



SEVENTY-FIVE KEY TEXTS A Biblical Theology of Evil and Suffering

Prophets

19. Isaiah 53: Salvation Through a Suffering Servant

Now, we will go to the Prophets. Some of these we'll hit on a little more in depth than others. Remember that these prophets were speaking to God's people in times where either they were suffering, or they were about to experience suffering as a result of their sin. So, we have seen Job, and how some suffering is not a result of sin, specifically, in somebody's life, but this is suffering as a result of sin. Part of my hope tonight is that you would see...that we would see together, that when we follow our ways instead of God's ways, when we win, we may think for a time that it will be good for us, but in the end, it will always lead to suffering. It's not wise to disobey God.

So, I want you to see in the prophets the severity of sin and suffering, and at the same time, I want you to see the wonder of grace from God, beginning with a perfect place to start: Isaiah 53: salvation through a suffering servant; one of the mountain peaks of the Old Testament.

The Setup in Isaiah...

So, get the setup in Isaiah. I put Isaiah's call here in Isaiah 6:1-8 that God is majestic. I want to show you a portrait of God. He is majestic. The terrifying holiness of God. There is no one is like Him. He is without error, and without equal, and see the total sovereignty of God. Terrifying holiness, total sovereignty. He is Creator of the world, Ruler of history, King of all nations, Judge of all peoples.

God is majestic, Isaiah shows us, and man is depraved, sinful to the core. From the very beginning of Isaiah 1, we see a portrait of painstaking sin among God's people. They are trusting in foreign kings; they trusted in false gods, and they are trusting in their things, Isaiah 2:6-8. They trusted in their leaders, and they trusted in themselves. God said, "Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?" (Isaiah 2:22). So, painstaking sin that leads to breathtaking grace in God. "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins," (Isaiah 43:25). God says that their sins will be removed, and their sins will never be remembered by Him.

God is majestic, man is sinful, but redemption is sure. That's the whole point of the book of Isaiah. God sends His prophet to deliver His promise that He will preserve His people, and in the end, God will restore all peoples.

Isaiah says, "Look for a spectacular sign." He prophesies in Isaiah 7, "a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Look for a spectacular sign, look for a promised son, Isaiah 9:6-7, "a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God..."

The Servant in Isaiah...

All of this leading up to Isaiah 53, where God says, "Look for a Suffering Servant." Starting in Isaiah 42, we begin to see a servant of the Father who will come. It's a reference to Jesus, and when you get to the end of Isaiah 52, beginning in Isaiah 53, you see a stunning portrait of Jesus as the Suffering Servant. Isaiah says He will repulse, but He will redeem.

Isaiah describes the coming Messiah, Jesus, saying, He is a human servant with an appalling nature, a divine sovereign who will astound the nations. He says the Lord will reveal Him, but we will reject Him, Isaiah 53:1-3. We see His humiliation, and we see our condemnation in those first three verses. Then, Isaiah says that Christ, the Lamb of God, will be slaughtered so that we can be saved. We read these verses earlier in the evening. Isaiah says that the servant will endure the penalty of sin and take the place of sinners on a cross. The essence of sin: Man substitutes himself for God; that's what sin is all about. The essence of salvation: God, in His mercy, substitutes Himself for man.

Isaiah says He will suffer in sinless silence, verses 7-9, and all will be satisfied in His substitution. Think about that on different levels, all satisfied. Who's satisfied? The Father will be satisfied through the Suffering Servant. God on high will display the full extent of His justice, judging and condemning and crushing sin. At the same time, He will demonstrate the full expression of His love by enduring and experiencing His own judgment against sin, and God will satisfy Himself and save sinners at the same time.

This is where we remember that the cross is a demonstration, first and foremost, of the character of God. The cross is a demonstration of His holiness and His wrath and His love and His justice and His righteousness all on display. Before the cross is for anyone else's sake, the cross is for God's sake.

The Father will be satisfied; the Son will be satisfied. At the cross, Jesus will rescue the children of God in His death. He will show the power of God in His resurrection. He will accomplish the will of God in His exaltation, and the Suffering Servant will become the sovereign Savior. This is great. All of this was prophesied 600 or 700 years before Jesus even came.

The Father will be satisfied, the Son will be satisfied, and sinners will be satisfied. Through trust in the servant, we will be vindicated before God the Father. In our sin, we will be forgiven of our sin, and we will be victors with God the Son. Peter says, referring to Isaiah 53, *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls,"* (1 Peter 2:22-25).

So, how does God provide salvation? Through a Suffering Servant. That's huge. Hold onto that: God provides salvation for sinners through the suffering of His Son.

20. Jeremiah 31: Weep No More

A Weeping Prophet...

After Isaiah in your Bible, you come to Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, and God says, "Weep no more." I put here four passages that show Jeremiah's suffering and his brokenness over sin in the people of God. I put a brief outline of how the prophecy of Jeremiah is an interplay between God's work in Jeremiah, God's work in Israel, and God's work in other nations. Central in those national messages for Judah...now, Jeremiah

prophesied in the Southern kingdom. In the middle of that is Jeremiah 31. The setting is the people of God were about to be overtaken by the Babylonians; Jerusalem is about to fall, they were about to be taken into exile.

A New Covenant...

It's a low point...suffering as a result of sin...and in the midst of that, God promises a new covenant. You see, the problem in the old covenant, as we've seen, is that the people of God were idolatrous, and they were immoral, turning from God to other gods, and immorality flowing from that, but the worst part was the people of God were incapable of anything different. They couldn't change their ways to accord with the Word of God.

So, God gives them a promise of a new covenant. It's glorious in Jeremiah 31-34. Jeremiah says we will receive a new covenant and see the differences here. The law of God in the old covenant was written on stone tablets. In the new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-34, it's written on human hearts. God's Word will transform His people from the inside out. Our worst enemy is fleshly religion, thinking that if you go to church and do this or that, you'll be right before God. That is not what we need. Our greatest need is spiritual regeneration. There is a difference there. Huge difference. Obedience to the law is not a condition for entering the new covenant, i.e., "Do these things, and you can be in covenant with God." Instead, obedience to the law is a promise that we experience in the new covenant. Trust in God, and He will give you the power to obey. This is what Jonathan Edwards said in that great quote right there.

Which leads to the knowledge of God in the old covenant: We relate to God through flawed men in the old covenant. Limited admission to the presence of God. Priests who were offering sacrifices. Only a few people at certain times could enter into the presence of God. For most people, it was a distant encounter of the glory of God, but in the new covenant, we are reconciled to God through a flawless man, and Jesus, our priest, has made the way for us to have unlimited access to the presence of God, and a direct experience of the glory of God, 2 Corinthians 3.

That was the promise, and Jeremiah said we will comprise a new community, and we will anticipate a new city. A new city. Now, in Jeremiah's day, for them the message was clear: In light of the words of Jeremiah, look forward to, one day, Jerusalem will be restored, but the message for us, in our day, is even greater! For us, in light of the words of Jesus, we long for the re-creation of a new Jerusalem and a new heaven and a new earth where God will dwell with us, and we will dwell with Him. We will weep no more for God will make all things right. That's the book of Jeremiah, and it leads into Jeremiah's laments in the middle of all this.

21. Lamentations: Steadfast the Mercies of God in the Sufferings of Men

The Crisis in Lamentations...

