

## **Matthew 22-11-27b**

Let's pick up our study now, we are looking at the nature of suffering as a component of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. He has alluded to it in times past when he was predicting his arrest and trial and crucifixion for the disciples, and we've seen that he warned them about this many times. And here in the upper room, there is a vivid reminder of any possible elements.

You know, Jesus could have taken twigs and bound them together into little crosses and handed one to each of the disciples and said, you know, do this in remembrance of me. But he chose to break the bread and to pass the cup. And of course, this cup, the new covenant in my blood, this is blood that is no longer in the body.

This is blood that is shed for the remission of sins. And both of these elements inevitably are tied to suffering. You can't eat the bread without the bread being broken and crushed.

You can't have the fruit of the vine without the grapes being crushed. You can't have the blood of the new covenant without that blood having been shed. So this is really interesting to me because naturally all of us experience personal suffering and observe suffering around the world and most significantly in our personal circle and periphery.

And we grieve over it. We in some part of our hearts wish that there was no such thing as suffering. People think that world peace would end suffering, that if there was enough humanitarian effort, if there was enough charity, if there was enough goodwill among people to feed the starving and clothe the naked.

I am here to tell you from the word of God that would not end suffering because the source of suffering is not poverty, it's not oppression, it's not man's humanity to man per se. It goes back to the entrance of sin into the world and the one who has the power of suffering and the power of death. And we're back to the world, the flesh and the devil.

And as long as there is sin, there will be suffering and death. The Lord Jesus came to solve the sin problem at its source and in doing so, He willingly tasted death for all men. I am reminded of Romans 5, 12 through 19.

I quoted this in the first session. I want to read it in its entirety. Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, thus death spread to all men because all sinned.

Again, this is Romans 5, 12 through 19. Until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. So, the consequences for sin that are described in the law, stoning and such for various crimes, didn't change the fact that before there was law, the punishments of the law did not pertain.

Nevertheless, verse 14, even though until the law, sin was in the world, but sin was not imputed, i.e. sin was not judged under the standards of the Mosaic law by the elders and the governance in Israel, nevertheless, verse 14, death reigned from Adam to Moses. Death reigned. Suffering reigned.

Even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of him who was to come. The first Adam and the last Adam, you are well familiar with that. The free gift is not like the offense.

If by the one man's offense many died, many have suffered, and many all die, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. Through Adam's sin, suffering and death enter the world. Through the suffering and death of the last Adam, life and healing and salvation enter the world.

The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. The judgment which came from the one offense ended up in condemnation. But the free gift results in justification.

But the sin and the gift of salvation are tied together with their focus on sin and its resulting suffering and death. If by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more then, those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. Notice he doesn't say reign in the future kingdom.

Much more those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. This is key. This is verse 17 of Romans 5. By one man's offense, death reigns.

Suffering reigns. It's bondage. It's slavery.

You can't escape it. It's inevitable. You can strut and fret your hour on the sage, sound and fury.

It signifies nothing when it comes to solving the problems of sin, suffering and death. But those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. Let's think about that.

How do we receive the gift? The abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. God has made grace available. How do I get it? First of all, I have to believe in the one who is making it available.

This is Hebrews 11.6. He that comes to God must believe that he is and that he rewards those who diligently seek him. He is a rewarder. It's a part of his identity.

It's so interesting in the last part of 11.6 of Hebrews. It doesn't say he rewards those who diligently seek him. He is a rewarder.

It is an unchanging part of his nature. And that abundance of grace comes to those who come to God. Those who do not come to God do not qualify.

They have exempted themselves. They have separated themselves. One of the purposes and one of the results of suffering in this world is to create that sense of need that motivates us to come to God.

No sense of need? You don't come. They may be having a white sale at pennies, but if I don't need sheets and pillowcases, why would I go? They may be having a Black Friday sale on tires, but if all of my tires are in great shape, why would I go buy them? I have no need. Why would I subject myself to the trip and the crowds and the, as my dad used to say, the roar of the grease paint and the smell of the crowd? Why would I subject myself to that if I don't need what's there? But if I do need it, I will put up with a lot.

You need to get some last-minute supplies for Thanksgiving dinner. You need to secure some gifts before Christmas morning, and you'll brave the weather. You'll brave the crowds.

You'll put up with the long lines. You'll pay the prices, whatever they may be, in this inflationary time because I have a need. It's a priority for me, and I will put up with inconvenience, discomfort, to whatever extent suffering may be involved.

I will put up with the suffering because I need what is at the destination. So, those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. Grace is available if I go to the source.

