

Last week we began a series on suffering, and this morning, because it's Easter, I'd like us to look specifically at the suffering of Jesus and see what we can learn that will help us to endure even unjust suffering patiently.

If I were to ask you what is *the worst thing* that has ever happened, not just to you or in your lifetime, but in history, what would you say? You might think of 9/11 and the terrorist attacks on our country. You might think of natural disasters like Katrina or tsunamis. You might think of the Holocaust. You might think of slavery. You might think of some assassination like Lincoln's or Kennedy's or Martin Luther King's. You might think of abortion or child abuse or sexual abuse. And you would be right to think of those things and put them in the list of "worst things ever." But you would be wrong if you didn't put at the top of the list *the murder of Jesus*. The worst thing that has ever happened in the history of the world is that the Perfect Man, the sinless Son of God, God incarnate was hated, abused, and murdered. There's no greater evil than sin and there's no greater sin than killing Christ Jesus the Lord and Maker of heaven and earth.

Then if I were to ask you what is *the best thing* that has ever happened, what would you say? What is the one event in history that has accomplished the

most good? You would know immediately to answer: the cross of Jesus.

But how can that be? How can the worst thing to ever happen be the best thing to ever happen?

That's the riddle we're dealing with when we talk about evil and suffering. It's an enigma. There are no easy answers. But it is helpful in coping with suffering to bear in mind that in the history of the world in which we live *the worst thing and the best thing were the same thing*.

Now obviously, the suffering of Jesus is a broad subject, so I have to pick and choose, and I've chosen **1 Pet.2:18-25**. Not because it says everything there is to say about the suffering of Jesus, but because it weaves together the two things that I want to focus on in each of these examples I'm using (Jesus this week, Joseph, and Job in the next two weeks), namely, purpose and pattern. I'm trying to show from their suffering that all suffering is purposeful; and I'm trying to show from their suffering how we're supposed to deal with it and endure it.

So from that angle, the text of 1 Peter 2 is perfect. It says the primary thing about the purpose of Jesus' suffering, and it says some profound things about the pattern for our suffering.

Notice what it says: **READ 1 Peter 2:18-25**.

Did you hear Isaiah 53 in that? It was clearly in Peter's mind. And that's typical of the NT as each writer is trying to show that Jesus is the Christ, the

promised Messiah and Son of God; He did exactly what the OT Scriptures said He would do. So here Peter refers to Isaiah 53 6 times. Jesus is the Suffering Servant that Isaiah was talking about 700 years earlier.

This passage is also typical of the NT, especially of the epistles, in another way, and that is in applying the cross of Jesus to the every-day challenges of Christian living in a sinful world. In this instance, the every-day real-life challenge was this: certain Christians were slaves and many of them had unreasonable masters. Master's who were not good and gentle but *skolios* – crooked, perverse, wicked, unfair, surly, overbearing, unjust. What were they to do in that situation? **Vs.18** – “*be submissive to them with all respect.*” How were they to do that? By living every day at the foot of the cross of Jesus, remembering His suffering and following His example.

That's the paradigm for Christian living. Take the template of Jesus' suffering and death and apply it to every hard situation in your life. Not “what would Jesus do?”....“what *did* Jesus do?” In other words, we too are here to be suffering servants.

That's how you function in a society with corrupt politicians – 2:11-17.

That's how wives honor and hope in God when their husbands are disobedient to the word – 3:1-6.

That's how *husbands live with their wives in an understanding way* – 3:7.

That's how all of us live *harmoniously, sympathetically, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit with one another, not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing* – 3:8-9.

And that's how you submit to an unreasonable master. And why would you do any of that? Because as believers and followers of Jesus we're not here to get ahead; we're not here to get rich; we're not here to get our way; we're not here to indulge our lusts; we're not here to demand our rights; we're not here to get what we deserve. We are here in this world – 2:9 – as *“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We who once were not a people, but now are the people of God; we who once had not received mercy, but now have received mercy.”* We are here as *aliens and strangers (sojourners, pilgrims), abstaining from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul, keeping our behavior excellent among the Gentiles (pagans, unbelievers who don't know God), so that in the thing in which they slander us as evildoers, they may on account of our good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

*The day of visitation* is the day of Christ's return, and His return will be both a day of salvation and a day of judgment. But on that day every person *will* glorify God – either because they've been saved or because they've refused to be and now they know

how foolish that was and how just God's judgment will be upon them because repeatedly in their lifetime the goodness of God was evident to them in the good deeds of God's people all around them who, like Jesus, did right even when it cost them suffering and death.