Lamentations, a very important book for feeling the weight of suffering and looking to the mercy of God in the middle of it. The steadfast mercies of God in the sufferings of men. The crisis in Lamentations came about as the Babylonians overran the city of Jerusalem, defiling the temple and ravaging the people. Lamentations is a blow-by-blow record of that destruction.

The sin that had brought about their suffering was tragic, but it was just. The city is about to be destroyed, but the Lord is in the right, Lamentations 1:18, in doing that. Their

suffering was God-given. "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come," (Lamentations 3:37-38). and it was severe.

"The tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives to them. Those who once feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple embrace ash heaps. For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, and no hands were wrung for her," (Lamentations 4:4-6).

All of this suffering brought about questions that were profoundly intense: "Are we forsaken by God?" "Why do you forsake us forever, why do you forsake us for so many days?", Lamentations 5:20-22. Their questions were eternally significant: "Can we be forgiven?"

The Comfort in Lamentations...

That question leads to the comfort in Lamentations. Key text: Lamentations 3:19-24,

Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

The writer found comfort in the fresh mercies of God. They are new every morning. Rooted in the unfailing love of God. "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end..." (Lamentations 3:19-24). And the unceasing faithfulness of God. Great is your faithfulness, and this comfort gave rise to a settled hope in the provision of God. The conclusion: "The LORD is my portion...therefore, I will hope in him." A deep confidence in the character of God. "The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD...For the Lord will not cast off forever but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men," (Lamentations 3:25-33). God does not delight in disciplining us, but He delights in turning us from our sin to Himself and His satisfaction. This leads, then, to an urgent desire to repent before God. "Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!" (Lamentations 3:39-40).

The Christ of Lamentations...

All of these themes ultimately point us upward to the Christ of Lamentations. If the Old Testament saints could say in the midst of suffering, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases...His mercies are new every morning...great is His faithfulness." If they could say that in the midst of their suffering, how much more you and I, knowing that Christ has endured the penalty of sin in the place of His people. He has died for us, Romans 5:8, and Christ has ensured the mercies of God for the sake of His people forever.

The Challenge from Lamentations...

So, the challenge from Lamentations is this: Trust in the character of God, confess the depth of your sins, and bank on the mercies of Christ. Rely on His mercy! In the words of Richard Sibbes: "None are fitter for comfort than those that think themselves furthest off." The steadfast mercies of God in the sufferings of men.

22. Ezekiel: God-Centered Suffering (Part 1)

Three Observations...

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel: A picture of God-centered suffering. Three brief observations: one, God judges all peoples for His glory. "And I will execute judgments on Moab. Then they will know that I am the LORD," (Ezekiel 25:11). "I will execute great vengeance on [Philistia] with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the LORD..." (Ezekiel 25:17). "Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt. Then they will know that I am the LORD," (Ezekiel 30:10).

God judges all peoples for His glory. God disciplines His people for His glory.

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes," (Ezekiel 36:16-23).

God will judge the people of Israel for His glory. The people of God had exchanged the splendor of the true God for the senselessness of false gods, and as a result they had exchanged the protecting presence of God for the punishing presence of God, and they were experiencing His discipline for the sake of God's name among the nations.

God judges all peoples for His glory and His people for His glory. Thankfully, that is not all. God also saves His people for His glory. In Ezekiel, He promises them that He will anoint a new king. Prophecies of the coming Christ, the servant of God and the shepherd of men, and He will inaugurate a new covenant. Much like Jeremiah talked about, different from the old covenant. The old covenant: marked by glorious perpetual promises. The new covenant will be marked by permanent peace with God.

God will form a new people. A people who are forgiven of their sin and filled with His Spirit. "I will put my Spirit within you..." Ezekiel 36:25-27. He will bring them to a new place. Again, for them, they looked forward to the city of Jerusalem. In that city, they would rebuild the temple. Remember, that is what the book of Ezra talks about. The promise for us: We look backward to the cross of Jesus where God made a way for you and I to know Him. When Jesus died, what happened? The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, so we are not building temples anymore because, in Christ, we have become the temple. You and I are the dwelling place of God. Why has He made us His dwelling place? For His glory. God saves His people from their sin and their suffering for the glory of His name. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "Glorify God as the temple of the Holy Spirit."

One Conclusion...

One conclusion from the book of Ezekiel, then: We need a radically God-centered perspective of our suffering. As long as we view suffering merely as what it means for us, we will miss the point. We must view suffering through the lens, not of what seems most right to us, but through the lens of what is most glorifying to God. 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do [how you suffer], do all to the glory of God."

23. Daniel: God-Centered Suffering (Part 2)

In the midst of suffering, look up...

Daniel is God-centered suffering (Part 2). As he's in exile, the book of Daniel calls us, in the midst of suffering, two things: look up and see the sovereignty of God in the midst of suffering; it's all over Daniel.

These different descriptions of God, titles of God, attributes of God. He is the God of heaven. He is the God of gods. He is the Lord of kings. He's the Lord of kings. He is the revealer of mysteries. He is the Most High God, Daniel 4:2. "He is the King of heaven," says Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king. He is saying, "God is the King of heaven." He is the God of Daniel. He is the living God. He is the Ancient of Days.

See the sovereignty of God in suffering, and seek the face of God in suffering. So, Daniel prays consistently. He prays with courage, even when he's thrown into a lion's den. He prays contritely, humbly, yet he prays with confidence. Daniel 10:12-21: that's a great picture of spiritual warfare in prayer. This text reminds us that we are in a battle. There is a battle raging in the heavenlies, and when we fall on our knees in prayer, we are participating in a war, and God will win the war. So, seek the face of God in suffering, and trust the promises of God in suffering. In the midst of suffering, look up and see His sovereignty, seek His face; look up and trust His promises.

In the midst of suffering, look forward...

Then, look forward, knowing that one day, God will redeem His people, Daniel 9:24-27. God will resurrect His people, Daniel 12, and God will reign over all peoples. Listen to Daniel 7:13-14,

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

This is a promise of a coming king who is human, and He is divine. Son of Man with all authority. Before He went to the cross, Jesus told the high priest who was sitting as His judge, "One day you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven," (Mark 14:61-62). a direct reference to Daniel 7. The coming king with a coming kingdom that is universal: For all nations. Which is why Jesus, when He rises from the dead, says to His disciples, "All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me..." He is the Son of Man prophesied from Daniel 7:13-14, and the picture is advance a kingdom that is universal, for all nations, and eternal: For all time. Everlasting dominion...a kingdom that shall never be destroyed. The book of Daniel says, in the midst of suffering, look up and look forward. God-centered suffering.

24. Hosea: Unfaithful People and an Unreasonable God

After Daniel, we have the story of Hosea: The story of unfaithful people and an unreasonable God. God tells Hosea to marry a wife named Gomer. Now, there are two problems there: Number One, her name is Gomer. "David, marry Heather." "Okay." "David,

marry Gomer." "Isn't she on the Andy Griffith show? What's that about?" So, that's the first problem. Second problem: Gomer was a prostitute, and God called Hosea to marry her in order to depict the covenant/marriage relationship He had with His people that had turned into adultery.

Hosea is a story of an unfaithful people.

So, Hosea is a story of an unfaithful people. We find the people of God depicted as a wife who was adulterous, idolatrous, hypocritical, and forgetful. She forgot her husband. The people had forgotten God.

Hosea is a story of an unreasonable God.