I go to him in faith, I go to him in prayer, and I claim his grace. Somebody hands you a 50% off coupon, it doesn't turn into money in your hand. You've got to go to the store and apply it to a purchase, right? So you have the abundance of grace, but you've got to claim it.

You've got to tell God, I'm ready for this abundance of grace to hit me. And the gift of righteousness. How do I claim, how do I obtain, how do I internalize this gift of righteousness? Well, we know this.

Righteousness comes by faith. Trusting God. So, things that I don't understand, things that don't make sense to me.

I think of small children. I think of pets who don't understand why we do what we do. They just don't have the intellectual capacity to appreciate our purposes, our schedule, our priorities.

A little child wants to run and play in a big flat space, but we grab them up and put them in the house and close the door because that flat space is a busy street. They don't understand that a car could flatten them at a toddler age, but we do. And so we remove

the opportunity for them to play in the street, and they may not understand it.

They're riding in a shopping cart at the store. They see a treat or a candy or something that they like and enjoy. They reach out to grab it.

We take it out of their hand, put it back on the shelf and say, you can't have that. But it's good and I want it. You've given it to me before.

Why can't I have it now? Well, they don't understand about spoiling your appetite and nutrition. And a little bit goes a long way when it comes to sugary treats. There's a time and a place, and this isn't it.

And wouldn't it be great if your small child always assented, always obeyed, always did what you asked them to do and did it with a good attitude, didn't pout, didn't sulk, didn't throw a fit, didn't scream and cry because, well, I don't know why I can't have this thing or I can't do this thing, but I know my parents love me and they've got a good reason and I will just trust what I don't understand. Wouldn't it be great if there was no such thing as the terrible twos because two-year-old children would just look to their parents and say, is this okay? Oh, it's not? Okay, well, I'll just wait. Wouldn't it be great if your dog would always come when you called him? Wouldn't it be great if your pets would do what you ask and always make it outside before they relieve themselves and so on? They don't always understand, especially some pets, don't understand the difference between inside and outside.

Wouldn't it be great if despite the fact that they don't understand, they would trust the parent or the master and do what is asked, do what is required, follow the guidance because it works out for the ultimate good. Well, this is God's challenge with us is will we trust him? Will we conform when it doesn't make any sense? I don't understand why when there was an earthquake in 2004 in Sumatra, 266,000 people died in and around Indonesia and the coasts that surround that area. The tsunami, 260 something thousand people died in one event.

It's been largely forgotten now. Is it because they were exceptionally sinful? Is it because Indonesia is the fastest growing Islamic hotspot in the world? No. There is imperfection, there is hardship, there are acts of nature and inevitable consequences of physics that strike.

The one thing I can assure you is that every one of those thousands of people who were believers, God knew them by their name, knew that it was his time for them to exit this life. And those who survived and lost family members, God has an individual plan and he will work it together for good. I don't understand why he does what he does in a lot of cases.

I don't understand suffering, but I know the role of suffering. I know that it is our contact

point with the Lord Jesus Christ. That's Romans 5, 12 through 19.

Those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness are kings and queens in this life. They will reign, they will rule, they will have control in this life through the one Jesus Christ. Our shared contact point, our shared experience with the Lord Jesus is enduring suffering, understanding that it is an essential part of God's plan.

I don't always understand how it is essential. Is this going to benefit me somewhere down the road? Will I know something through this I wouldn't know otherwise? There are manifold reasons, some of which are in scripture. We want to look at some of those now.

So, our first point by way of review, suffering entered the human world as the result of sin, very clearly. Number two, Jesus suffered to enter into our sufferings and bring us to God. That's Hebrews 2, 10 through 18.

Our third point, suffering tests the genuineness of our faith. 1 Peter 1, 6. If you're in Hebrews, you can just flip a few pages over to 1 Peter. 1 Peter 1, 6. In all this you greatly rejoice.

In all of what? You look up in the preceding context. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Death has been conquered.

An inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, doesn't fade away, kept in heaven. We are kept by the power of God through faith for deliverance, ready to be revealed in the last time. Ready to be revealed.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. You suffer grief in all kinds of trials. Verse 7, These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, which is of greater worth than gold, even gold refined in the fire, is going to perish.

But the genuineness of your faith will result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. So, suffering, tests, and reveals. Is our faith really there? Many have failed this test.

We've talked about the author of the book, God's Problem, and various other things, Bart Ehrman using his knowledge of Greek and Hebrew to erode people's confidence in the scriptures. Suffering destroyed his faith. His faith wasn't genuine.

It didn't endure. It didn't last. It was superficial.