Now that's the context. But all I want to focus on is two things – what Peter says about the purpose of Jesus' suffering, and what he says about the pattern for our suffering.

### **1. The Purpose of Jesus' Suffering.**

And here I'm simply trying to help you see that the worst case of suffering ever, the most unjust suffering ever, was not pointless.

You've already seen from Isaiah 53 that it was *prophesied*, that it was *predicted* 700 years before it happened. Jesus death was not an unexpected, tragic crime that messed up God's plan, it was the plan. In fact, in another place, **Acts 2:23**, Peter says so explicitly, "*this Man [Jesus], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put to death.*" Godless men carried out the dastardly deed, but a sovereign God made the decree and planned it in the secret counsel of His own will from eternity past.

But why? Why would a good and powerful God decree that such a horrible thing happen to His only begotten Son? What good could possibly make such an evil worthwhile? Notice 5 purposes.

**a. To leave us an example.**

Notice **vs.21**.

Now that isn't the only reason Jesus suffered and died, but it is an important one. He suffered *for you*, not just *because* of you, not just *instead* of you, but *for* you, for your benefit, and one benefit was to leave you an example for you to follow in His steps.

Think about that. Knowing that suffering and death is such a universal component that all human beings share in common, how amazing it is to consider that one reason God sent His only Son into the world was to share in that suffering and death and show us how to do it.

And how did He do it? **Vs.22** – without sinning, without deceiving or lying, without reviling or abusing or insulting or slandering, and without threatening. He didn't return evil for evil, in other words, He didn't demand His rights, He didn't defend Himself; He just quietly and confidently and continually “kept entrusting *everything* to Him who judges righteously.” More on that in a minute.

**b. Second purpose for Jesus' suffering and death, vs.24, to bear our sins in His body on the cross.**

“To bear our sins in His body” means to suffer the punishment for our sins. The wages or penalty for sin is death and Jesus died that death.

What that means is that when Christ suffered – more than any of us have ever suffered, not because of the physical pain but because of the spiritual reality that was going on – He was standing in our place. He was bearing *your* sins so that *your*

condemnation became His and no longer yours. Which means, one implication anyway is, that the sufferings of your life now are **not** ever nor ever will be *condemnation for sin*. They may be *discipline for holiness* (as we said last week, Heb.12), but the suffering of a Christian is never divine wrath or condemnation. That is the very thing Christ bore *“for us in His body on the cross.”*

He took our sin upon Himself and bore the penalty of it for us. Somehow, **2 Cor.5:21**, *“God made Him who knew no sin sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* God treated Jesus like He was me so He could treat me like I was Jesus.

That’s why His suffering is so unique and so profound. Jake and Henry and I were talking about that last week. The physical suffering of Jesus, while it was excruciating, was not all that extraordinary. Thousands of people were crucified. What makes the suffering of Jesus the worst suffering ever and the most unjust suffering ever is that it involved the sinless Son of God bearing in His fleshly body the weight of all our sin and the devastation and separation of the wrath of God against that sin.

The worst part was not the 39 lashes that ripped open His back and belly, or the crown of thorns pressed on His head, or the spit and punches in the face, or the nails in His hands and feet, or the spear in His side, or the scorn of rulers, or the mocking of the crowd, or the betrayal by one of His own disciples

and the desertion of all the others. The worst part was *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* And the answer to that is because for that instant while He died, the sin that He was bearing *for us* separated God the Son from God the Father. You say, “How did that work?” I don’t know, but it sounds more painful than any suffering I’ve ever endured.

