

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of April 26, 2009
"Sharing Jesus' Suffering"**

[This week's message focuses on what the Bible says about the suffering and trials we all experience in this life.]

[Topics: Suffering; Trials; Jesus' Suffering; Image of God; Living a New Life]

Excerpt: Wouldn't it be nice if we never suffered or faced trials? Wouldn't that be nice if when we became believers, we would have nothing but smooth sailing? NO!! We would become greater snobs than we already are! That's the problem. We would become the great "untouchables" if we're not careful. It wouldn't be healthy for us if God took us completely out of the world.

Did God create suffering? Did God create evil? No, God didn't create evil but he did allow evil. He certainly created the potential for evil because he made free moral agents, beginning with angels. God created Lucifer and all the angels and gave them free moral agency to choose whether they were going to respond to him or not.

Lucifer chose not to and became Satan the Devil. And he invited the angels to come with him and a large number did, the Bible says. And out of this, evil developed because beings turned away from God.

And then God created Adam and Eve on the earth, and he gave them the same choice, because God doesn't want a bunch of robots. He wants people who will stand with him and walk with him, because of love and because of choice. But sadly because Lucifer turned away, he whispered in Adam's ear, and Adam said, "That sounds interesting." And he and Eve turned away as well.

They turned away to sin. And then suffering started. And God told Adam that when that happens, you will surely die. Well, they didn't die instantly. Spiritually, they were removed from God. So they became spiritually dead. Paul says we were "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Col. 2:1).

But physically it took Adam and Eve 900 years to die. But in God's eyes they had died spiritually. What was inside was decaying and corrupting. And they were walking away from God. And they were creating heartache because literally one of their first two sons kills the other.

And it goes downhill from there. And mankind has been walking in sin and as a result, we have been suffering ever since. Now the majority of the suffering is a consequence of the choices we make and how we live life as human beings. The verse that says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) has two parts to it. One is that we've sinned. And the other one is that we have fallen short of God's glory of what we could have become.

So we all have opportunity to suffer. Some of it is consequences of our actions. Some of it is life around us. Some of it is the enemy coming along and stirring things up. We can think of Job where he was sailing through life. God said that he was a righteous man. And Satan countered and said, "I'll show you what kind of man he is." And God says, "OK, but he won't sin."

And so Satan takes out after Job. And Job chooses not to sin, even though he still had some issues God was still dealing with him. Job stood strong and didn't turn against God. And we'll talk about God working in our lives as we go along.

Now let's spend some time in 1 Peter today, because Peter understood a little bit about suffering. First of all, he had been there when Jesus had suffered. But also while Peter is writing this letter, he's seen a lot of suffering in the church. He's seen persecution. He's seen the Roman Emperors attacking the church trying to wipe it out. He's seen the Jews attacking the church. He's seen people lay down their life for Jesus Christ.

In verse 7 of the first chapter, Peter wrote that we, as Christians, would have trials. And that the trials are a time of testing, just like gold is put in the fire to get rid of the impurities.

This morning in Bible study, we mentioned that the Bible says that all of us are created in God's image. But when Adam sinned that image got twisted. Now some people teach that the image was actually removed and that we were no longer in the image of God. But that's not true. In several places, the Bible says that God told people not to touch them because they are in his image.

And so the image got twisted and we no longer represent God well. When we begin to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we begin to invite him to change us now. We would then say, "Begin to change those things that aren't like you, Jesus. Would you turn that image so that I represent you?"

And our life long goal is to walk with Christ in a way that when we meet him on the other side, we will look like his image again. And his perfect image in us in this life begins to be reflected out even as we go through some difficult times. We all go through suffering with health issues, or financial problems, or family difficulties. We have to figure out what God has in mind for us.

Peter writes that trials happen, which causes our faith to become full and beautiful like perfect gold. So we come to **1 Peter 3:17**. "**It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**"

Peter is saying we're all going to suffer, but please make sure it's for the right thing. Many of us have suffered over the years, because we do stupid things. So we kind of brought those things on ourselves. We need to realize that we shouldn't have thought that. Or we shouldn't have done that. But it's a little more challenging when you do what God wants you to do and then people give you a hard time.

18) "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." Jesus suffered for our unrighteousness, for our sin. And he went to the cross for us. He died for us.