It didn't have a good foundation. Suffering is the trial by fire that shows if you really have faith or not. That is not its only purpose.

And some have said, well, how much genuineness do I need to exhibit before God will

remove this suffering? It is one aspect. It is one component. It is one benefit.

And Peter points it out here. The genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold, which perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to the praise, honor, and glory of Jesus Christ at His revelation, to reflect the glory of Christ. Now, how does this work? I'm curious.

I want to know. If I am enduring suffering, if I am experiencing pain, if I am near to others who are enduring great hardship, limitation, bad days, day after day after day, and Peter glibly says, well, this is going to redound to the praise and glory and honor of Jesus Christ when He is revealed, how does that work exactly? Well, Peter goes on to talk about this in the rest of his letter. Turn over to chapter 2, verse 19.

Servants, be submissive to your masters, in verse 18, with fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. If you are suffering as a slave, be submissive with respect. This is commendable, if because of conscience toward God, you endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

A lot of suffering, whatever its source, is undeserved. Nobody sticks up their hand and says, give me bereavement, give me physical pain, give me disease, give me limitation, give me Parkinson's, give me MS, give me dystrophy, give me cancer, give me whatever. It's not voluntary.

And it's not deserved. It's not like, well, you're a greater sinner. You see this in John 9, which is coming up.

Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he's suffering with blindness all these years. Undeserved suffering, if we endure it, because of conscience toward God. I know that God has purposes in allowing this suffering into my life, and I don't get those purposes.

And here's the thing. I don't have to understand those purposes. If I understood the purpose, it wouldn't be faith, would it? Faith is the substance of what's in the future.

It's the evidence of what we can't see. I don't know why this child was taken. I don't know why this school bus crashed and children died.

I don't know why these horrific injustices have taken place, and others have suffered. I don't know why I am experiencing a particular kind of suffering. It makes no sense to me.

I don't see that, oh, well, of course, cause and effect, and I fully understand the purpose of God. I may have no idea, but I trust God that He's got an idea. And if He's got an idea, and if it makes sense to Him, and it is not to correct me, He's not getting my attention because I need to do something different, it's not suffering for correction, then I am gonna commit myself to the hands of a faithful creator, and it is enough for me to know

that He knows why.

And that glory and that honor is going to be reflected at the revealing of Jesus Christ. The old song, we'll understand it all by and by, has a kernel of truth in it. There are things we do not understand now, and there are people who demand an understanding, or they're not gonna accept God's terms.

This is progressive Christianity. This is deconstruction, reconstruction. If my Christianity doesn't make sense to me, I'm throwing it out.

It has to make sense to me. There are people who won't even come to God through Christ, because, well, it doesn't make any sense to me. Why isn't God the way I think He ought to be? He's not approaching me on my terms.

He's not meeting my criteria for what I would consider to be a good God. The essence of faith is we come to God on His terms and by His grace. We live our lives as beneficiaries of His abundant grace and those who desire to obtain the gift of righteousness by faith.

If there's no occasion for faith, there's no occasion for righteousness by faith. And sometimes unknown and inexplicable suffering, its cause and purpose is unknown to me. What do I know? Many times, instead of concentrating on and being frustrated by what we don't know, I've told you before, this is my decision-making process.

When I come to an option or a set of options, I'm at the golden time where I have to start thinking about, well, Medicare this and Plan A and B and C, and I don't know what all that is. And I got to make a decision here in the next couple of weeks about what to do about all that. I don't know anything about that.

What do I know? I know that I have responsibilities. I have assignments. I start thinking about, what do I know? This is navigation in the Navy.

Those of you who were midshipmen and others who can imagine what it's like to be in the middle of the sea where you've got no landmarks around you. There's no streets and street signs. You don't have Google Maps and that.

Have you ever pulled up Google Maps and looked at the ocean? There's nothing there. There's no blue stripes saying, go this way. It's just blank.

What do you know? Well, I can see a lighthouse. I can determine the direction to that lighthouse. I see this peninsula over here.

I can shoot an azimuth to that, and I can intersect those lines on my chart, and that tells me where I am. I look at what I do know, and I can interpolate or extrapolate things that I don't know. This is our task.

If we're experiencing suffering, if we are bereaved by death, if the effects of sin are

around us in our culture, in our government, in our world, in our personal lives, I don't know why these particular things may have come into my particular zone of observation and experience. What do I know? Go with what you know. I know I have an assignment.

Me personally, I am a son, I am a husband, I am a father, I am an employee, I am a small business owner, and that comes with certain responsibilities before God. God has expectations of me in each of those roles. I am a pastor and teacher.