What it means, though we can’t comprehend it, is that Jesus absorbed the wrath of God justly aimed at our sin. Like an umbrella, or a storm-cellar, or an ark takes the fury of the storm and protects those it covers, Jesus absorbed the wrath of God directed at our sin. **Gal.3:13** - *“Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”* As our substitute, Jesus didn’t cancel the wrath of God, He absorbed it and diverted it away from us and onto Himself. The full force of God’s wrath was poured out and Jesus took it so we would never have to.

That’s what the word **propitiation** means.

**Rom.3:25** – *“God displayed [Christ] publicly as a propitiation in His blood.”*

**1 John 4:10** – *“in this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*

The word means satisfaction. It means the removal of God’s wrath and the satisfaction of God’s justice through a substitute. And here’s the amazing part, God *Himself* provided the substitute.

Don't ever think "*God's mad at us, but Jesus loves us. God's all about holiness and wrath, but Jesus is all about grace and forgiveness.*" No! There's no disunity in the Trinity. It's true that God is holy and just, and if He were not, there would be no *demand* for His Son to suffer and die. But God is also loving, and if He were not, there would be no *willingness* for His Son to suffer and die. The fact is that God is both just and loving; therefore His own *love* was willing to meet the demands of His own *justice*. And so He sent His own Son to be the [wrath-absorbing, justice-satisfying] propitiation for our sins.

And John says *in this* [like nothing else in the world] is love.

Pointless suffering? Not at the cross. Purpose #1 – to leave us an example; purpose #2 – to bear away our sins.

*Do you get that? Do you believe that? Your sins have been borne away in Jesus' body on the cross and you bear them no more. Whatever guilt and condemnation they deserve you will never face because Jesus did already. No wonder Horatio Spafford exulted, "My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought – My sin, not in part, but the whole – is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!"*

c. A third purpose for Jesus' suffering can be seen in vs.24 – **“that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.**

He bore our sins in His body on the cross to this end: *that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.*

That's pretty radical isn't it? That's the miracle of regeneration. And the sense here is not that Jesus' death made this *possible*, but made it *actual*. This is *reality* for those who are in Christ.

That's Paul's argument in **Rom.6** for why we can't continue in sin: "*What, don't you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*" When you belong to Christ, you are so united to Him that your identity is lost in His and whatever's true of Him is true of you – He died, you died; He was buried, you were buried; He was raised, you were raised. That's how God sees it. And Peter's saying Jesus died to make it that way. He died *for* sin that you might die *to* sin...and live to righteousness.

Practically, Paul says in **Rom.6:12**, that looks like this: *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*"

In Christ, you are dead to sin and alive to righteousness; see yourself that way, consider

yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God; and by the power of the Holy Spirit live that way.

Look at **1 Pet.4. READ vs.1-3.**

Isn't that true? Haven't you spent enough time already carrying out the desire of the Gentiles (pagans who don't know God)? Haven't you lived for sin long enough? Shouldn't you live the rest of your fleeting life in the flesh for something other than the lusts of men? Jesus died so you could. Jesus died so you would.

This is the miraculous life-transforming power of the cross. It works like this: the more we look at it, the more we hate our sin and love Jesus' righteousness. The more we gaze upon Jesus bearing our sins in His body on the cross, the more our hearts are softened and our eyes opened to see how much God loves us and what an enormous price He has paid to redeem and reconcile us. And we die to the power of sin's deceit which has so long persuaded us that a better life and a better future can be had through sin than through righteousness. What a lie! And now we look at it cross-eyed, and we don't see things the same way anymore. The cross unleashes on us the conquering love of God that constrains us to see that living for sin is not living at all but dying, and a heart transformation takes place and we become dead to sin and alive to righteousness.

John Piper puts it this way: "This means that when I embrace Jesus as my Savior, I embrace my own

death as a sinner. My sin brought Jesus to the grave and brought me there with Him. Faith sees sin as murderous. It killed Jesus, and it killed me. Therefore, becoming a Christian means death to sin. The old self that loved sin died with Jesus. Sin is like a prostitute that no longer looks beautiful. She is the murderer of my King and myself. Therefore, the believer is dead to sin, no longer dominated by her attractions. Sin, the prostitute who killed my friend, has no appeal. She has become an enemy. My new life is now swayed by righteousness.... The beauty of Christ, who loved me and gave Himself for me, is the desire of my soul. And his beauty is perfect righteousness.

