like the cross? ¹⁷ *I can count all my bones –they stare and gloat over me; ¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.* That's Jesus at the cross, naked, while the soldiers divide his clothes among them.

¹⁹ *But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, my strength, come quickly to my aid! ²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! ²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion! Rescue me from the horns of the wild oxen!*

You have answered me.

²² *I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation, I will praise you* (our verse from Hebrews): ²³ *You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! ²⁴ For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.* No, our God does not abandon those who suffer, the Father did not abandon Jesus at the cross. We have to say, just like the Apostle Paul in 2 Co 5:19: "God was in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to himself, forgiving us, not counting our transgressions against us." Jesus did not suffer alone and neither do we.

²⁵ *From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. ²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. ²⁸ For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. ³⁰ Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; ³¹ they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.*

What Jesus did there at the cross changed all of human history. It is because of his triumph at the cross that we have hope now. Through Jesus' sufferings, God is rescuing the world, He is forming a new family from all the peoples of the earth, the family of God. And when we surrender to Jesus and suffer while still trusting in Him, we know we are more than victorious, we know our God does not abandon us.

3. Jesus triumphs over suffering

That is how the author of Hebrews uses Psalm 22. It's reminding us that God does not abandon suffering and that through Jesus' death, we now can be free, we have salvation. Let's go back to Hebrews 2; look at verse 14 and 15: *"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has*

the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

We here have two purposes for Jesus' death: to destroy and to deliver. He was destroying the one who had taken us captive and He was rescuing us. When the Author of life entered the dominion of death, the only thing the enemy could do was bow down and recognize the one who was Lord. Jesus at the cross was showing who is King, He was Reigning, He was defeating the powers of sin and darkness exposing them on the cross, just like Colossians 2 tells us. At the cross Jesus absorbed the consequences for our sins and defeated them, He said: ***“It is finished”***, “I love these human beings and I have come to rescue them. They are mine; no one can separate them from me”.

Now, because of Jesus' triumph, suffering has someone above to answer to, it has to answer to the Creator of heaven and earth. God does not let suffering get the last word. And so, the least of our pains now has a purpose, to make us more like Jesus and to bring us closer to God. And we know that everything that happens works out for good.

So today, Jesus calls to us and offers us his life. He says: ***“²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”***

We know that, as Christians, we also suffer, we are not immune. It's not because we are baptized or been in church all our lives that these things won't happen to us. Now, we do not lose heart. Our God, our Jesus has conquered, the Lion of Judah, the slain lamb. ***“In the world we will have tribulation. But take heart; Jesus have overcome the world.”***

4. Jesus is hope in the midst of suffering

We now have hope. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we now have an everlasting hope. We know this world is not the end, our Lord is coming back, heaven and earth will be reunited, and we will be with our God forever and ever. The New Jerusalem is so special because, as Ezekiel says, ***“The Lord is there.”*** And in that city, when all of creation is restored, all tears will be wiped away, our wounds will be healed, because our God has destroyed death!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor during World War II. And in the face of the darkest moments of human history, he still preached Jesus, the light of the world. When the Nazi regime reigned, his loyalty and trust was still in Jesus. He was arrested in 1943 and hanged in 1945, just a little while before the war was over. Before he died, his last words were: “This is the end; for me, the beginning of life.”

No, death does not have the last word, because Jesus has overcome death, he defeated it. There is hope in Jesus; our life is hidden in Christ. And when Christ, who is our life, appears, we will rise again, appear with him in glory and reign with him forever (Col. 3:3-4). Therefore, we unite our voices to Isaiah and the author of Hebrews, saying: ***“I will put my trust in him.”***

We know, just like Paul, that ***“the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”***

Application

My beloved brothers and sisters, we saw today how our God does not let suffering have the last word. Rather:

- Jesus comes and identifies with the ones who suffer.
- Jesus does not abandon those who suffer.
- Jesus triumphs over suffering.
- Jesus is our hope in the midst of sufferings.

I know 2020 was not an easy year. It was very chaotic, with lots of uncertainty, and so far, 2021 is not that much better either. But we know that our God did not abandon us. He carried us through. He gave us strength in the times of trial. He gave us peace in the storm.

And so, in the face of trials and the uncertainties of 2021, we still have a message of hope for the world, we have Jesus. He's the one who guides us and takes care of us. He did not leave us alone. This world is in desperate need of hope and we, who have hope in Jesus, we need to share that hope with others.

We also saw that the author of Hebrews talks about community, the assembly, the congregation, and then David was also concerned with that, he had it in mind. So, when we face times of trials, we do that as a community, as the body of Christ, one unified family under the Lord Jesus. We rejoice with the ones who rejoice, we cry with the ones who are crying. See, we have received comfort and peace in Jesus. Therefore, we are also to go and share that comfort and peace with others, this amazing gift is for sharing. This amazing grace is for our family.

Let's be honest, we need each other. Just by seeing the testimonies of the people that got baptized today, we are filled with joy and hope because we see what God is doing in other people's lives. And so, we put our trust in him.

Finally, we don't know the future, we don't know what's going to happen. But we do know that our God takes care of us and guards us. And when Jesus comes back, we will rise again, and we will be with him forever. Suffering does not have the final word. Jesus does. Let us pray.