God has expectations of me in that role. So rather than trying to figure out a bunch of unknowns, I can concentrate on, well, these roles dictate that there are certain things I should do and not do. And based on that, amazingly, suddenly, a lot of the unknowns don't seem so important anymore.

It's my goal to fulfill what I do know. That's what Peter is talking about here in 2.19. If you suffer and endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called.

Look at verse 21. To this you were called because Christ also suffered. Christ's suffering is a part of our calling.

His body being broken for us, His blood being shed for us is an essential part of our calling. To this you were called because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow in His steps. Jesus didn't want to drink the cup, but He recognized the will of the Father was that He drink it and drain it.

And He did. Not my will, but thine be done. I wouldn't arrange things this way, but this is what you have assigned me.

This is what I will do. Out of love for the Father, in verse 23, when He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

Committed Himself to the righteous judge. When He suffered, I'll let God judge. I need to be faithful.

In my circumstance, who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes we are healed. In His suffering comes our healing. This is why Paul can talk about bearing in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus, fulfilling what is lacking in the suffering of Christ.

Entering into that suffering is to enter into the attitude that Jesus had as He endured that suffering. He is our example of committing ourselves to the Father when it's hard, when it seems impossible, when we lack the strength. Remember the thorn in the flesh that Paul talked about in 2 Corinthians chapter 12? He was caught up to the third heaven.

This is the general understanding of this passage. Paul, at the first six verses, such a one

was caught up to the third heaven and heard things that you're not allowed to utter. Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations.

This is 2 Corinthians 12, 7. Paul says, I had a need. If I didn't get this thorn in the flesh, pride would have carried me away. Exaltation would have distracted and deflected me and made me useless for my purpose.

Lest I should be exalted above measure. By the way, he mentions this twice. Notice.

Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations. God gave me insight into heavenly truth. Lest I be carried away by that truth and raised up inappropriately, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to beat me.

It says Buffet, but the word is just beat. This messenger of Satan is there beating on me. Lest I be exalted above measure.

He begins and ends that sentence with, I know that the purpose of this thorn in the flesh was for my benefit. If I had been exalted above measure, I'd be useless. Couldn't be an apostle.

Couldn't do my job. Couldn't write these inspired letters. Couldn't establish and support these churches.

I pleaded with the Lord that he might take it away. Three different times he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you. The abundance of grace, the gift of righteousness we just saw.

My strength is made perfect in weakness. The captain of our salvation is made perfect in suffering. God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

It's manifest. So Paul says, therefore, most gladly, I will rather boast in my infirmities. I could tell you about these wonderful, exalted heavenly experiences I had 14 years ago, but I would rather boast in my weaknesses, my infirmities, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

So suffering, point three, test the genuineness of our faith. Point four, suffering confers specific personal benefits. In Paul's case, it was to keep his pride in check.

That's not always the case, but it's a specific personal benefit so that Paul could remain useful and continue to exercise his spiritual gift. His suffering was necessary. After being asked three times, God refused to take it away.

He said, my strength is going to be manifest in you because of this weakness, because of this infirmity. You need this infirmity so that you can be exhibit A of my strength. Suffering can be for specific personal benefit.

In Paul's case, an antidote to pride, perhaps. And the grace of God and the power of Christ will rest on us. And that's in every instance of suffering, good, bad, deserved, undeserved, to have the grace of God and the power of Christ rest on us, remain with us.

God's strength made perfect in us. Whatever the other reasons and purposes God may have in our suffering, whatever the causes, whatever the fault or blame that could be attached to it in some sense, we can forget all that. God allows it for our personal benefit and that the grace of God and power of Christ may rest upon us.

And connected to that, the fifth reason, suffering is an opportunity for the works of God to be revealed. This is John chapter 9. You remember the question of the disciples. Jesus is passing by.

He sees a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? In John 9, 3, Jesus answers, Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. Now, some have tried to argue that God set this man up to be blind in order for this miracle to take place.

That is not a legitimate way to take this. The preceding chapter is about Jesus as the light of the world, John chapter 8. And this is going to be the specific aspect that is going to be revealed. Scripture does draw a link between sin and suffering in some cases, but this is mainly in the covenant.

You go to Exodus 20, verse 5. Do not bow down to idols nor serve them. I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God. I will visit the iniquity of fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

If you hate me, I will send, I will visit that iniquity on you. That's Exodus 20, verse 5. Deuteronomy 28, 15. It'll come to pass.