Hosea is a story of an unfaithful people and a story of an unreasonable God. When you get to Hosea 2:14, the first word you see is, "*Therefore,*" and as soon as you see it, in light of all of the above, you expect wrath to be coming. You expect judgment to be coming. You cheat on God, you worship other gods, you forget God, and you pretend to worship God while your heart is far from Him, you deserve condemnation, but what does God say? "*Therefore...*" in light of all of your sin, "*I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.*"

That is unreasonable; that is unfathomable. God says about His sinful people...His adulterous wife, "I will allure her, and lead her and speak tenderly to her and give to her, restore her, protect her, betroth her, respond to her, establish her, and ultimately, I will pay the price for her." Hosea goes to the auction block where Gomer is being sold to other men, and he pays the price to bring her back.

So, lift your eyes from this story in the Old Testament to see the God who looks upon your sin and my sin, on your unfaithfulness to Him, and He sends His Son to allure us. All of this story pointing to the day when on the cross, Jesus would be condemned like the harlot's children. Like Jezreel, He became the place of bloodshed. Like No Mercy, He was given no relief, and like Not My People, He was cut off from the Father. On the cross...here is another way to understand Good Friday. On the cross, Jesus was regarded as the unfaithful wife in our place. Donald Grey Barnhouse said,

"When we see this love at work through the heart of Hosea we may wonder if God is really like that. But everything in the Word and in experience shows us that He is. He will give man the trees of the forest and the iron in the ground. Then He will give to man the brains to make an axe from the iron to cut down a tree and fashion it into a cross. He will give man the ability to make a hammer and nails, and when man has the cross and the hammer and the nails, the Lord will allow man to take hold of Him and bring Him to that cross, and in so doing will take the sins of man upon Himself and make it possible for those who have despised and rejected Him to come unto Him and know the joy of sins removed and forgiven, to know the assurance of pardon and eternal life, and to enter in the prospect of the hope of glory with Him forever. This is even our God, and there is none like unto Him."

Hosea: the story of unfaithful people who deserve eternal suffering and yet experience unreasonable love from a merciful God. Hosea.

25. Joel

Joel...I'm going to fly through these next ones just to give you an overview of how these prophets speak to suffering. Joel prophesies that the day of the Lord will be a day of destruction for the resistant. For those who resist God, the "day of the Lord" in Joel refers to judgment upon God's people and judgment upon all peoples. "Suffering is coming for sin," God says. The day of the Lord will be a day of destruction for the resistant, but it will be a day of salvation for the repentant. Repent; turn. When we repent, God relents. When we repent, God relents and forgives. Joel.

26. Amos

Amos. Amidst great social injustice, God demands justice from His people. So much suffering in the world, then and today, is due to injustice in man, and God demands justice from His people, and amidst great social injustice, God brings justice to all peoples. The book of Amos makes clear that sin will ultimately never be excused. Our sin against God is grave. Sin will ultimately never be excused, and judgment will inevitably never be escaped. What that means is our need for Christ is great.

27. Obadiah

Obadiah. Overall structure: the coming doom of Edom (verses 1-16), first part of the chapter/book. The coming restoration of Israel (verses 17-21). The overall point: God will ultimately assert His victory over all earthly powers. Mark it down: He will ultimately assert His victory over all earthly powers.

28. Jonah

Jonah. See that God possesses sovereign control over nature. Storms and fish and worms. You see God's sovereignty over vomit; God's in control of it all. He possesses sovereign control over nature, over nations...Israel and Nineveh and all nations, and in God's sovereign control, we see that God's people cannot outrun God's pursuit. Praise God, His people cannot outrun His pursuit.

He possesses sovereign control; God expresses merciful compassion toward sinful pagans and toward selfish prophets. Praise be to God that His capacity to forgive is greater than our capacity to sin. He delivers us from certain destruction when we turn and trust in Him for mercy.

29. Micah

Micah. In Israel, we see the ravages of our sin. We see how sin is disorienting. You know how you hear stories of people wandering off in sin, and you wonder, "What are they thinking?" But that's the way sin works. When we sin, we begin to approve the bad and

condemn the good. Sin is disorienting; sin is deceiving. We give ourselves to sin, and we think we're not going to come to account. We act as if God will never judge.

Meanwhile, sin is destructive, and as we sin, we are asking disaster into our lives. Sin is destructive. We need a Savior, Micah shows us, and in Christ, we see the reign of our Shepherd. In Christ, we see His reign. Micah prophesies of a coming shepherd who will rescue His sheep and forgive His sheep and purify His sheep, and ultimately, in Christ, He will protect His sheep. *"And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace,"* (Micah 5:2-5). He protects His sheep.

30. Nahum

Nahum. The portrait of God as our warrior, who is jealous for His glory and our affection, who is just and good, and He is sovereign. Nahum depicts the nation of Nineveh, a nation whose power was unrivaled in that day, but Nahum says God's power is unparalleled in any age, and He will do whatever He wants with Nineveh. God is sovereign. God is judge, and His judgment is terrifying for the enemies of God. Listen to these words, *"Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard."* His judgment is terrifying for the enemies of God, and His judgment is liberating for the people of God. *"Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off,"* (Nahum 1:15). His judgment is liberating.

The book of Nahum is a clear reminder that we are at war. There is a spiritual battle raging in the heavenly places, Ephesians 6:12. All creation lies in the power of the Evil One, 1 John 5:19, and all of God's children overcome the power of the Evil One, 1 John 4:4. How? Jesus triumphed over all enemies through His suffering. *"And you, who were dead in your trespasses...God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him,"* (Colossians 2:13-15). Jesus extends His kingdom even now through His church, and ultimately, Jesus will reign on the earth upon His return.

Nahum assures us that battles with sin and suffering in this world, through Christ, will ultimately lead to victory. See the hope that these prophets are holding out in the midst of suffering.

31. Habakkuk: Questioning God

The Hard Reality of Habakkuk...

Now, that leads us to Habakkuk, a particularly important book for understanding the questions we ask in the middle of suffering...questioning God. Habakkuk is a unique prophet because in all the other prophetic books, you have God speaking to His people through the prophet, but in Habakkuk, you have the prophet speaking to God on behalf of His people. The whole book is a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. Habakkuk is watching as the

people of God are suffering as a result of their sin, and the Chaldeans, otherwise known as the Babylonians, are about to destroy the Southern kingdom of Judah, and Habakkuk is wondering where God is and why God is letting this happen. From the very first verse to the very last verse, we see the hard reality of Habakkuk: God uses painful experiences to accomplish His sovereign purposes. God uses painful experiences to accomplish His sovereign purposes.

Now, let's unpack that. See the struggle of faith here and Habakkuk's bold, honest questions before God. He comes before God with the deep questions of life, and that is good. He comes to God with deep, honest questions, and as a result, he comes out on the other side with deep, honest praise. "O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?" (Habakkuk 1:1-2).

Habakkuk is asking some of the same questions that we ask in suffering? Does God hear me? Have you ever cried out to God, and it seems like you hear nothing but silence from heaven? Does God hear? Does God care? Habakkuk is living in the middle of evil and injustice and suffering, yet God seems to be doing nothing about it. "Do you not see all that's happening? I know you see it, so do you not care?" Is God good? That is one of the main questions of the book, and one of the deepest questions in all of life: "How can God be good and there be so much evil in the world?"

Is God holy? "Why do you idly look at wrong?" (Habakkuk 1:3). "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil...you cannot look at wrong," (Habakkuk 1:13). Habakkuk is questioning the holy nature of God. "How is it possible for Him to be holy and look upon evil?" Where is God's power? "Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise," (Habakkuk 1:3). "Where are you, God?" Where is God's Word? Habakkuk 1:4, "Your law is paralyzed..." It seems like it is not doing any good; what good is it? "Justice never goes forth; justice is perverted all around," (Habakkuk 1:4). Will God show that He is just? And the core question in all of this: Is God worthy of my trust? These are real questions, aren't they? Familiar questions to us.