He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the Spirit. So in his body, Jesus went through terrible, terrible things. A couple years ago at Easter, Mel Gibson released the movie, "The Passion of the Christ." While it was a powerful movie, it didn't really show what happened. You could still recognize Jim Caviezel, who portrayed Christ. The Bible says you couldn't recognize Jesus any more. We just can't imagine what Jesus went through and the pain and the suffering that he endured as a perfectly righteous man who didn't deserve it at all.

It was only because of our sinfulness and our unrighteousness that he chose to do that so that he could bring righteousness to us. So when we go through our trials and tribulations, we have some hard times. But it's nothing compared to what he did for us.

Now dropping down to **verse 21**. **"And this water (the flood) symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God."**

So Peter says baptism is our entering in to what Christ did. It's our becoming a part of what he did. When we accept what Christ has done for us, then he begins to change our heart, our mind and our conscience. We then become transformed. And our image of God that was twisted begins to get straightened out. And thus we begin to truly reflect the love of God. And so baptism is an outward expression of that.

When we get baptized, we are really saying, I want my "old man" to die in baptism. And I want to rise up from the water as a new person that looks like Jesus Christ.

"It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ," So the good conscience that comes from God brings us into a relationship with him. Now we become saved through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who came up out of that tomb and gave us new life.

22) "who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him." So Jesus Christ is alive, functioning in us who brings us to salvation. And he's also gone up into heaven to take us there so we can sit with him at the right hand of the Father.

Now on May 24, we will celebrate Ascension Sunday and look at what Jesus' ascension means as he took that broken body to heaven. So in heaven there's a glorified fleshly-scarred body, but healed. As Revelation 5 says, Jesus looks like a lamb that was slain, but he's actually the Lion of the tribe of Judah. So his scars are still there because he looks like a slain lamb. So when we go through difficult times, Jesus can say, "I can understand. I've been there."

So when Jesus ascended into heaven he was given all power and authority including those angels who whispered in Adam's ear and started humanity down the path of sin. So Christ has undone what they caused.

1 Peter 4:1, "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin." So Peter is telling us that when we go through trials, here's what we need to do. First, don't have a pity-party. Instead we need to focus on Jesus and have the same attitude as he does, and to allow our mind and heart to accept what he has done for us.

So when we go through difficult times we need to know that he's there, he's with us, he's in us. So when we go into baptism we die with Jesus. Our body, in a sense, has died. So we are free from sin. But when we are suffering, one of the first questions we ask ourselves is what did I do wrong? And we start to get all guilty. We think that we must have done something wrong. But even if we have sinned, Scripture tells us that God is NOT counting our sins against us (2 Cor. 5:19).

So if we are suffering, we don't have to worry about sin and wonder if God is judging us. Yes, God has judged us – he's declared us righteous through Jesus a long time ago. Now are there things we can learn? Obviously. So when we are in a trial we should ask God to show us what we could learn so we don't get ourselves in this position again.

But you know, sometimes it has nothing to do with us. Remember Jesus talked about the tower that fell on the people and the disciples asked who sinned. But Jesus said it wasn't about sin, it was about life with trials happening. Sometimes we have natural trials like earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, etc. Scripture tells us that the earth "moans and groans." Jesus will take care of us in all our trials even ones that the demons may try to stir up. We just need to offer our lives to Christ. He has all power and authority.

Flying back home last Thursday, Pastor Glen was sitting next to a young lady who was reading "Angels and Demons" a new book by Dan Brown [who wrote the DaVinci Code]. He asked her what she thought of the book. She wasn't all that impressed. She was reading it because he boyfriend asked her to.

So later Pastor Glen asked her if she was spiritual and she said not really, but that her boyfriend was and that he was checking out Christianity and Islam. Later he gave her his business card and asked her to give it to her boyfriend. And she agreed.

Yes, there are demons out there, but they can only conspire so far against us because Jesus is ultimately in charge. People get so fearful and say that every bad that happens to them is caused by a demon. But if we submit to Jesus, he will take care of us no matter what the problem is. So we don't have to be paranoid over anything.

2) "As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God." So when we "die" in baptism, we choose to give away the old life and exchange it with the new life in Christ.

In the church conference Pastor Glen just attended, a pastor from a church in Denver called Adullum talked about how he tells new converts that if they want to be a part of the church they will have to "die to the self. It's not about you, it's about Jesus." Now in theory we all have to die to self to come to any church.

