

Message Summary

Suffering and the sovereignty of God is a hard topic to address, but it is necessary. All of us have suffered, are suffering, or will suffer. It is part of living in this fallen world, ridden with the effects of sin. Scripture teaches that God has not only allowed suffering, but planned it for his glory and our good (Rm. 8:26-30). The God sovereign over our suffering calls us not to blame Him, but trust Him and His purposes in it.

“All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tm. 3:12). Paul knew firsthand. His obedience to Christ called him to shipwrecks, stoning, and sleeplessness (cf. 2 Cor. 11:24-29). We face a special temptation in modern America to try to make our Christianity as comfortable as our lifestyles. Scripture teaches otherwise. In following Christ, suffering will be part of the package. We must repent from anger at God. It is never right to be mad at the God who does what is right and good. Rather, we must seek to rightly understand God and his ways. Right understanding produces right living. Right understanding will give us the backbone to stand for our faith in the midst of suffering for the gospel. It is the dose of medicine that tastes bad, but will ultimately heal us.

God is sovereign over all things that come. He is in control of little things, like sparrows (Mt. 10:29) and casting lots (Prv. 16:3). He is sovereign over big things, like natural disasters (Amos 3:6) and political leaders. But God is not the Author of evil or responsible for it. We cannot understand this paradox fully, but we must trust.

Acts 4:23-31 teaches God’s sovereignty over the worst act of evil in human history: the murder of the perfect Son of God. Jewish leaders opposed the early church’s ministry of preaching and healing. After arrests and threats, the church lifted their voices even more in praise and proclamation to God. Peter takes the occasion to proclaim Christ’s death and resurrection. The nation plotted and raged against Christ (vv. 25-26; cf. Ps. 2:1-3), God’s anointed. Yet, even in this despicable act of evil, the Roman soldiers were actually fulfilling what God’s hand and plan had predestined to take place (v. 28; cf. Is. 53). At their worst, they accomplished God’s best. God planned this horror that we might be saved from the very sins by which He was killed. If God achieved our great salvation through this act of evil, how much more can He use our suffering to fulfill His great purposes!

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

- 1) Cohen mentioned that suffering is uniquely challenging for Christians in America, where we enjoy such luxuries as climate-controlled buildings and houses, dependable automobiles, and hot, running water. How does this impact our perspective of Christianity? How does it condition us to respond to trials and suffering?
- 2) Regarding suffering, how does "right understanding produce right living"?
- 3) How can God be sovereign over evil but not responsible for it? What is the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
- 4) How does the cross provide the only right context for understanding our suffering?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

- 1) What suffering are you currently enduring for which you must trust God?
- 2) When suffering, do you tend to blame God or trust Him?
- 3) Who around you is suffering and needs to hear the truths of this message?
- 4) Do you expect your Christianity to be as comfortable as your American lifestyle?
- 5) Do you follow Christ for happiness or righteousness?
- 6) Are you currently harboring any resentment against God for any suffering you have endured? How can you trust Him more with it this week?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for ordaining the cross of Christ, the greatest evil that produced our great salvation. Thank Him that He uses our suffering today to bring His glory and our good
 - Pray that He would teach our church to trust Him more in our suffering. Pray that He would mold our thinking and understanding around the cross of Christ.

- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that God would lead us to bold evangelism, and give grace to grow and learn through the trials which often accompany it.
 - Pray for Christ Fellowship's Fall Festival (Oct. 29, immediately following the service). Pray that many would come, learn, and see the gospel in our community of faith. Pray for the Lord's provision of needed supplies and volunteers.

- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray for Jeff and Misti Fairchild in their preparation for the mission field. Pray for effective language acquisition, practical engagement with ministry as they learn, wisdom, strong community, and continued spiritual strengthening and encouragement.