Now, what happens in response is God says, "I will indeed show my justice and my holiness and my power, and the way I am going to do it, is I am going to bring judgment on my people through the Chaldeans/Babylonians." If you put yourself in Habakkuk's shoes, that was not the answer you were looking for. That only creates new problems. "You're going to take the most unjust people on the earth, and you are going to use them to punish your people?" Have you ever asked God questions in the middle of your suffering, and the response He seems to give only leaves you with more questions in the end? This is the struggle of faith.

So, God responds to Habakkuk, and in God's response, I want to show you the life of faith. The central message of the book of Habakkuk is right here in Habakkuk 2:2-4,

"And the LORD answered me: 'Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.'"

So, how do you live by faith? You listen to the truth of God. "Write this vision down," God says. "Make it plain. The Word is the rock upon which my people are to stand." When God speaks, listen. Even if it's not what you might be looking to hear, God's Word is always

good. It is eternal. You will never go wrong in the midst of trial listening to the truth of God. So, start there; listen to the truth of God.

Second, lean on the timing of God. *"The vision awaits its appointed time...If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay."* Habakkuk wanted to see the justice of God now, and God said to him, "Wait. In due time, you will see my justice." Short-term circumstances always provide poor measurements of the long-term character of God. The life of faith says, "I don't see it now." It honestly says, "I don't see it now, but I trust in the long-term. In His timing, God will show Himself as the one who hears me, cares for me, as the one who is good and holy and powerful and faithful and just and worthy of all my trust."

Lean on the timing of God, and live with your trust in God. The ultimate question here is: are you going to live with your trust in yourself or are you going to live with trust in God? Think about it, first, as this relates to your salvation. Live with your trust in God for your salvation. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in making his case in Romans when he says, "We are saved by faith..." Oh, this is so rich right here. This is God saying, "Just as you trust in me for salvation, trust in me amidst your suffering." So, at the moment of your salvation, what did you do? You thrust yourself upon the faithfulness and righteousness and provision of God; that is how you are saved...faith. Which is the same thing in your suffering. Thrust yourself upon God and say, "I can't do it. I need you to do it. I need you to be my strength and my sustenance and my satisfaction." And He will.

Live by faith; just as you were saved by faith, suffer by faith, and as you do look forward to the triumph of God. Starting in verse 5 all the way to the end of Habakkuk 2, God describes how His justice will reign, and Habakkuk realizes that there is coming a day when God will show His glory. *"The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea,"* (Habakkuk 2:11-14).

Oh, this is huge. Particularly, if you are suffering at this moment, if you are walking through a difficult time right now, see this and know this. There is coming a day when evil and injustice and pain and suffering will be no more, and the glory and the goodness of the Lord will cover the whole earth. Mark it down, people of God: the day is coming when God will show the full expression of His glory all over the world, and these passing, painful troubles will fade away. He will show Himself to be perfectly good and holy and sovereign and wonderful, beyond dispute. He will show His glory, and we will stand in awe.

All leads to the song of faith. The last chapter, Habakkuk 3, is amazing. It is literally a song, intended to be a psalm to be used in worship, and Habakkuk in it reviews the faithfulness of God to His people in the midst of suffering in the past, and these are the conclusions Habakkuk comes to: God is awesome; God is full of wrath; God is full of mercy. God is present in all of creation. God is praised by all of creation. God has power over all things.

Habakkuk recounts the power of God in creation. God has power over all things; God is sovereign in all things. God is the protector of His people. *"You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed,"* (Habakkuk 3:12-13). He is the protector of His people. God is the deliverer of His people, and then we come to three of the most beautiful verses in all of Scripture. In the midst of suffering and waiting, surrounded by evil and pain; no visible signs that an end is coming anytime soon, Habakkuk concludes the whole book by saying:

"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will

take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places," (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

God is our satisfaction. "While we wait in darkness and suffering with no fruit on the vine or food in the fields, I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." He is our satisfaction. God is our strength, and God is our victory. In the midst of trial, He puts me on the mountaintop as a victor and a conqueror. So, it does seem weird to us, the hard reality of Habakkuk, that God would use painful events to accomplish His sovereign purposes, but can I remind you of something far, far weirder? Something far, far more difficult to understand?

The Comforting Reality of the Cross...

The comforting reality of the cross, that God uses His Son's suffering to accomplish His people's salvation. One writer said, "God is always at work in human history to achieve His ultimate goal, and the means by which he chooses to pursue that goal may be as astounding as the destruction of a nation or as incomprehensible as the blood dripping from the figure of a man on a cross." Yes, God's ways in Habakkuk may seem strange to us, and His ways in our lives may seem strange to us, but brothers and sisters, look to the mystery of the cross, where God inflicts the pain of sin upon His Son in order to bring us peace, and God the Father uses the cruel, torturous, otherwise unexplainable death of Christ to bring us life.

We find salvation in His suffering, and because of His suffering for our sins in our place, and because of His victory over our sins on our behalf, because of Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the grave, we know...oh, put your faith, put your trust in this: we know our suffering is temporary. God is sovereign over all things. Cancer is not sovereign, tumors are not sovereign, nations are not sovereign, tornadoes are not sovereign, doctors are not sovereign, disease and disaster and death and Satan and suffering...none of these are sovereign. God is sovereign, and He is able, and He is willing, and in His timing, He will bring about the end of all those things.

Our suffering is temporary, brothers and sisters, and our God is trustworthy. Many of you know the story behind Horatio Spafford's hymn, "It Is Well With My Soul." Spafford and his wife, Anna, had fallen on hard times as a result of the Chicago fire, and they experienced the death of their four-year-old son due to scarlet fever. They wanted to get away for various reasons, so Spafford, his wife, and his four daughters planned to set sail on a boat for England. Just before they were scheduled to leave, something came up, and Spafford had to stay and send his family on ahead. He promised to join them as soon as possible, but a few days later, in the middle of the ocean, the ship on which Spafford's wife and daughters were sailing collided with another ship, and all four of Spafford's daughters drowned. Spafford received a telegram from his wife in England on the other side of the ocean that said, "Saved alone." As quickly as possible, he got on a ship to get to his grieving wife, and during that journey over the ocean, the captain of the ship told Spafford when they got to the place and passed over the waters where his daughters were on the bottom of the ocean, three miles underneath. On that day, Spafford wrote these words:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

32. Zephaniah

Zephaniah. The overall structure is here, and the overall point is that one day God's people will exchange their shame for His honor. "*He will exult over you with loud singing...so that you will no longer suffer reproach...And I will save the lame and gather the outcast...*" Zephaniah 3:14-20.

33. Haggai and Zechariah

Haggai and Zechariah. These books are related to each other. The message is clear in both: Repent of sin. "*Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you...*" (Zechariah 1:3). Repent of sin in the fear of God by the Spirit of God. Repent of sin and renew your strength; renew your strength for the glory of God. Zechariah and Haggai give us a promise of a King who is coming, Zechariah 9, Zechariah 8.

