

"Why Must God's Children Suffer?"

Text: Hebrews 2:10-18

God grant that the celebration of the birth of the Baby in the manger in Bethlehem would continue to grant us peace and comfort throughout the coming year. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, the sermon title probably takes you to a little different place than is intended. The suffering of "children" often elicits strong emotions in adults, who seem to have a sort of universal protection mode when it comes to children. Yet to our God, adults too are his children.

We will be exploring this thought further this morning because it is the key to understanding and gaining insight into both our text for this morning and our topic: *Why must God's children suffer?* Our text is found in the Book of Hebrews, the Second Chapter:

Hebrews 2:10-18 *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹² saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." ¹³ And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me." ¹⁴ ¶ Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.*

These are God's words. God grant that each of us might rightly respect and highly regard these words, for all those who hear the words of God and treasure them are blessed. So also we pray, **"Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Would you say Jesus was a perfect man or that Jesus was a sinless man – or both? Jesus certainly was the only *sinless* man since the fall of Adam, and he never once made a moral or ethical error of any kind, but it

probably creates a false impression to affix him with the label "perfect." Jesus was sinless, mistake free, error free. So what is the problem with thinking of him as perfect?

The world actually uses the word "perfect" today in a myriad of ways. They talk of the perfect husband, or the perfect mother. We hear of the perfect vacation, the perfect date, the perfect house, the perfect children, and the perfect gentleman. Apply this now to Jesus. Some apply, some don't. What is the perfect man in the world's estimation? Wouldn't he be strikingly handsome? What color eyes would the perfect man have, or what color or length of hair? Would he have scars, or perfect, unblemished skin? Was Jesus the perfect man?

The fact is Jesus might not even have been very good looking. Most believe that Isaiah 53:2 is talking about Jesus' physical appearance when it says, ***"For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him."***

When we talk about a perfect vacation, date, or night out, *pain* and *suffering* never enter into the picture. Now consider our Savior in light of the fact that "perfect" never includes things like pain and suffering – and here is where we begin to recognize the problem as it relates to our topic for this morning: *Suffering*.

What about pain and suffering? It is obviously foolish to think of Jesus' pain and suffering as restricted to Holy Week with the soldiers, crown of thorns, crucifixion, and so on. There was undoubtedly much more. Did Jesus, for example, have back pain? Did he suffer from pinched nerves, toothaches, headaches, the flu, or colds? Did he have scars from his early work with wood or stone? These sorts of things don't fit with the world's idea of perfect, and yet Jesus probably suffered from all of these things and more. Remember that Holy Scripture says in Hebrews 4:15 (two chapters after our text): ***"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."*** The suffering of Jesus undoubtedly included all that we know and more. He was tired, thirsty, and hungry. He wept, grieved, and was frustrated. In fact Isaiah 53, quoted earlier, goes on in verse 3 to tell us, ***"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering."***

All of this is intended to help us to gain insight into the pain and suffering we see all around us – and experience for ourselves. The

inevitable question seems always to be, "*Why?*" Why did Jesus have to suffer? Why is there pain and suffering at all in this world? Why doesn't our merciful, all-powerful God in heaven spare us, his true children, from pain, hardship, and heartache? The world, in fact, turns this question around and uses it as proof that God does not exist, or at best that he lacks power or control over the events in our lives, or that Christians are just flat out wrong in their beliefs about God. The ungodly reason that a *merciful* God would not allow his beloved children to suffer; therefore one of three things must be true. Either God does not exist at all, or God does not have the power to spare us from pain and misery, or we are not petitioning the true God. Such is the logic of the godless.

But then again it's not just the godless, is it? During times of suffering, have you ever felt that God was far away or ignoring you? Emotional and physical pain has a way of changing us. It can cause us to do and think and act as we never thought we could or would. What God intends as a test of faith (and for the strengthening thereof) we too often turn into a failure and into something sinful and rebellious – even blasphemous.