(The Passion, 79)

Jesus suffered and died to effect that kind of heart transformation, and it works.

- d. A fourth purpose in Jesus' suffering and a fourth proof that it was not pointless: Jesus suffered and died **to make us whole**.

**Vs.24** adds, *"for by His wounds you were healed."*

Some people make this all about physical healing, and it does include that. Jesus proved His intentions toward sickness and disease by healing people everywhere He went. **Matt.8:16** says, *"when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'He himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases.'" That was a preview of coming attractions and proof of the*

inbreaking of His kingdom on earth and His authority and His lordship over all creation. And eventually all sickness and disease will be eradicated when He transforms these lowly and mortal bodies of ours into glorious and immortal ones.

But the primary emphasis is on spiritual healing or wholeness. Jesus died to make us whole, complete, to make us well. In other words, to save us and to restore us to our intended purpose of glorifying God and being His image bearers on earth. Ultimately that will include new glorified bodies free from sickness and disease and death, but the wellness and the wholeness of salvation is the emphasis, and the thing we need most.

Nowhere in the Bible does God promise His people freedom on earth from sickness or disease or death; only that all such miseries are temporary. And the point here, as in Isaiah 53, is that they are temporary because of Jesus' suffering and death. He took to the grave not only our sin, but all the sickness that results from our sin.

Pointless suffering? None here.

If Jesus hadn't suffered and died there would be no example for us to follow; there would be no escaping the wrath of God; there would be no dying to sin and living to righteousness; there would be no healing of all our diseases – ever! And there would be no turning of lost sheep back to their Shepherd.

- e. The fifth purpose of Jesus' suffering and death is **to turn us back to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.**

That's what Peter means by healed: "*you were continually straying like sheep*" – that's a terminal disease called rebellion, but now that Jesus bore your sins in His body on the cross, and now that you have died to sin and been made alive to righteousness "*you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*"

Sheep are notorious for being discontent and pushing through fences because they're convinced the grass is greener on the other side. And when they get over to the other side what do they discover? They were right: the grass is greener on the *other* side. Sometimes God lets us stray so we'll learn that the best place to be is near Him in the green pastures that He provides.

And so the cross of Jesus brings us back to God and near to God.

**1 Pet.3:18** – "*For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God.*"

**Eph.2:13** – "*But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*"

The cross turns us around and points us to the One who truly cares for our souls and will Shepherd us and provide for us and love us and protect us. And the cross teaches us that there's nothing better for

a sheep than to be close to the Shepherd and follow Him. And the cross teaches us to love Him and trust Him and not wander off.

So through His suffering and death Jesus becomes our Standard, our Substitute, our Savior, our Sanctifier, and our Shepherd.

Now if you can see that; if you can see that the worst suffering ever, the most unjust suffering ever, the most atrocious shocking suffering ever was not in vain, was not pointless, but divinely appointed and wonderfully and powerfully purposeful, then maybe with a little time and grace you can begin to see or at least imagine that your worst suffering is not in vain but purposeful even if you can't yet see what the purpose might be.

Here's what we learn from the suffering of Jesus. Here's what we know about evil and suffering, even if it's the only thing we know.

When we consider the question: Why does God allow evil and suffering in the world and then look at the cross of Jesus, we still may not know what the full answer is, but we at least know what the answer isn't: it isn't because God doesn't care, it isn't because God doesn't love us.

In Christ, God entered into our suffering, proving that He's not indifferent, He's not silent, He's not distant. He takes our misery and suffering so seriously that He was willing to take it *on Himself*.

The cross proves that God loves us:

**Rom.5:8** says, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

The suffering of Jesus unto death proves that God loves us and that God uses suffering for good.

Christ suffered “for us.” He died on the cross to pay for our sins so that He can end evil and suffering without ending us!

Now let’s get personal.

## **2. The Pattern for Our Suffering.**

What do we see here from Jesus’ suffering about how to endure even unjust suffering patiently?