34. Malachi

All of this leading to the last book in the Old Testament, and what I put in here for Malachi is basically what the Old Testament has taught us about ourselves, and these things are clear all over Malachi, and they will sum up all that we have seen in the Old Testament. One, we are dead in our sin. Dead in our sin. We are prone to defame God. We are prone to dishonor one another. Sin is just too subtle in us; it is too seductive to us. We know it in

every one of our lives: sin is too strong for us, and as a result, we are desperate for a Savior. That's the whole point of the Old Testament: to show us the depth of sin within us and the depth of suffering around us and to show us that we need a Savior above us.

Note this: the problem of evil and suffering in the world is ultimately a problem with people's hearts. Our hearts, and only Jesus can change the hearts of evil people. This is huge, particularly, when we think about suffering and things like poverty and human trafficking and sex slaves and injustice around the world, and we think, "We need to fight for justice." And we do, but we need to remember that proclaiming the gospel of Jesus is the foremost, fundamental, necessary, non-negotiable way to address evil and suffering and injustice in the world.

We can try to change systems and eradicate practices when it comes to these issues, but to work against evil and suffering in the world apart from proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ will ultimately be futile. This is huge. There are so many causes, even in the church today, that are being trumpeted. "We need to address this and this and this and this in the world." Abortion, orphan care, sex trafficking, slavery, poverty, and on and on and on, and these are issues that need to be addressed. I want to trumpet these issues, but we are fooling ourselves if we think that these issues can be addressed apart from verbal, intentional, clear proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the answer to the evils and sufferings of this world. Only Jesus can change human hearts.

So, consider what the Old Testament has taught us, not just about ourselves, but God. Summing it up here, He is overwhelmingly gracious. God stays His wrath. In wrath, He remembers mercy. He is gracious. At the same time, He is inexpressibly holy. God does not toy with sin or sinners. He is infinitely holy and worthy of total obedience. He is consistently faithful to His people. Great is His faithfulness. Page after page in the Old Testament: people's unfaithfulness, God's faithfulness. He is completely just. He will demonstrate His righteousness. He will demand our repentance, and He will display His wrath. God is just.

He is ultimately sovereign. I hope we have made that clear. His perfections and His purposes never change. He is in control of everything that happens in the Old Testament; there is nothing out of His control here. He is unquestionably supreme. Malachi 1:11, "*For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.*" He is the only Savior. He is the only hope, and He promises that He will preserve a remnant, and He will provide a Redeemer. The last book of the Old Testament makes clear that God will send His messenger; "*the LORD whom you seek will come to you...*" Malachi 3:1. Yes!

Gospels

35. Matthew 4: Temptation to Sin...The Root of Suffering

That leads us to the Gospels in the New Testament when the Lord does come, the Savior on the scene. Now, remember Genesis 3; suffering and death entered the world as a result of what? Suffering and death enters as a result of sin and Satan's temptation. So, before Jesus even begins His ministry, we see Him addressing the root of suffering: sin and temptation.

Two Pictures...

In Matthew 4, Jesus is tempted three times, and all three times He resists the devil. So, what does this story teach us? Two pictures: one, Jesus is the new man, stepping into the

universal human story. There are deliberate parallels between Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4 and Adam and Eve in the garden in Genesis 3. It's no coincidence that both Adam and Jesus are initially tempted to eat food apart from the Father's will, and in both of these stories, their temptations begin with questioning God.

For Adam, the serpent asks, "Did God really say not to eat that?" For Jesus, the serpent doubts Christ's sonship, saying, "If you are really the Son of God, why are you hungry like this?" Jesus is stepping into the same story that Adam stepped into, and Jesus will stand where Adam fell. He is a new man, unlike Adam, unlike anyone else in the universal human story who has succumbed to sin, and He is the true son, suffering through the particular Israelite story.

So, there are some parallels between Matthew 4 and Genesis 3, but there are even more parallels between Jesus' temptation here and the testing of God's people before they entered into the promised land in the Old Testament. The parallels are clear. Both are tested in the wilderness. God's son, Israel, was tested for forty years; God's Son, Jesus, is tested for 40 days. Every time Jesus wards off temptation in Matthew 4, He uses Scripture from Israel's wanderings in the Old Testament during those 40 years, and the last parallel that I'll point out is in the Old Testament story, right before they were tested, God delivered the people of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea; what Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:2 calls Israel's baptism. Here in the New Testament story, right before Jesus is tempted, He is baptized. So, all of this is pointing us to the fact that Jesus is the true Son of God, suffering through the particular Israelite story.

Two Questions...

Now, two questions that come up when you come to this passage often. Number one, does God tempt us? Matthew 4:1, if you look at it, it says, "*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*" So, what does that mean? Does that mean that God tempts us? The clear answer that Scripture gives to that question is, "No." God never tempts us in the sense of enticing us to evil. James says, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*"

Instead, Satan is seen in Scripture as the tempter. We are tempted by Satan (who is subordinate; we talked about that in Genesis 1-11) for evil. So, only the devil and demons tempt us to evil, but we need to remember that even their tempting us to evil, though directly attributable to them, is ultimately under the sovereign control of God. Nothing happens in the universe apart from the sovereignty of God, and this is where we see God in this picture, not as tempting for evil, but as testing for good.

We are tempted by Satan (who is subordinate) for evil, but we are tested by God (who is sovereign) for good. So, here in Matthew 4, the Spirit of God is leading Jesus into a time of testing, just as He led Israel into the wilderness for a time of testing, but God is definitively not tempting Jesus, and He definitively did not tempt Israel, and He will definitively...God will never tempt you toward evil. Instead, in His sovereignty, God will use even Satan's attempts to tempt you to evil to bring about good in your life.

Second question: Could Jesus have sinned? The answer is no...and yes. So, let me explain real briefly. Four truths that pertain to this question that we know from all over Scripture. One, Jesus is fully human, and as a man, Jesus was fully tempted, just like we are, Hebrews 4, 1 Corinthians 10.

Now, sometimes we read Matthew 4:1-11, and we see the temptation He went through, and we think, "I've never been tempted to throw myself off a building." However, we need to realize...and if we had more time to look at these temptations, we would realize that there are no new temptations, brothers and sisters, there are just new ways of succumbing to old temptations. The Bible is clear: Jesus was tempted exactly as we are.

Third, Jesus is fully God, and fourth God cannot be tempted. Just as James 1:13 says that God does not tempt us to evil, it says God cannot be tempted with evil.

So, we know these four things to be true: Jesus is fully man, fully tempted, fully God, and God cannot be tempted. The problem is when you try to put them together and figure out how all this works, and that's the mystery. The mystery of the Incarnation. In His humanity, Jesus was fully tempted, just as we are, and it was possible that He could sin. In His deity, He was not tempted, for God cannot be tempted, and so it was not possible that He could sin. So, these are mind-boggling realities that mysteriously come together in the Incarnation.

Think about it this way. It's not a perfect illustration, but think about it this way: Think of the person in the world that you love the most. Picture their face, and then let me ask you a horrifying question, "Could you murder that person?" And as soon as I ask that, you're thinking, "Absolutely not! I'm repulsed at the very idea; there's no way I could hurt that person that I love that much." In that response, what you're thinking is, "I don't have the moral capability of murdering that person." But if you understood my question as, "Could you murder that person?" in terms of physically performing an action, though it's unfathomable to you, it would be physically possible.

So, in a similar way...not exactly the same, but in a similar way...Jesus, in His deity, as the light of the world in whom there is no darkness, could not have sinned. His moral nature is incapable of that kind of action. At the same time, in His humanity, Jesus could have sinned in the sense that He was absolutely capable of turning stones into bread or throwing Himself off a temple or bowing the knee to Satan. He was fully tempted as we are.

