

Suffering According to the Will of God

By Jim Davis

Wouldn't it be good to be in the presence of Jesus so that we could ask some of the more perplexing questions in life? The disciples were walking along with the Lord when they passed by a man that was blind from birth (John 9:1-4). They were given opportunity to ask one of those questions, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" We really like to keep things in neat categories. It provides some security for us to be able to trace the horrible things that happen in this world back to a direct cause. If the cause is a tangible area of sin we hope that we may in some way be able to isolate ourselves and our loved ones from it. Jesus didn't offer His disciples the comfort they may have desired. His response to their question was that this man is blind "that the works of God might be displayed in him."

The terrifying reality of life in a fallen world is that sometimes, horrible things happen to us that are not directly caused by the things that we control. It is not your parent's fault. It is not your fault. We live in a world that is corrupted by rebellion against God. As we make our sojourn through life each of us will suffer things outside of our control to a greater or lesser degree. Jesus' unsettling response to His disciples is, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work." As so often is the case, our Lord directs our thoughts from the defensive, "how can I keep this horrible thing from happening to me," to an offensive posture of "how can I work the works of God?" In fear and trembling I would like to suggest that Jesus rebukes the human "why me" perspective for an ambitious divine "all to Thee" perspective. We would recall that Jesus also said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). "As long as it is day," is a reminder that our days are numbered. There will be a time in the future when we can no longer glorify the Father with good works. We are to use our time and our circumstances for that which is most profitable for eternal things. One other point that should be made is that the greater the darkness the more powerful the light. The more unmanageable the trial the greater the glory that is given to God. Jesus demonstrated this when he gave sight to one that was blind from birth.

Suffering is...

May I give to you a few suggestions that may help you through your trials? **Suffering is never meaningless or random** although it may seem to be. It demonstrates the sufficiency of God's grace. The Apostle Paul taught that God's power is perfected in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Although God will not always heal us from our sickness or deliver us from our affliction, He will provide grace that is sufficient through the power of the indwelling Christ. He compared suffering to death and stated that suffering in Christ brings glory to God and life to others (2 Corinthians 4:8-15). God's grace will always be sufficient for you. It also demonstrates the reality of our faith. The renowned members of the hall of faith in Hebrews eleven were those who "gained approval through their faith" (Hebrews 11:39). The Apostle Peter taught, "if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith . . . may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7).

In addition, suffering teaches us the value of full surrender to God (1 Peter 4:1-2), the value

of patience (1 Peter 2:20), the value of obedience (Philippians 2:8-11), the value of prayer (Philippians 4:6-7), and the value of studying the Scriptures (Psalm 119:67,71). Suffering can teach us contentment (Philippians 4:11-12), and sympathy for others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), and it produces the fruit of righteousness in our lives (John 15:2). Probably the greatest benefit to suffering in the life of the believer is that it produces a deeper intimacy with God. Jesus has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). In the valley of the shadow of death, "Thou art with me."

Suffering is momentary in light of eternity. "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Peter said, we are to greatly rejoice even if for a little while we have been distressed by trials (1 Peter 1:6). Things that seem bad from the temporal perspective may actually be good from the eternal perspective. We often mistakenly define good as that which causes us temporal pleasure and bad as anything that disturbs us or makes life unpleasant or uncomfortable.

Suffering is a gift. The Apostle Paul taught, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). The Bible says, "let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (1 Peter 4:19). Jesus spoke of the suffering of the cross as "the cup which the Father has given Me." Jesus, although He was innocent, suffered the shame of the cross for the greater glory of God. "Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:22-23). Those who believe in God hold that He will ultimately work all things together justly for good.

I would close with a challenge for you if you are presently going through a trial. **Suffering is something for which we give thanks.** Paul teaches that we are to "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). It may be easy to give thanks for the good things that happen to us in life but it is not natural to thank God for suffering. I realize that I may be speaking to someone who is undergoing unimaginable suffering. I challenge you to turn to God and say, I trust you and I thank you, not for this evil thing that has happened to me, but for the good that you will work through it. May the giving of thanks abound to the glory of God.