If you do not obey the voice of the Lord, your God, to observe carefully his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today, these curses, remember Ebal and Gerizim, these curses will come upon you and overtake you. In the bonds of the covenant, disobedience, willful disobedience, willful departure from God, there is suffering for discipline. There is suffering that comes as a part of judgment on faithlessness and disobedience, but you find that there is suffering.

People have tried to draw a link between lifestyle choices and various diseases, STDs and such, and that can be a self-inflicted wound, but it is the presence of sin in the world that creates the occasions for suffering. Jesus doesn't say sin causes blindness. Jesus says this blindness, the presence of sin, and the concomitant suffering and death in the world provides any number of occasions for the work of God to be displayed.

Anywhere there is suffering, anywhere there is death, anywhere there is disease,

anywhere there is the effect of sin and death in the world, it is an opportunity for the work of God to be displayed. That's why Jesus goes on to say what he says, which is seemingly a non-sequitur. Neither this man nor his parents sinned but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

And that goes with every healing, every diseased person that was brought to the Lord Jesus that he healed. But he goes on to say, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. There's a text problem there at verse four, but it is we.

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Notice it ties back to verse three. The works of God are going to be revealed.

How? We must work the works of God. The works of God are going to be revealed. We must work them.

Isn't that interesting? We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work. The night is death.

Some have thought Jesus was talking about his own death and he and the disciples wouldn't be able to do anything. But of course, there's the resurrection. Night is coming.

We have the day. Think of Ecclesiastes. The things that happen under the sun.

We're born. We live. The grass withers.

The flower fades. And we end in death. While it is day, while we are here representing the Lord Jesus Christ, while we are here, we must work the works of him who sent the Lord Jesus to us while we have the opportunity.

Jesus says in verse 5, As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. As long as we share in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, as long as we willingly endure those sufferings and commit ourselves to the hands of our faithful creator, it is day and we reflect that light. So a purpose in suffering is to reflect the light of the world.

We say the light of the world is Jesus. The light of the world needs to be reflected from us. Shine forth from us.

Shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation so that others will see our works and glorify our Father. We work the works of the one who sent the Lord Jesus to reflect his light. And then of course he spits on the cursed ground and what comes from the Lord Jesus lips takes cursed dust and turns it into a healing salve.

Go to the pool of Siloam and wash. And John tells us Siloam means sent. What did Jesus say? We must work the works of him who sent me, who Siloamed me.

This healing is tied back to working the works of the one who sent the Lord Jesus and by

extension sends us. Very fascinating passage. But the truth that we glean from it is that our suffering, when the power of Christ rests on us, when the grace of God and the light of the world shines through us, it often shines in suffering.

This man, his blindness is an occasion for the works of God to be revealed and we must work those works. In the experience of suffering, whether it is our own or the suffering of others, Jesus says, we, your Bible may say, I scratch it out. It's we, we must work the works of God, the works of him who sent me while it is day.

There is an opportunity now for the grace and the strength of God to be revealed and it is revealed in suffering. Opportunity for the works of God to be revealed. John 9, we have much more to say.

I'm about halfway through my observations from scripture on suffering, but everything in this life, especially suffering and death should drive us to the cross where the ultimate suffering and death took place and through that to the empty tomb where life and righteousness have prevailed and the power of God has conquered sin and death. And even as we experience the lingering effects of sin in this world and as we suffer, we look to our savior who entered into our suffering and experienced our death to bring us as sons to God, to call us brethren. We are brothers in suffering.

We are brothers in righteousness. We are brothers in all of those wonderful gifts that come to us in him. Ephesians chapter one.

What a glorious opportunity to convert cursing to blessing, to redeem the time while it is day and experience as no other circumstance could make possible the grace and the righteousness and the glory and the love of God in our lives. It's an opportunity. It's hard.

The cross was hard. Emptying himself and coming as a servant and experiencing the death of the cross was hard. But look at the result.

Momentary light affliction, Paul calls it. And you look at the list of his sufferings and he says, you know, it's momentary and it's light compared to what the Lord Jesus went through. And it is working for us an eternal weight of glory.

More on this next week, but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the wonderful example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not just in his compassion for the crowds, not just in his revelation of truths of living in the kingdom and experiencing righteousness and blessing and inheritance, but in his entrance into our sufferings, experiencing our death to fulfill salvation, to grant us life, righteousness, and relationship with you.

We pray that as we reflect on these things, your Holy Spirit will illuminate them in our hearts and souls, give us strength for the journey through life that we experience, the road that we travel, which has its highs and has its lows, but that in all things, the light of

the world, the Lord Jesus Christ will shine in us and through us to be a blessing both to us and to others. We pray it in Jesus name, amen.