Three Temptations...

So, we've cleared all that up? Okay, we will move on to three temptations, and we're not going to analyze these too in-depth; we just don't have time, but see their essence. The first temptation: self-gratification. Commanding stones to become loaves of bread because He was hungry. Jesus was, and we are tempted to fulfill our wants apart from God's will. Jesus fought off this temptation by trusting the all-satisfying, all-sufficient goodness of the Father.

The second temptation: self-protection. "Throw yourself down from here, and the angels will catch you." Jesus was, and we are tempted to question God's presence and manipulate God's promises, but Jesus resisted that temptation by resting in the shelter of the Father's unshakeable security. The third temptation: self-exaltation. "You can have everything in the world," Satan says to Jesus, "if you'll just turn from the worship of your Father." Like Jesus, we are tempted to assert ourselves in the world while we rob God of His worship, and glory be to His name, Jesus refused to exchange the end-time exaltation by the Father for a right-now exaltation of a snake.

One Conclusion...

Now, from all this, we come to one incredibly significant conclusion at the start of the New Testament: Jesus has done what no one else has ever done or will ever do: He has resisted

temptation fully and conquered sin completely. He has conquered sin, the root of suffering. That is a very good start to the New Testament.

36. Luke 4:16-21: Good News for the Suffering

Next text: Luke 4:16-21: good news for the suffering. Jesus goes into the synagogue, reads Isaiah's promise that God will anoint His servant with His Spirit to "*proclaim good news to the poor...liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" Then, Jesus said, "*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*" i.e., good news for the suffering!

Jesus reverses our status.

Jesus reverses our status, and we see this prophecy just play out in all kinds of ways all over the Gospels. Let's look at some examples here: In Luke 5, Jesus takes the dirty and makes them clean. In cleansing the leper there in Luke 5, we see that to all who feel helpless, Jesus will restore you. Then, the sinful woman in Luke 7 anoints Jesus' feet with oil, and we learn that Jesus takes the rejected and makes them accepted. To all who are hurting, He will receive you. In Luke 15, He takes that which is lost, and He brings it back to life. From lost to found. To all who feel hopeless, He will rescue you.

In Luke 16, we see the reversal...from poor to rich. To all who are humble, Jesus will reward you. To all who are humble, Jesus will reward you. In Luke 18, He takes the blind and gives them sight. From blind to seeing: To all who need healing, He will reveal Himself to you. He will reveal Himself to you. This story is echoed again in other places, including John 9. A man born blind, and the disciples ask, "*Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" In other words, "Why is this man suffering? Whose fault is it?" They ask Jesus for an explanation, and Jesus doesn't give it to them. Instead, He tells them God has designed blindness for the man's good and God's glory. You look at that passage, and "*Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.'*"

This is huge! We may not always be certain of the cause of our suffering, but we can always be confident in the purpose of our suffering. There is purpose in our suffering. So, see this: there are two ways to ask the "why" question in suffering. We can ask "why" looking for a cause, but most times...I will go ahead and tell us...that question, and we have seen this, leaves us empty. "Why did I get cancer?" "Why did that drunk driver kill my family member?" "Why did we have all these miscarriages?" You ask those kinds of "why" questions, and your search will end up being futile, but you ask "why" not looking for a cause, but submitting to a purpose, that question will lead you to fulfillment. So, "What is your purpose?" That's a good question to ask. "What is your purpose in this tragedy, oh God? I'll follow you, and I will trust that your work might be displayed in me."

Jesus redeems our souls.

So, Jesus reverses our status: liberty to the captives, and ultimately, He redeems our souls. The language there in Luke 4 is the Year of Jubilee, where people are given a whole new start, and the ultimate message of Christ to the suffering is that He takes us from cross to resurrection. To all who are held captive by sin, He will set you free. Good news for the suffering!

37. Mark 4-5: Good News for the Weak

Mark 4-5: Good news for the weak. In these two chapters, we see back-to-back-to-back-to-back miracles from Jesus. We see that He has power over nature when He calms a storm. See the presence of God. These disciples realize that the man in the boat with them is God Himself, and they learn that when you find yourself amidst life's storms, "You are not alone."

Then, He heals a demon-possessed man at the beginning of Mark 5, and we see that He has power over demons, and in this story, we see the peace of God. Jesus makes clear to those who trust in Him, in a world of evil, Satan, and demons, "You are safe in me." Then, He heals a woman who has been sick for twelve years, and we see that Jesus has power over disease. See the healing of God as Jesus stops amidst a crowd of people and gives her His attention and says, "I care for you."

All of this leading to Mark 5, where Jesus raises a girl from the dead. He has power over death. See the hope of God. I love how Jesus never preaches a funeral in the Gospels. Every time He gets there and starts to speak, the dead person comes back to life, and it's over. In Christ, you need not fear death, for "You will live forever." Good news for the weak.

38. Luke 13:1-5: Jesus and Natural Disasters

Two Disasters...

That leads to Luke 13:1-5: Jesus and natural disasters. You read Luke 13, you see two disasters described, encompassing both moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil: There was an ambush at the temple, and Galileans were killed there. Natural evil: there was a fall of a tower killing 18 people.

Four Reminders...

People are asking about these instances, and Jesus gives us four reminders when it comes to natural disasters, whether it's tornadoes that have ravaged through various communities in the United States recently, or tsunamis and earthquakes and cyclones that have killed hundreds of thousands of people over recent years. How do we respond when natural disasters happen? First, natural disasters remind us that death is unpredictable. Natural disasters remind us that death is often sudden. People who experience natural disasters don't wake up in the morning expecting what's coming. Death is often surprising, but death is always sure. Death is sudden for many, surprising for many, but it is a reality for us all. We need to remember that when we see natural disasters.

Very few of us got up this morning, thinking, "This could be my last day." People think, "Well, that'd be a horrible way to live, always thinking about death." Not for Jonathan Edwards. He wrote in his resolutions: "Resolved, to think much, on all occasions, of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death."

You think, "Why do you live like that?" Here's why: because you and I need to remind ourselves everyday that our house and our bank account and our health and our car and our nice job and our comfortable life guarantee us nothing. We cling to the things of this world in vain. Death is often sudden, it is often surprising, and it is a reality for us all, and that changes the way you look everything in the world.

Second, natural disasters remind us of the penalty of sin, which plagues all of us. The crowd in Luke 13 assumed these Galileans and these people crushed by the tower had, obviously, done something wrong to deserve this and this happen to them. Jesus confronts them with two truths that the Bible echoes everywhere. First, our sin is universal. In other words, the fact that these people died during these disasters had nothing to do with their righteousness or unrighteousness.

Sin is universal, and as a result, our suffering is inevitable. Jesus' hearers were assuming that because they weren't victims in these tragedies, they'd obviously done something to be blessed by God. Not the case. Natural disasters remind us of the penalty of sin, which plagues all of us. Edwards summed it up well when he said, "Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God."

Third truth: Natural disasters remind us to repent and be reconciled to God. That's the main point of Luke 13. The specific context that Jesus is addressing here is the Jewish people who had grown cold toward God. They had lost sight of their sinfulness and their need to repent, and what's interesting is that Jesus doesn't take their question and use it for a discussion about the mysterious ways of God. This was His chance to explain to them why natural disasters happen, but He doesn't. Instead, He looks them in the eye, and He urges them to repent.

