

Theological Equipping Class
May 7, 2023
Taught by: Tim Hollis

Biblical Themes - Growth Through Suffering

Class Outline:

1. The Beginning of Suffering
2. Trial and Error Suffering (Judah)
3. Sacrificial Suffering (Joseph)
4. God-glorifying Suffering (Job)
5. Dependant Suffering (Israel)
6. The Suffering of Jesus
7. The End of Suffering

1. The Beginning of Suffering

In the beginning, God's creation was not a place of suffering.

Mankind rejected this creation, and our Creator, and disqualified humanity from the presence of God.

The removal of humanity from God's presence is the beginning of suffering.

*16 To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your **pain** in childbearing; in **pain** you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in **pain** you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field." (Genesis 3:16–18)*

Mankind did not listen to the Word of God and suffered as a result.

But God is gracious even as we suffer; God uses the suffering we chose to grow us and to draw us to himself.

2. Trial and Error Suffering (Judah)

Defined:

Trial and Error suffering is when God uses the suffering that comes from the consequences of our own sins to change us.

The Person (Genesis 29:35):

Judah, 4th son of Jacob and Leah

The Suffering (Genesis 37-38):

Judah sold his brother into slavery

Rejected the desires of his father

He disobeys his father and marries a Canaanite woman, and all 3 of his sons are wicked (God took two of their lives because they were so excessively evil).

He then got his daughter-in-law pregnant

The Growth (Genesis 38:24-26, Genesis 43:8-9):

*About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality." And Judah said, "**Bring her out, and let her be burned.**" 25 As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant." And she said, "Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." 26 Then Judah identified them and said, "**She is more righteous than I**, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." (Genesis 38:24–26)*

And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. 9 I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. (Genesis 43:8–9)

Judah is transformed from a prideful and wicked embarrassment, to a humble servant.

3. Sacrificial Suffering (Joseph)

Defined:

Sacrificial Suffering is when God allows a person to suffer, in order to bring blessing to others.

The Person (Genesis 30:22-24):

Beloved first-born son of Jacob and Rachel

The Suffering (Genesis 37, 39-50):

Slave to Potiphar

Reputation destroyed

Forgotten in prison

Exiled in Egypt, away from his family

The Growth (Genesis 50):

19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:15–21)

4. God-glorifying Suffering (Job)

Defined:

God-glorifying Suffering is when God allows a person to suffer, in order to magnify the glory of God.

The Person (Job 1:1-12):

And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (Job 1:8)

The Suffering (Job 1:13-37:24):

Everything in his life is destroyed (his family, his possessions, his health)

Job has terrible friends who assume the role of sin vigilantes:

“Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities. For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. The man with power possessed the land, and the favored man lived in it. You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed. Therefore snares are all around you, and sudden terror overwhelms you, or darkness, so that you cannot see, and a flood of water covers you.” (Job 22:5–11)

The Growth (Job 38-42):

Then Job answered the LORD and said: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1–6)

How does Job grow through his suffering?

Job’s suffering shows us that there is nothing/nobody more glorious than God. When everything God had blessed Job with was taken away, there was one thing that didn’t change: that God is glorious, sovereign, and surpassingly wise. No matter what, God reigns above all others, and there are none more glorious. Thus, Job’s suffering magnified the glory of God.

5. Dependant Suffering (The Nation of Israel)

Defined:

Dependant Suffering is when God uses suffering to call people to depend on him for justification rather than themselves.

Q: Will God allow our disobedience and idolatry [our sins] to go unpunished?

A: No, God is righteously angry with our sins and will punish them both in this life, and in the life to come.

Q: Is there any way to escape punishment and be brought back into God’s favor?

A: Yes, God reconciles us to himself by a Redeemer. (New City Catechism)

The People:

Sinful, constantly and consistently disobedient Israel.

The Suffering:

God says, “Obey my commands. And it will go well for you. Disobey my commands, and suffering will abound.”

But Israel fails to obey.

So Israel is subjected to cycles of exile, where injustice and suffering abound...as promised.

The Growth:

God used Israel's many sufferings to demonstrate that they can never be the ultimate solution. No one obeys the law of God perfectly, and so long as that is true, no amount of white knuckling the faith will bring about the righteousness God commands.

This leaves them with only one choice: depend on God to provide a Redeemer.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4–6)

6. The Suffering of Jesus

In the suffering of Jesus, we see the fulfillment of all the types of suffering we've discussed.

Trial and Error Suffering (Judah)

Sacrificial Suffering (Joseph)

God-glorifying Suffering (Job)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you... (John 17:1)

Dependant Suffering (Israel)

Q: Who is the Redeemer?

A: The only Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ. (New City Catechism)

7. The End of Suffering

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:1–4)

Q&A Notes: