

Taste and See Afflictions

Psalm 34:15-22

¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry. ¹⁶ The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. ¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. ¹⁸ The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. ¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all. ²⁰ He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken. ²¹ Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. ²² The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

There are three reasons for afflictions:

(1) A fallen world

- Gen. 3 explains the reason for our struggles in this life – difficulties in marriage, parenting, making a living, our bodies aging.
- Even those who seem to live ‘charmed’ lives deal with things (autism, etc.).
- A pain free existence is an illusion. Therefore we should not become bewildered by pain or suffering.
- Suffering does not disprove God – quite the opposite. It proves that we are designed for a perfect existence by a perfect God. Animals do not ponder the meaning of suffering.

(2) Transgressions

- God tells us not to sin or break His law because, as we saw last week, it always has consequences.
- The selfish abandonment of a marriage with its damage to children, the abuse of children, bad financial decisions all bring ongoing suffering.
- Most of the suffering I’ve seen in Africa comes from corrupt leadership.

(3) Righteousness

- There is suffering that comes because you are a genuine believer.
- 1 Pet 4:12,13 - ¹² Beloved, **do not think it strange** concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you: ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you **partake of Christ’s sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.
 - Christians were singled out for persecution in the Roman empire “...because the followers of Christ rejected the pagan worship and made themselves obnoxious to the worshippers of the gods.” (Studies in Early Church History, Henry Sell)
 - The Christians were actually called “atheists”!
 - Romans viewed Christians as anti social, because they had a stricter moral code. So, there were certain activities they just wouldn’t partake in
- So, how does this work for us, 2,000 years later in the Bible belt?
 - We’re not being killed, as in the 1st century or in some Muslim nations.
 - We’re not being imprisoned or denied the better jobs, as in communist countries.
 - Does that mean there is no ‘suffering for righteousness today’ in our situation?
 - 2 Tim. 3:12 - Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.
 - Jesus said in Mark 8:38 - For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

- This is the pressure on believers today – to back away from God’s Word in areas like sexuality, marriage and divorce, Jesus being the only way, etc. It’s OK to believe, as long as you really don’t think this is for everyone! As long as you don't try to evangelize others.
- If we do take God seriously and are not ashamed of Jesus and His Words, we may not be imprisoned or killed (however, gay/lesbian issues for businesses), there just may be some ‘social rejection’ we experience. Not invited to certain events. People change their conversation around you, etc. A lot of times believers aren’t even willing to experience that!
- So many times I hear believers defend their beliefs with the phrase, “*Well, this is what I believe.*” (vs. “This is what God’s Word says”)
- Luke 9:23 *Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*
 - Afflictions for righteousness are *voluntary!* You can stop them by just not behaving as a true believer any more.
 - A cross is something you can pick up or put down.
- People embrace voluntary suffering all of the time for lesser purposes:
 - Navy seals candidates
 - Athletes & people who exercise
 - People trying to lose weight
 - People getting higher education or training
 - People saving for a house or school or getting out of debt
- God calls us to voluntary suffering for the same reason – it develops us.

But the LORD delivers him out of them all (v.19)

- No matter what the source of our suffering, we have God’s promise of deliverance if we’re looking to Him.
- Two storms in the NT – both illustrate ways God delivers us.
- ²⁰ *He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken*
 - There will be no permanent damage
 - This is also a Messianic prophecy,
 - *For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “Not one of His bones shall be broken.”* (John 19:36)
 - Jesus set the example of suffering and deliverance, and knows how to both identify with us and deliver us.
 - Our ultimate deliverance is heaven
“...Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even agony into a glory.” CS Lewis

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Discussion

1. Of the three reasons for afflictions (fallen world, transgressions, righteousness), which one do you feel you have suffered from the most?
2. What afflictions do you think come because of righteousness today? What is your experience in this area?