This is what Peter is telling us. Once we die to our self, we don't live the rest of our life through evil humanity. We begin to put evil desires away. We begin to walk with Christ and allow him to lead us.

3) "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." Peter is telling us we've spent enough time there doing those horrible things. We've done enough of that. We should turn away from them. So we, as Christians, need to allow Christ

to live in us and guide our actions. We do certain things that others may do but in measure. For example we may take an occasional drink, but we aren't drunkards. So there are ways in this world without going to excess of riot that brings suffering on ourselves and others.

4) "They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you." People feel guilty when you don't do the type of activities that they do. And most who feel guilty react with hostility. Isn't it amazing! You can go out as a Christian and do the right things and people get mad at you. Your family will get mad at you. They will tell you that you don't act like you use to. They're not happy that you got better. That's because you make them look bad.

Now our congregational theme this year is "Sharing the love and life of God." We should be sharing that from God to us and from us to others. Part of the life part is dying with Christ and suffering with Christ. Paul wrote about how we experience the suffering of Christ (Phil. 3:10).

Since we are the body of Christ, he continues to suffer in the world through us. And we experience his suffering because we are his body. And so part of "sharing the love and life of God" is also sharing in his suffering. It means that we share our sufferings with him as we go through our trials. And as others experience their suffering, we gather around them and share in their suffering with them, because one of the ways Jesus is among them is when we are among them. We want to be as a church that comes around others and be with them when they are struggling to help them and encourage them.

5) "But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." Peter is speaking about those who attack you and heap abuse upon you.

6) "For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit."

So all of us have to face certain things in the body. There's a certain judgment we go through in the body as far as the struggling and the suffering and the scars that every one of us will end up with when we meet Jesus. He'll have scars and we'll have scars. We all will have a spiritual limp in this life, so to speak.

But also at the same time, we live according to God because the Spirit of God, living in us, is changing us into the new creation that correctly reflects the image of God even when we go through trials. So when we're going through difficulties, picture Jesus there with you, because he is. And if you need more of Jesus there, ask us in the body to come help you, because we're Jesus – he's living in us.

Don't be afraid to ask someone to visit you or to pray with you over the phone. So don't be too prideful to ask for help if you need it. That's what a body is about. If you ever stub your toe in the middle of the night, you know the rest of your body dances. You don't have to tell it to, it just does. Because that toe cries out, "Help!" And the rest of the body responds, doesn't it?

We should be the same way. And it should be the same with people on the outside. We share the life of God with them. We share in their suffering. We go there to be with them.

We go and encourage them in whatever way we can, because we all have our tough times. Jesus understands what tough times are. And he wants to be there for us. He wants to help us through that. As we die to self, Christ can shine in us. And that image will look more and more like him. And as it does, we can impact more and more people. Jesus didn't promise us a rosy life with no trials and trauma.

Rather he promised us we would have our difficulties; we would have our challenges. The creation moans and groans for the revelation of the sons of God. Life is tough out there. And yet the good news is as stated in 2 Corinthians 5, "But also everything has been reconciled to Christ." All of this hasn't been revealed yet. And so we are waiting for that time, when all the sons of God will be revealed and the whole creation will be fixed.

In the meantime, we suffer. In the meantime we struggle. But Christ is with us and he helps us through it all, because he understands, because his scars are as real as ours. Be encouraged that he's with us in our sufferings.

Key Scripture: 1 Peter 4:1-6.

General Group Question: Did God create evil or human suffering? If he didn't then why is there both evil and suffering in the world?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. Was Peter acquainted with Christians who had been suffering? What were some of the reasons for their suffering in the first century?
2. Do all Christians suffer and go through trials? Briefly explain why or why not.
3. Genesis tells us that humanity was created in God's image. After the "fall" was God's image removed or twisted? How can God's image be correctly restored in our lives?
4. What is the significance of our baptism in Christ?
5. How has Jesus' resurrection and ascension impacted us in our Christian walk?
6. When we are suffering in a trial, is it wrong to feel guilty and blame ourselves for doing something bad? Why or why not?
7. Does God count our sins against us once we've accepted Jesus as our Savior? Briefly explain your answer.
8. Why can Jesus empathize with us and so strongly identify with us in our suffering?
9. What is our responsibility, as Christians, when we see someone, in or out of the church, suffering through a trial?