

Rom. 5:3-5; Job 2:1-10; The Suffering of the Faithful I. How Job Suffered II. Why Job Suffered III. Responding to our Suffering

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this evening we are going to consider the suffering of the righteous. When God's people suffer- what can we say? When the righteous endure hardship- what comfort can we offer? The fact is, suffering effects us all and changes us all. Some are hardened and become angry as they accuse God of wrongdoing; while others are humbled as their faith is challenged and other grow in the image of Christ the suffering servant. One application we can see as we consider the life of Job is that Job points us to the perfect righteous One. Jesus Himself suffered unjustly and at the hands of Satan and wicked men- but the suffering of Jesus is unique because it is through His suffering that we find the forgiveness of our sins. However, Jesus does point to His own suffering when He said, in Mt. 16, that his disciples must take up their cross and follow me. Although our suffering does not secure our atonement, we do follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. It is difficult to talk about suffering when you are in the midst of it. In fact, Job's friends had it right when they just sat in silence with Job for 7 days. So we must be careful to avoid rash speaking and false assertions as we proceed; but the fact remains that God's people need to be prepared for suffering. We all have and will endure suffering in various ways- some of you are drinking from that bitter cup right now- others have passed through the fires before. The past few months I have been wrestling over the best way learn from suffering- and my hope is that the comfort of God's presence that we enjoy through the suffering is what you take home. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals the comforting presence of God which remains through the suffering.

I. How Job Suffered

In our first point, we consider the various ways that Job suffered. Suffering can come in many forms- both internal and external. Spiritual and physical. It can be applied to us by various means- both friend and foe. For Job, he lost everyone and everything. The few people left in his life turned against him. He

lost all his possessions- his animals being stolen or burned up with fire as we find in ch. 1. His servants all put to death by the sword. His own children crushed by weight of the house in which they were staying. And yet after all this, the righteous man Job says, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away- blessed be the name of the Lord. Now Satan had been attacking Job because of his righteousness- but Job does not know this. Rather, Satan's work remains behind the scenes as he attacks the man of God. Next, Job's own body is covered in painful sores and his own wife encourages him to curse God and die. But Job's response is still, shall we receive good from the LORD'S hand and not ill. In all this, Job did not sin with his lips. His own friends after waiting in silence for 7 days- when they finally speak they accuse Job of some great sin. God does not do this to people that are good. Bad things don't happen to good people. Job. 4:70- when have the innocent ever perished- his friend says. What little Job has left is turned into a curse as his wife and friends turn against him and accuse him of sin or encourage him to sin. But Job held fast to his integrity- refusing to curse God or blaspheme the LORD'S holy name.

II. Why Job Suffered

But why did Job suffer this way? Why did so many evils fall on this one man- suffering more than anyone else before? Well, it was not because of Job's sin but because Job was righteous! Now this might sound contradictory- why would Job suffer for being righteous? Well, that is the very thing we learn in Job 1:8 where the LORD refers to Job as one who is blameless and upright- who fears God and turns away from evil. So we catch a glimpse into the secret workings of God- but Job does not hear this conversation. God is going to prove His power as well as test Job's resolve- all the while knowing the end of the matter as well. So Job's faith and knowledge of God will grow through suffering! As he will state in Job 42- I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. We find a similar problem in John 9:2. Here Jesus' disciples are asking about this man born blind. Who had sinned- this man or his parents? The answer Jesus gives proves that God's ways are not our ways. Jesus says- this blindness has happened in order to prove God's power and work! Somehow God's glory is

