

# **Glorifying God in Hard Times and Affliction**

*“Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name” (Psalm 29:2)*

One of the saddest human spiritual conditions is described in Matthew 13:22. It is the condition of the person who hears the word but lets the cares of the world strangle out his or her faith. Human suffering can drag faithful Christians down and cause them to complain, stop living, become self-absorbed, forget God, blame God, and in general deliver themselves over to Satan.

## **FIRST, WHY DO WE SUFFER?**

We begin our study with "The secret things belong to God." (Deut. 29:29) It is difficult to understand human suffering because we no longer have inspired prophets to know if our suffering is from the finger of God as a punishment or a normal happening of life. Unless our suffering is a consequence of a sin, we simply cannot know the reason for the suffering. (James 1:2-3, 2 Cor. 12:7-10) Throughout life suffering will come our way; we can either glorify God or serve Satan in the way we handle these trials.

Why does human suffering exist? Simple answer—sin. Not my sin or yours, but the entrance of sin through Adam and Eve. Before their sin, the world was perfect. There was no death, no sickness, no shame, etc. After their sin, human suffering began. Women would have pain in childbirth, and men would only eat through toil and labor. Ultimately, the separation from the tree of life meant the aging and dying process began for Adam, Eve, and all mankind who followed.

## **Is it God's Will when people suffer? Yes and No.**

**Yes**, because God put in place the laws of nature (physics) and science. Whether it be aging; disease, based on environment or genetics; or choices when people place themselves in danger, suffering is a result of these laws God put in motion. **No**, because God does not manipulate these laws so that every event that happens in anyone's daily life is chosen and ordered by him. (Eccl. 9:11-12)

Sometimes our suffering is the result of someone else's choice. Therefore, I may suffer because someone chose to drink and drive, killing someone I love. I may suffer because humans have used materials to create things (asbestos in building materials) that cause sickness or illness. We may find in the future that chemicals we use to flavor or preserve food could cause cancer or illness. Again, this is not the direct will of God but choices man has made.

## Is suffering the result of a sin? Yes and No.

Sometimes our suffering is a direct result of our sin. If I drink, I may suffer from liver failure. If I smoke, I may develop lung cancer. If I am unfaithful and have sex or do drugs with immoral people, I may suffer from a STD, AIDS, etc. The list can go on and on, but let us be clear. In the context of today's lesson, there is **no glory for God when we suffer due to our own sins.**

However, there are times I suffer strictly due to "time and chance" (Eccl. 9:11-12). For example, if I am in a car and the brakes go out, I might hit a tree. The laws of nature will cause me great suffering, but I did not sin in any way. The wreck is not a punishment for a sin. Death due to illnesses (ex. cancer) is because we all must die (Heb. 9:27).

Sometimes I suffer because of the sins of other people. Consider the random victim of a school shooting; a person paralyzed after being hit by a drunk driver; the office worker in the "Twin Towers" on 9/11, etc. They suffered due to the evil acts of another.

Finally, **we will suffer** persecution if we are a Christian living in a pagan world. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12, John 15:20). Paul was stoned, beaten, and put in prison because he was a Christian. By the fourth chapter of the book of Acts, the apostles had already been arrested, beaten, and told never to preach in Jesus' name again. How did they respond? They prayed for "boldness." A central theme of 1 Peter and Philippians prepares all believers to suffer and rejoice because they are able to partake in the suffering of Christ.

### **When we suffer patiently, God is glorified, which is the theme of this weekend series.**

However, if we complain, stop living, or begin to lay blame in the midst of suffering, we only serve Satan's purpose, and **God is not glorified.**

### ***Can I take solace in this passage?***

*Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

## **HOW DO WE PATIENTLY ENDURE SUFFERING?**

There seems to be some common themes among Bible characters who endured great trials and tribulations.

1. Faith (belief in a promise):

List Bible characters that suffered greatly but a promise sustained them:

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List situations that may cause you to suffer and a promise from God that can sustain you:

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2. A Different Perspective: So often we are so wrapped up in what is going to happen to us (our body, our emotions, etc.) that we fall prey to Satan by complaining, withdrawing, blaming, hating, etc. For example, we may have a loved one who is really sick. Their care consumes our time, and they may even die. It is so easy to be overcome by the sadness or sorrow.

What can we learn about perspective from David when the boy died as a result of his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:14-23)? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does David's situation and Paul's words, "to live is Christ, but to die is gain," help us with this concept of perspective? \_\_\_\_\_

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Read 2 Cor. 4:16-18. If we could ask Paul about the beatings, stonings, and shipwrecks after he had been in Paradise for 1,000 years, would he consider those afflictions light or severe? Now ask yourself the same question regarding what Job suffered. How hard was it at the time? Now, what do you believe he would say after 1,000 years in Paradise? Think of the power it would give us to live with this perspective (Matthew 10:28). **This is what perspective will do for us!**

3. God's Grace is Sufficient (2 Cor. 12:7-10): Paul made it very clear in this passage that this trial was to remind him he needed God. Sometimes we become self-sufficient in our own minds and forget how much we need God.

Consider what could have been different if the "complaining" Israelites in Numbers 12:2-4 focused on God's grace (unmerited favor)? Yet, they focused on the immediate fears of the moment and failed God.

List a few examples where focusing on God's grace shown to us could help us through the trials we may experience. (Phil. 4:11-13)

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4. Rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake (1 Peter 4:13, Mat. 5:10-12). In Acts 5:33-42 the apostles were beaten, and they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. When was the last time you or I rejoiced because we were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake? Do you remember the promise in Mat. 5:10-12? Notice the list of

passages that speak to “rejoicing” in suffering (Mat. 5:10-12, Phil. 2:17-18, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 1 Peter 4:13, 1 Peter 5:6-11). Think of the power it would give us if we could develop this attitude toward suffering. We may have to be careful of pride creeping in, but we would be so much more effective at standing up for the cause of Christ when He is defamed.

## **HOW DOES OUR PATIENTLY ENDURING TRIALS GLORIFY GOD?**

I must admit that it is hard to wrap your head around the fact that being beaten, made fun of, suffering loss, etc. somehow glorifies God. However, I believe the key is in how we handle the situations. When people in our society suffer, what is their common response? Is it not complaining, feeling sorry for themselves, blaming others for their woes, blaming the situation for their failures or maybe even their desire to stop living (depression and withdrawal)? We have been programed to expect these responses.

Now would it stand out when Christians don’t respond negatively, don’t panic in their defense trials, show no fear before the person who threatens their lives, pray for the persecutors, suffer calmly without drawing attention to themselves, etc.?

So let me ask, when you or I suffer, do we suffer like a Christian or a person of the world? I hope this session will help us to respond like a Christian so that Christ is glorified so that each of us may be “blessed in eternity.”

So, let’s consider each of the situations below and think about which method the character used to endure the sorrow, trial, or suffering? Secondly, let’s consider how different their behavior was compared to the normal worldly response. Lastly, how was God glorified in each situation?

1. Paul on the boat about to shipwreck (Acts 27)
2. Jesus asleep on the boat (Mark 4:25-41)
3. Peter asleep in prison the night before he was to be brought out to Herod (Act 12:5-11)
4. Stephen was said to have the face of an angel (powerful, calm, and peaceful) while being persecuted and on trial (Acts 6:15).
5. Abraham saying “when we return” while knowing he was about to sacrifice his son (Gen. 22:5)
6. David arising and eating after the child dies (2 Sam. 12:14-23)
7. Jesus’ trial (Mark 15:2, 5)

Remember suffering glorifies the One for whom we suffer! (1 Peter 4:14-16; Philippians 1:20).