

Surviving Suffering

Introduction

This is our 2nd in a series of three meetings on the subject of “suffering.” Last time we looked at the cause of “suffering” and “evil” in the world.

We then heard, Susan Murray speak about the “suffering” she is experiencing in her five-year battle with cancer. She spoke knowing that her time left is very short—perhaps weeks. Her face was bloated beyond recognition, a hat covered her lack of hair, and she wore a patch over her eye. The hard times have been “*more than she can even remember*”.

The thing that struck me most was when she said that she had *recently* told her husband: “*I think I am happier now than I have ever been.*” It wasn’t words—it was real. Her “peace” and “comfort” from God was evident in her presence. That peace is a gift from God that is available in difficult circumstances. We do not earn it—he longs to give it to us.

There are so many kinds, or ways we suffer:—health, relationships, rejection, death of a child, a loved one, financial loss, a job problem or loss. But, God has not left us to suffer alone. *He offers his comfort to those who call upon him and turn to him in times of difficult circumstances.*

David (His Low Point in Suffering)

This was true for one of the *most well known persons* in the Bible--David. He was called: “a man after God’s own heart.” As a youth, he was anointed by God to be the next King of Israel. His encounter with Goliath is legendary. He killed Goliath with his slingshot.

King Saul was so impressed with him, he brought him into his service; but then David became so successful, the women sang:

*"Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands."*

When Saul heard this, he became *jealous* of David. (Prior to David's anointing, Saul had disobeyed God's will and had been told by the prophet Samuel that his *kingdom would not endure*; that God would appoint a man after his own heart—who *would* do his will.) Saul saw that the Lord was with David and he knew David would one day receive the kingdom, instead of his descendants. Saul tried ways to get rid of him. He tried to get rid of him in battle; he tried to get his son Jonathan to kill him, as well as others—finally one day when David was playing the harp for Saul, Saul picked up his spear and threw it at David, but David escaped. David became convinced Saul would kill him.

What did David do? [Read I Samuel 21:10-15]

I believe this was the *lowest* point in David's life. There were other times later that were painful and times he did wrong, but I would call this, *the lowest point*. David, the man after 'God's own heart, God's anointed pretended to be crazy because he was now afraid of the Philistines. *What happened to the courage that killed Goliath?! The confidence he needed to become King of Israel??*

How can this be? Why do you think David dropped so low? [I have some thoughts, but I wonder what you think. What comes to your mind?]

(I think, as a young person, he trusted God with a heart committed to God—but he had yet had to walk through hurtful and painful experiences—and still trust God.)

God had yet to teach David an even *deeper relationship* with him. God uses the circumstances in our lives to be the catalyst to teach us his comfort. Just as he did in David's life!

David writes about this in Psalm 34.

David wrote this Psalm after he had experienced this situation. We know this by what appears to be a superscription just below the words "Psalm 34". Actually, these words are the first verse in the Hebrew text and therefore are a part of the Psalm. In addition, David wrote this Psalm in such a way that each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet--in alphabetical order. There are 22 letters and there are 22 verses, from "alef" to "tav." It's like, from "a to z" God calls us to be dedicated to him. It's easy then to memorize the Psalm.)

Notice what he says in this Psalm:

34:4 "I sought the Lord, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears."

34:6 "This poor man called, and the Lord heard him;
he saved him out of all his troubles."

David moved toward God.

*{Saul, on the other hand, moved farther and farther from the Lord.
--he became jealous, angry suspicious, bitter, and depressed--
He wanted his will, and would not submit to God's.}*

What had God done for David?

David knew that God had worked through his circumstances by causing the Philistines to become so disgusted with him that they drove David away.

But had David done anything?

Ps. 34:4--he sought the Lord--probably in the midst of his "insanity." And the Lord heard him!

Results of this experience:

Psalm 34 is a Thanksgiving Psalm. It begins with David's thankfulness to God. vss. 1-3: {Note the parallelism.}

"I will *extol* the LORD at all times;
his *praise* will always be on my lips
My soul will *boast* in the LORD;
let the *afflicted* hear and *rejoice*.
Glorify the LORD with me;
let us *exalt* his name together."

David had reason to thank God. So he says: I will *extol* the Lord at all times; his *praise* will always be on my lips.