going to be put on display through this suffering? Now this is some deep doctrine- God working all things for His glory- and that includes pain and suffering? If God's Word had not said it- would we dare to assert this as true? But the fact remains, somehow the suffering of the righteous is going to display God's power and glory! We all know Rom. 8:28- but its truth needs to be seared on our souls- impressed on our hearts! God is working in all things- and all will work for His glory. "God works all things together for the good of those who love Him." God is glorifying His name- even as you walk through the waters and stand in the fire. But more than that- not only for God's glory but also for our good! Remember that Job did not know- and we do not know how everything is going to end. The future in this life remains hidden for us- but we do know that it will end with good! One good end that Job received was a double increase of everything returned to him. The good end that we have to look forward to is an inheritance in glory and a home filled with honor in the life to come! So first comes the suffering- and one day comes the crown! Paul even says that our current suffering is light compared to the weight of the glory to be revealed! So there are blessings in store for God's people who suffer- if not blessings today surely they will be reaped tomorrow. Joseph was able to make the same confession in Genesis 50- what you meant for evil God meant it for good. So we need to be mindful of our thoughts and careful in our conclusion- lest we jump to the wrong answer when we ask the question- why is this happening to me. To answer the question of "why," the Bible gives us the answer of "For God's glory and for the good of His people." This truth is not to make light of our trials- but rather to view them with a proper perspective. Getting what we do not want- or not getting what we do want- is one of the ways that Jesus produces good fruit within and turns our focus to eternity. As we read in Rom. 5- suffering produces endurance, character, and hope! So we start to hope for the good that is coming after the thorn and thistle give way to the flower.

III. Responding to our Suffering

Now that we have a better understanding of why these trials have come- not because of our sins or to punish us but rather to bring God glory and produce good fruit within us- in our final point we consider how we should respond when we are going through these trials of suffering and trial. The earthly and human response to suffering is to avoid it at all costs. But a Christian is one who can stand firm in the suffering- to endure while standing in the flame. By faith we can even receive hardships and say- this too is from my loving Father's hand. Isn't that what Job said? Shall we not receive this from the Lord's hand? Job states this fact even more clearly in Job 13:15- Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him! So instead of driving us away from God- these trials ought to drive us to God! We also learn that in these trials, it is God's presence that comforts. Children, do you remember when Daniel's 3 friends were cast into the fiery furnace? Do you remember that there was a 4th person in there with them? Well, when we suffer the flames of fire, we can know that God is with us! Listen to Isaiah 43, when you pass through the waters, I will be with you! Or again in Psalm 23:4, when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil for you are with me! Note this fact, we are to place our faith in the God who is present! Or to say this another way- the comfort we have in times of trials is found as we put our faith in the God who is present! So the answer to the question of what should we do when we are in a time of trial, suffering and pain is this- hold fast to the God who is there with you! God is present and He is holding you! The faith that the suffering saints have in God is not a blind and baseless faith. No, it is faith built on truth and reality. Children, do you remember when your dad was teaching you to jump into the pool. He would stand by the edge and encourage you to jump- and you could jump into the water with confidence because you knew that your daddy would catch you! He would not let you sink- the water would not hurt you. Well, as God's people we are called to have this childlike faith in our Abba- our Father. We can pass through the water knowing that He will catch us- holding our heads above water until we arrive at the other side! So as we suffer, our faith is not some blind leap into the dark! No, we have the confidence of a child who is held by their Father! Loved and cared for by our God

who is with us! So the good end that God may be working in us may be a stronger faith- a deeper trust that relies on our Abba Father. More than that- we know what our future hold! That our sins have been forgiven and that we are heirs to eternal life because of Jesus our loving Good Shepherd. As we remember the suffering of Jesus, you will recall that when Jesus suffered on the cross, He was forsaken. So consider this- the comforting presence of the Father during our suffering is the very thing that was taken away when Jesus cried out- why have you forsaken me! So the suffering of Jesus on the cross was a suffering without the comforting presence of the Father- and it is by His suffering in this way that He secures for us the continued and constant presence of the Father! In other words- Jesus suffered the forsaking of the Father while He suffered so that you would never experience the pain of being alone! Our Father will never leave us- and never forsake us! We are never alone- and this fact is impressed upon us! We must hold to this truth- yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death- I fear no evil because You are with me! He is with us- through trial, in the valley and through the storm! That is the comforting truth that we must hold to! And this walking through trials is one of the ways in which God produces a hope and perseverance within us- one that stands firm to the end.

To conclude, the pathway to the promised land is not easy. And during that pilgrimage, various storms, thorns, floods, and fires must be traversed. But the good news is that through it all, our loving Father is there! Jesus Christ reveals the comforting presence of God which remains through the suffering. So let us all be ready for the trials when they come. Not caught by surprised, but ready as one who knows that in this world we will face trials. And for those who are currently in the middle of the fire, stand upon this truth- never will your loving Father leave you! As Job said, I know that My redeemer lives, and at last, He will stand upon the earth. And one day, in my flesh, I shall see God.