Jesus' response to every single natural disaster in our lives is the same, "Repent and be reconciled to God." Are you right with God? Are you toying with sin in your life? Are you disobeying God? Are you living in willful, deliberate sin? Have you grown apathetic in your relationship with God? Repent and be reconciled to God. Jonathan Edwards said, "Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life."

Fourth truth from Luke 13: Natural disasters remind us of the urgency of our mission. The context that precedes Luke 13 is Luke 12: Jesus is urging His followers to get their hearts in the right place, to be watchful and ready for the day when He comes back. Jesus is saying that life is fleeting, people are perishing, and eternity is coming. All who are perishing today who do not hear and receive the gospel tomorrow will perish forever! This is why Jonathan Edwards said: "Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can. Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live." Jesus and natural disasters.

39. Matthew 10: Suffering Promised for Christians

Where to Go...

In Matthew 10, we see suffering promised for Christians. As Jesus commissions out His disciples on, like, a temporary mission trip, listen to where He tells them go. He says, "Go to great need; go to the diseased, the dying, the despised, and the dirty. Go to great need and go to great danger. Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves..." (Matthew 10:16-18). Think about this: what is the responsibility of a shepherd? To protect his sheep, right? From wolves; to keep wolves from coming in among the sheep; that's what the shepherd guards against.

So, here is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and He's telling His disciples, His sheep, "Go hang out with some wolves!" He's saying, "Be as foolish as sheep." That's the imagery here. Sheep are some of the most helpless and foolish of all domesticated animals. Harmless noises can send sheep into a frenzy, and when they face danger, they've got nothing; all they can do is run, and they're slow. So, the dumbest thing a sheep can do is to walk in the middle a pack of wolves, and Jesus says to His followers, "You do that." Jesus is saying to them, and by implication to us, "You will go by my commission into dangerous places, and you will find yourselves among evil, rapacious, vicious people, and I will have you there by my design."

That is so different than the way we think. We think, "If it's not safe, it must not be God. If it's dangerous, if it's risky, if it may cost me or harm me, then it must not be God." However, what if that's the criteria by which we determine if it really is God? "Go," Jesus says. Go to danger, and let it be said of you like it would be said of sheep wandering into the middle of wolves, "They're nuts! They're clueless! They have no idea what they're doing." Jesus says, "That is what it means to be my disciple."

Be as foolish as sheep, but at the same time, be as smart as snakes. Go without reservation and without hesitation to danger, and when you're there, be smart, and be as pure as doves. When you're with the wolves, don't let them have anything against you when it comes to your purity. Don't be abrasive, inconsiderate, belligerent. Be innocent.

What Will Happen...

In the middle of it all, be innocent, and show them what purity looks like in action, and when you do, here's what will happen. You will be betrayed. "*Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child...*" (Matthew 10:21). You will be hated "*by all for my name's sake,*" (Matthew 10:22). You will be persecuted. He says in Matthew 10:23, "*When they persecute you...*" not "If they persecute you..." Are you getting this? This is the reality we must face: the danger of our lives increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship with Christ.

So, here is the unavoidable conclusion from Matthew 10. Hear this loud and clear: To anyone and everyone tonight who wants a safe, comfortable life away from danger, stay away from Jesus. That's the whole point here, because this is how the world responds to Christ. So, when Christ in us grows more and more, then the world responds to us more and more like they responded to Him.

So, how do you avoid being betrayed, hated, or persecuted? You don't become like Jesus. This is why I think we are so prone to sit back and settle for religious routine and comfortable Christianity in our culture. Because it's safe, and the world likes us there. As long as we live our lives just like everybody else, go to church on Sunday, keep our faith to ourselves, we will face no risk in this world. The only problem is we will know so little of Jesus Christ. But when we know Christ, and when we're becoming like Christ, and we're proclaiming Christ, things will not be easy for us. The more Christ is manifest in your life and your family, the harder it will get for you in this world, because you will be identifying with Jesus.

So, the question we must ask is, "Do we really want to be like Jesus?" I mean, really? Because if we are, if we're identified with Him, then our lives will not stay the same. It will not be easy; it'll be dangerous. This is what He's saying, not what I'm saying. This is what Jesus, your Savior, your Lord, your King, our King, is saying.

So, do we really want to be like Him? We will be betrayed, hated, and persecuted, and as we are, Jesus says fear will tempt you. Three times in verses 26-31, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid." He says see with an eternal perspective. "Don't worry about what the world says now; worry about what God will say in eternity." Speak with a holy boldness, and sacrifice with reckless abandonment.

Jesus says, "*Don't fear those who kill the body but can't kill the soul. Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell,*" (Matthew 10:26-28). Jesus says, "Man is not who you need to be afraid of; you need to be afraid of God." He's your ultimate judge, and He holds your eternity in His hand. Men don't; God does. That's a weird way to encourage your disciples when they are going out. Jesus is literally saying, "Don't be afraid of men. The worst thing they can do is kill you." We think, "Well, if I go to that place in the world, if I go to the Horn, I could be killed." And Jesus says, "That's all?" Don't be afraid; all they can do is kill you!"

Is that comforting to you? Here's the deal: the only way that is comforting to you is if your life has already died with Christ, and you are so focused on eternity that nothing man can do to you even matters. It was said of saints of old that they feared man so little because they feared God so much.

Fear will tempt you, but the Father will take care of you. He rules you sovereignly. He knows you completely, and He loves you deeply. You are valuable to Him. The one who calls you to the wolves is good, and He loves you, so don't be afraid.

What You Do...

So, what do we do? We confess Him publicly, Matthew 10:32-33. We love Him supremely, more than anyone or anything else in this world put together. We take the ultimate risk. We lose our life, Matthew 10:38-39, and we find the ultimate reward. Find satisfaction and pleasure and treasure that supersedes anything this life or this world has to offer us. Jesus promises suffering for Christians and reward in Christ.

40. Selected Texts: Christians' Response to Suffering

Christians' Response to Those Who Cause Suffering...

So, how should we respond to suffering? Selected texts: Christians' response to suffering. This is more thematic than textual here, but see Christians' response to those who cause suffering. Jesus says, "Bless them." Love them. "Love your enemies." Pray for them, and forgive them. Jesus says, "Do not seek revenge against them." This is how followers of Jesus respond to those who cause suffering.

Christians' Response to Those Who Are Suffering...

What about how we respond to those who are suffering? Jesus says feed the hungry, Matthew 25. Give water to the thirsty. Reflect the grace of God. Demonstrate the mercy of God. As you have been given, so you give. Love for your neighbor flows out of a love relationship with God. Express the love of God. "*Love one another...as I have loved you...this is how they will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,*" (John 13:34-35).

41. Selected Texts: The Prediction of Christ's Sufferings

From there, we move into other selected texts that predict Christ's sufferings. Jesus suffered willingly according to the Gospels. "*No one takes my life from me,*" He said in John 10. "*I lay it down on my own accord.*" Jesus suffered willingly of His own volition. Jesus suffered necessarily. This was the sovereign plan of God. This is why He came. This is huge. Jesus was not a victim on Good Friday, caught off guard by evil men who wanted to murder Him on the cross. He came to be murdered. Jesus suffered willingly and necessarily. Why?

42. Selected Texts: The Purpose of Christ's Sufferings

Why did Jesus suffer?

Selected texts on the purpose of Christ's sufferings. Why did Jesus suffer? For many reasons. This is just a list, and it's not even exhaustive. Jesus suffered to obey the Father's will and fulfill the Father's Word. Jesus suffered to ransom people from slavery to sin. To give all who believe unhindered access to the Father. He suffered to deliver people from the Evil One.