I was reminded of this again recently by a scene in a popular movie where a purported "man of God" abandoned his faith and cursed God because he didn't understand the specific need for suffering in his life. It was not until he felt that he understood the reasons that he "forgave" God. Though it was just a movie, we would be well served to remind ourselves that God doesn't work that way. He owes his children no explanation. We are not his peers; nor do we possess the divine intellect necessary to grasp all that God alone knows. To us he says simply, "***Be still, and know that I am God.***"

It is necessary then, as we stand at the beginning of yet another year on earth, that we look ahead realistically and plan accordingly. We all have a tendency to think, or at least hope, that tomorrow is going to be better somehow. Such hope is what the world needs to survive, but the Christian ought to be realistic. There is suffering and pain ahead for all of us - physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. How do we know this? Jesus said so: (John 16:33) "***These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.***"

Since we know that trials and suffering of all kinds are waiting for us in the days and months to come, we try to prepare by answering *now* some of the questions that will certainly come *later*. (Perhaps you are struggling with these questions even now.) The first question we need to answer is, "*Why is there suffering at all?*"

The answer begins with another question: "*What do you imagine that you deserve?*" All pain and misery was brought into this world by man, not by God. The basic cause of suffering is sin. In the sinless Garden of Eden there was none of the suffering that we see now. The curse came to man only when man disobeyed and destroyed the perfection of God's creation. Pain ought then to remind the Christian of our own sin problem. To answer our question "*What do we deserve?*" we must answer that we deserve much worse than we will ever receive. Because of sin, God would have been perfectly justified in bringing to every single man, woman, and child a life of misery and pain, from birth to death, followed by an eternity in hell. Because of our sin, we do not deserve anything better on this earth. Nor do we dare imagine that we have earned something, spiritually or materially, because we have experienced the results of sin in this earth by suffering. It is a heathen notion to imagine that God will reward (with heaven) those who suffer on this earth.

Here again we gain a new measure of respect and admiration for our Savior Jesus. Jesus knew what heaven was like - sinless, painless, perfectly blissful. Yet he chose to leave that perfection and to be born into a world of sin and misery. Imagine how Jesus felt as he endured pain and heartache as a suffering human being. We justly deserve to suffer for our sins. Jesus had no sin. He placed himself into this world of hurt so that we might never have to suffer the far greater agony of hell. So also our text tells us that now "***both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.***" (NIV)

There is also a second reason why God allows what he does, even in connection with his own children. Imagine if there were no such thing as pain or suffering of any kind here on earth. Who then would be interested in a Savior? Hard to imagine anyone who would be thinking in terms of a rescuer, since we would have no great desire for heaven and we would have no fear of hell. Why, in a painless world, would we have been interested in a life after this life? Then too, how could we fear hell, the place of torment and agony, if we had no concept of what pain and suffering were all about? It would be like trying to describe colors to a man born blind, or a symphony to a man born deaf. Hell would hold no terror, and our old Adam could never be subdued. Jesus would be of no interest to us in a painless world, and the result would invariably be that our first taste of suffering would be the ultimate suffering of hell. We had to first experience suffering before we could possess a fear of pain and death, before we would even recognize our need for a Savior. So we read in our text that "***by his***

death (Jesus) might...release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

There is still more to understand about suffering. We have God's promise that it is through suffering on the outside that we learn to grow straight on the inside. Children do not learn the lessons they need to learn only through patient pleading. Pain is a powerful teacher. Certainly only a monster would punish his child just to make him feel pain. Christian chastisement is done out of love and with a purpose. That purpose is ***"to bring up a child in the way he should go"*** and the ultimate goal is heaven. So it is with our Heavenly Father. He allows pain and suffering for many reasons - all of them he intends for good. He uses suffering to strengthen our faith, to draw us closer to himself, and to draw others to him through our patient acceptance of his will. What comfort our text holds out to us as we struggle to accept and *thank* our God for what he has chosen to allow into our lives. Our text tells us that the same Jesus who ***"made propitiation for the sins of the people... in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted... is able to aid those who are tempted."*** In times of suffering, what a great comfort to know that Jesus has been there. He knows exactly what we are going through, and he speaks to God the Father in our behalf.

Why then, once we have tasted suffering, must it persist. Only God knows the specifics of every case, but we do know that hardship helps to keep us focused. The end is in sight, but we tend to lose sight. Suffering helps to ensure that we never ***"love the world, nor the things in the world."*** Such a God-pleasing focus would be nearly impossible in a painless, trouble free world. Our Lord loves us too much to allow that to happen – and he knows full well that it *would happen* in a problem-free world.

In the end it is *our* deficiency, *our* need, *our* lack of focus and consistency that makes earthly suffering a necessity for God's children. The fault does not rest with our merciful God but with us. He is the loving Father; we are the wandering children who have brought pain and hardship into God's perfect creation.

Remember finally that Jesus suffered only until his death on the cross. His body, having become accustomed to pain on this earth, now knows no pain. This same Jesus, who once suffered for the sins of the entire world, will suffer no more. Now, according to our text, since ***"Jesus Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."*** The greatest comfort is here to be found, for God has promised all believers in Christ Jesus that we will rise just as Christ was raised. At that time, because of what Jesus has done for us, we will leave

behind forever all that is painful, frustrating, evil, and difficult, and we will enjoy forever the full and complete perfection of heaven. May God the Holy Spirit preserve each one of us in and through life's trials until that great day; protecting us in the days and years to come, until that great day when Jesus himself returns to take us home. In the meantime, God grant that we recognize in hardship the loving hand of our Savior-God, and grant us the faith and humility to thank him for it, and to gain the blessings he intends therein. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{NKJ} **Jeremiah 31:10-13** " Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.' ¹¹ For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. ¹² Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the LORD -- for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all. ¹³ "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow."

^{NKJ} **Luke 2:41-52** His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. ⁴³ When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; ⁴⁴ but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵ So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. ⁴⁶ Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. ⁴⁸ So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." ⁴⁹ And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. ⁵¹ Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

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The Second Sunday after Christmas – January 3, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#95- (Red Hymnal)

"Savior of the Nations Come"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Jeremiah 31:10-13) As is often the case, this prophecy from Jeremiah has a double application. These words point both to the return and re-establishment of the nation of Israel and to us in the New Testament as the "New Israel."

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 84 (Page 38)

The New Testament Lesson: (Luke 2:41-52) Our Gospel lesson tells us that Jesus' parents were indeed good parents. They brought Jesus up in the fear and worship of God, celebrating the Passover every year as a family. Jesus, when he was only 12 years old, taught us all by example that **"being about our Father's business"** is what our time of grace on earth is all about. God grant to each of us in the coming year the grace to recognize and fulfill His calling for our lives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#98- (Red Hymnal)

"Of the Father's Love Begotten"

The Sermon – Text: Hebrews 2:10-18 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Why Must God's Children Suffer?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -#109- (Red Hymnal)

"While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#97- (Red Hymnal)

"Let Us All with Gladsome Voice"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (30) 2009 Average (51) Christmas Eve (70)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Adult Bible Study
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

In Our Prayers – Les Weiss remains hospitalized at Med One. He can have visitors and might enjoy a visit. Please speak to the Pastor for further details.

Normal Schedule Resumes – Please note that Confirmation and Adult Bible Study both return to the regular times this Wednesday, 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. respectively.

Outreach Committee – The Outreach Committee of St. Paul is beginning the process of reorganizing. We are looking for good ideas and good people to help implement them. The time commitment would be minimal. Please speak to the Pastor or to Chairman Mike McEnroe if you are interested in serving.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is asked to gather after the service this morning for a very brief meeting.

Sunday Bible Class – Please consider making the effort to include Sunday Bible Class in your normal Sunday activities. We are currently undertaking a study of the Ten Commandments – from a little different perspective. Feed your soul!