### **a. *We have to expect suffering not be surprised by it.***

Doing right doesn’t mean you won’t suffer. In fact, Peter seems to assume the opposite. **Vs.15** – *“for such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”* **Vs.20** – *“for what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure, this finds favor with God...For you have been called for this purpose!”*

Doing right doesn’t mean you won’t suffer; doing right means you most assuredly will suffer. So don’t say, “Oh no, I’m suffering, what did I do wrong?” Expect to suffer even when you do what is right.

And recognize that this is part of your calling. You *should* suffer if you do what is wrong, but that’s not your calling. Your calling is to endure patiently the

suffering that comes into your life when all in the world you're doing is what is right.

But how many of us live in the liberating knowledge of that? It's our calling, our vocation, to be misunderstood, criticized, ignored, hurt, treated unjustly for doing what is right, and not to retaliate or feel that we have to make things right because they're wrong and we're right.

One of the reasons suffering comes as such a blow to us many times is that it catches us off guard. It comes as a surprise. That's *our* fault. It happens because we get so accustomed to God's mercy and blessing that when suffering comes we take offense. "What is this? Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this?" So one simple way to take the sting out of suffering is to expect it. By expecting it we rob it of much of its power.

So don't be surprised by suffering, expect it.

Look at **1 Pet.4:12** – *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.”*

**b. To follow Jesus means refusing to sin just because you are suffering.**

Notice **vs.21** again – *“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you,*

*leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin..."*

You don't have to sin just because you're suffering.

Suffering is no excuse for sinning.

We don't deal with suffering by sinning.

They lied about Jesus, but Jesus didn't lie to wiggle His way out of worse suffering. They reviled Him, but He didn't revile in return. They threatened awful things, but He uttered no threats of retaliation. He suffered unjustly without sinning. What a Savior! What a Champion!

Remember **3:8** – *"not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead, for you were called for the very purpose of receiving a blessing."*

That's the hardest thing and the worst thing about suffering, isn't it? That sin causes suffering and suffering causes more sin. Where does that cycle end? It ends at the cross and that's why we have to sing, "Jesus keep me near the cross." The cycle can end at the cross and it can end with us if we live near the cross.

**c. *The key to endurance in suffering is trust.***

This is the most profound statement in the whole passage to me – **vs.23** – "while being reviled, he did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, *but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.* The "Himself" is inserted. And that's okay – it's true – Jesus kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously. But it could

just as well be translated “everything.” He kept entrusting Himself, the outcome, final vindication, *everything* to Him who judges righteously. And that’s what we have to do when we’re suffering, especially when we’re suffering unjustly.

The word “entrusted” is also noteworthy. It’s not the word for “faith” or “trust,” it’s *paradidomi*; it means to deliver up or give over. In this context it means that Jesus gave the whole situation over to God. He put the whole thing in God’s hands. He committed it all to the Father. He didn’t defend Himself, He didn’t fear what might happen to Him if He didn’t, He turned the whole thing including Himself, those abusing him, the hurt done, the injustice, the outcome, everything over into God’s hands as the one who would settle the matter justly someday. As Jesus laid down His life for you He was saying, “I will not carry the burden of revenge, I will not carry the burden of self-pity, I will not carry the burden of sorting out motives and settling the score, I will not carry the burden of bitterness; I will hand all that over to God who will settle it all in a perfectly just way in His time and meanwhile I will pray, “Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they do.”

That’s your calling. That’s the challenge to each one of us today. When you’re suffering, will you trust God as much as Jesus does? Will you entrust yourself to Him? Will you turn everything over to Him with the confidence of Abraham, “Will not the judge of all the earth do right?”

Why don't we trust God? It's only because we don't know Him. And why does God allow evil and suffering? That we might come to know Him.

Remember, in this series, I'm asking you this simple question: Can you trust a God who allows evil and suffering in the world? Can you trust a God who allows you and those you love to suffer? One reason you can is because God sent His own Son into this world to suffer for you. And whatever else we may not understand about evil and suffering, we at least know this much: that God Himself is not untouched by it as if it's only our problem and not His, and whatever He's up to in allowing evil and suffering, it must be big and it must be wonderful, otherwise why would He subject His own Son to it.

The worst thing that ever happened is the best thing that ever happened. Cling to that thought when suffering comes and look to the cross as proof that God loves you and works even the worst of evil for good.