Jesus suffered to deliver people from the wrath of God. To experience God-forsakenness in our place, as our substitute. Jesus suffered to proclaim the message of salvation for the nations. To bring sheep into the fold of the Good Shepherd. Jesus suffered to establish a new, eternal covenant with the people of God, instituted at the Last Supper before He went to the cross. Jesus suffered to demonstrate God's supreme love for sinners by giving eternal life to all who believe, John 3:16.

Ultimately, Jesus suffered to glorify the Father. What drove Jesus to the cross? It was the glory of God. "*Now is my soul trouble. And what shall I say? 'Father save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name,'*" (John 12:27-28). People say, "Well, Jesus had me on His mind when He went to the cross." Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus ultimately had the Father on His mind when He went to the cross. He was going there for the glory of the Father.

43. John 3:16: Everlasting Life and Everlasting Suffering

The unpopular reality: We are all perishing.

So, let's drill down a little here in the gospel on what Jesus' sacrifice means for sinners. John 3:16 shows contrasts between everlasting life and everlasting suffering. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*" So, here is the unpopular reality behind this verse: we are all perishing...every one of us in the world. James Denney said, "If there is any truth in Scripture at all, this is true—that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the Gospel, and to love and obey Jesus Christ incur at the Last Advent an infinite and irreparable loss. They pass into a night on which no morning dawns."

Our condemnation is personal. Our condemnation is total, and our condemnation is eternal. We...every single one of us...we deserve everlasting suffering. We deserve, Revelation 14:11, hell, where the smoke of sinners' torment "*goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night...*" Thomas Watson said, "Thus it is in Hell; they would die, but they

cannot. The wicked shall be always dying but never dead; the smoke of the furnace ascends forever and ever. Oh! Who can endure thus to be ever upon the rack? This word 'ever' breaks the heart." And it does.

In hell, sinners will realize how serious sin really is, how just God really is, and sinners will realize how endless suffering really is. Are you in that "we"? There's no more important question than that tonight. Many among 50,000 people tonight, maybe even many who think that they are Christians in a Matthew 7 kind of picture are perishing on a road that leads to everlasting suffering. George Whitfield, famous preacher from the past, used to urge listeners to "Consider 'the torment of burning like a livid coal, not for an instant or for a day, but for millions and millions of ages, at the end of which souls will realize that they are no closer to the end than when they first begun, and they will never, ever be delivered from that place.'"

The unprecedented rescue: God is all-pursuing.

In our sin, we are perishing; this is the unpopular reality. And the unprecedented rescue of John 3:16 is that God is all-pursuing. Our condemnation is personal; His salvation is personal. Our condemnation is total; His salvation is total. Our condemnation is eternal; His salvation is eternal. "*Everyone who...believes in me shall never die,*" (John 11:25-26). In heaven, we who have turned from sin and trusted in Christ will realize how glorious grace really is; we will realize how merciful God really is, and we will realize how endless satisfaction really is, all because God gave His only Son to suffer and die on our behalf.

44. Selected Texts: The Suffering of the Son of God

The Timeline...

So, we come to selected texts that describe the suffering of the Son of God. Basically, what I've done here is given you a chronology of Jesus' death and resurrection. Saturday: anointed. Sunday: arrives in Jerusalem; Monday: anger of Jesus overturning the tables; Tuesday: authority of Jesus challenged and asserted. Tuesday/Wednesday: betrayal of Jesus; Thursday: the Last Supper. The humility of Christ: He washes His disciples' feet. The prophecy of Christ: He predicts Peter's denial. The comfort of Christ: He promises the Holy Spirit. The prayer of Christ: He intercedes for His disciples.

The Garden of Gethsemane. Three agonizing prayers, three tired disciples, and the arrest of Jesus. Friday: the trials of Jesus starting very early in the morning, in the middle of the night before the Jewish authorities. Preliminary hearing before Annas, hearing before Caiaphas, trial before the Council.

Before the Roman Authorities: First, hearing before Pilate, hearing before Herod, last hearing before Pilate. The torture of Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus: First three hours, the prayer for his persecutors, the promise to the criminal, the provision for His mother. Last three hours, the cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). The acknowledgement of thirst, the cry of triumph, the cry of resignation.

45. John 19: The Resurrection of the Son of God

Possible Explanations...

This is the suffering of the Son of God, which, then, gloriously leads to the resurrection of the Son of God. All kinds of possible explanations that have been given in history for Jesus' resurrection. Some have said...Muslims claim that Jesus didn't really die on the cross. Others have said that Jesus' tomb was not empty. The women went to the tomb that first Easter morning. In their grief and shock over Jesus' death, they went to the wrong one, and everybody else who started to believe did so because they were going to the wrong tomb, too. If they'd just check next door, they would've known He was there.

The disciples stole the body of Jesus, or the disciples were delusional when they claimed to see Jesus. We are not going to go into a full refutation of all these things, but suffice to use N.T. Wright's quote here: "The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb and the meetings or sightings of the risen Jesus. Nobody was expecting this kind of thing. No kind of conversion experience would have invented it. To suggest otherwise is to stop doing history and enter into a fantasy world of our own."

Starling Implications...

Jesus died on the cross and actually rose from the grave, and the implications of this are startling. If Jesus rose from the dead, then He is Lord over life and death, and He is Lord over sin, suffering, and Satan. *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,"* (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Jesus is Lord over you and me. *"Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved,"* (Romans 10:8-10).

Believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but don't stop there. So, follow with me. Come up from your notes for just a second here. We are going to pause right after this. Believe in the historical resurrection of Jesus, but don't stop there; that's not salvation. Mere intellectual belief in the resurrection of Jesus is not salvation. The demons believe in the resurrection. If the devil himself were here tonight and I were to ask him, "Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God?" he would say, "Yes." If I were to ask him, "Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?" he'd say, "Yes." If I were to ask him, "Do you believe He died on the cross and rose again?" he'd say, "Yes." If I were to ask him, "Do you believe He is the only way to be saved?" he'd say, "Yes." If I were to ask him, "Will you commit to live a moral life and come to church and get involved in leadership?" he'd say, "Yes." Because you can believe and do every single one of those things and not be saved.

But do you know what the key question is, the question that would change everything in that conversation? If I were to look at the devil and say, "Do you repent of your sin and surrender your life to Jesus as Lord?" and he would say, "Absolutely not." This is why this is so important, because this is exactly what we've done today. We've said, "Believe in Jesus, pray a prayer, get involved in church, maybe even lead in the church, live a good life, and you will be saved." That is a lie. It's a lie. Scores of professing Christians have believed half of Romans 10:9, and they think they are saved from their sins when they are not. They're headed to everlasting suffering...some of you...and you think you're safe. No, believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and surrender to the lordship of Jesus with your life. This is what it means to be saved.

There are scores of people...scores of people here tonight...giving lip-service to Jesus whose lives are not surrendered to Him as the absolute authority...the one who reigns supremely

over you and rightfully determines and directs everything in your life, and I want to call you, urge you to surrender your life to Him and confess Him as Lord. Turn from your sin and yourself to Him, and be saved by Him as Lord. Because of His sacrificial suffering on your behalf, He reigns as the supreme Lord of your life, and if you have not submitted your life to the lordship of Jesus, let me urge you not to toy with sin and yourself and play games with Christ any longer. Turn from sin and yourself and be rescued by the Savior.

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