1. *(In David's life)* David learned to *live this way*—trusting God in his circumstances. David's circumstances continued. He knew God had chosen him to be King, yet Saul was still disobedient; he was still on the throne and he continued to pursue David, even after this event. But David had a new level of trust. God does this when we turn to him—he gives us the *comfort* we need for the situation we are experiencing. Not because we earn it, but because he is gracious to the "brokenhearted." (vs. 18) And I believe, this teaches us a depth for the many times and ways we will suffer in the future. The more we trust in these times, the deeper we know him.

This was true for David. David lost children, he had friends and family betray him; he failed morally, but, he did not lose sight of God's will for his life and his trust in God's comfort.

2. *(In the life of others)* *Who is he referring to--*"Let the afflicted hear and rejoice;" "let us exalt his name together.?"

[Read I Samuel 22:1-2]

David was now better able to lead. He too had been in difficult circumstances. He knew God more intimately and now he is ready to lead his men. He is ready to teach them what he has experienced and knows on a deeper level. These men went on to be "David's Mighty Men" who accomplished infamous feats.

David begins to teach his men: Verse 11 is the focal point of the Psalm—the mid-point of the Psalm—this is typical of Hebrew poetry.

34:11 “Come, my children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord*.”

He then teaches them what he has learned—about what is “good.”

34:8- “**Taste** and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the man who takes refuge in him

34:9 **Fear** the Lord, you his saints,
for those who fear him lack nothing

34:10 The lions may grow weak and hungry,
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.”

(There were lions in Israel at that time. No doubt they were roaming around the area of the caves. They can be stronger than the lions, because God cares for them.)

34:11 **Come**, my children, listen to me:
I will teach you the fear of the Lord*.

34:12 Whoever of you loves life
and desires to see many good days,

34:13 keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking lies.

34:14 **Turn** from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

He teaches them the Lord is good

Those who “fear” him* (see footnote)—lack no good thing.

How to have good days—“keep tongue from evil; lips from speaking lies; turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it”—do good.

David continues teaching. He writes for “the righteous”—those who honor God and live their lives according to his will*.

34:15 “The eyes of the Lord are on the *righteous**
and his ears are attentive to their cry;”

34:17 “The *righteous* cry out, and the Lord hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.”

34:19 “A *righteous* man may have many troubles,
but the Lord delivers him from them all;”

3. *(In our lives.)* God wants us to learn about him in our circumstances. He offers his comfort to us. We can learn about this in our head—and even in our hearts. But, like David, it is in our experience we really learn his comfort.

As David says in vs. 18—“the Lord is close to the “brokenhearted”—the “crushed in spirit.” I know there are many of you who have experienced this comfort—and I hope you will share your experience.

I’ll go first.

About 20 years ago that comfort and peace became real to me. It was in the hospital the night before my 1st mastectomy. I’m partial to the Word—that night I was reading II Corinthians 1:3-4:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

It was then, I knew that peace—it passes understanding. It carried me through the following year of chemotherapy. Like David, I had a confidence in God’s comfort. And I knew it was available to any in need of His comfort—to the “brokenhearted,” and the “crushed in spirit.”

It is not a state we live in. It is a gift, given in and for the time of need. We won’t experience the grace another person has at a specific time—because God gives as we have need.

What has been your experience in times of suffering? Discussion.

[Our suffering is not just in the physical realm. David’s was in the role God wanted for him. There is also grief, rejection, financial loss, job loss etc.]

One last point: To walk in this way is winsome—it draws us as we observe it in another. It is what was apparent in Susan when she was here. It is what David is talking about in vs. 5:

“Those who look to him are **radiant**; their faces are **never covered with shame**.

Radiant = Nahar (in Hebrew)

Its use in other passages helps in defining its meaning:

Isa. 60:5 = You will look and be radiant,
Your heart will throb and swell

Jer. 31:12 = they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord

When we turn to God in our suffering and trust his adequacy and his will—we will be radiant—even in suffering. We saw it in Susan. David was able to continue his “exile” with confidence as he motivated his men to do the same.

My challenge for you, for me, for all of us is to let our circumstances be an opportunity to deepen our relationships with God by receiving His comfort.