

Matthew 22-12-04a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. We are in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 26, and we are continuing to look at the words of the Lord Jesus as He breaks the bread and distributes the contents of the cup among His disciples. This is a very central and pertinent portion of the final week, the final days of the Lord Jesus in His humanity and His incarnation.

And it is extremely important to us to understand, to appreciate, and most importantly, to apply in our own thinking, our own experience. In the 26th verse of the 26th chapter, Jesus says, take, eat, this is my body. And this crushing of the bread, this breaking of bread, Jesus breaks it, and then it is crushed between the teeth, just as the grain was crushed to make the flour that became the bread.

And intrinsic to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ is suffering. Why is this? We often take it for granted. Why suffering? Why does the Lord Jesus have to suffer to atone for our sins? Why do we suffer in this life? What is its role? What is its purpose in the plan and outline of human history authored by God Himself? We're gonna continue that study this morning.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our attempts to understand and put into practice His word. Father, how grateful we are for another time of fellowship and an opportunity to receive the ministry of your Holy Spirit, looking at the example, the words and the works of the Lord Jesus Christ, which define our lives, which have made it possible for us to be related to you. We are so grateful for our salvation.

We're grateful for our Savior. We pray that you will bless us this morning as we seek a better understanding and hope to draw closer to you through the Lord Jesus and to live our lives in a way that represents Him and reflects your glory so that we're able and willing and qualified to serve both now and in the kingdom of the Son and in your own kingdom, which follows. We ask all these things in Jesus' name, amen.

We began last time looking at what the Bible has to say about suffering. I'm going to review that quickly and move forward this morning. We know from Genesis, the first three chapters, that when God created the world, He saw that it was good.

When He had finished it, it was very good. And yet by the end of chapter three, you have Paul's description, "Whereas by one man sin entered the world and death by sin, so that death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." This is Romans chapter five, verses 12 through 19. Romans five, 12 through 19.

Until sin was in the world, suffering was not in the world. Sin and suffering are inextricably linked. And this is central.

It does not mean that because we have suffered, we must have sinned. This is the message of the book of Job in a nutshell. All suffering does not mean that the sufferer is being punished for sin, but there is suffering because there is sin.

This is true. And verse 17 of Romans five, "'If by the one man's offense, death reigned through the one.'" Remember so often in scripture, when you see the word death, you can invest it with the concept of suffering. Death is rarely pleasant.

It is a process in many cases that involves suffering. At the point that we are born into this life, we are ultimately on a journey that results in physical death. "'If by the one man's offense, death reigned through the one, suffering reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one Jesus Christ.'" So along with the introduction of sin and its concomitant and inevitable suffering, there is the conquest of death, the conquest of sin and reigning in life.

Suffering and death, overcoming and life, ruling and life. This is what we get from Romans 5, 12 through 17, actually on down through 19. So that's the first point.

If you're wanting to organize these thoughts, at least the way I've organized them, this is your first point. This is the starting point. Why suffering at all? God didn't invent suffering because He just wanted something to contrast goodness and pleasantness and peace with.

It is inherent to sin. There is no other reason that there is suffering in the universe except that it was introduced at the same time as sin. That's the first point.

So secondly, Jesus suffered to identify with, to enter into our suffering and to bring us to God. Sin separates us from God and suffering separated us from God. God in the heavenly realms is not associated in any way, shape or form with suffering.

This seems like an obvious point, but we don't always think about it. In the throne room of God, the seraphim, the burning coals, the cherubim, the holy, holy, holy, there is no picture of suffering in the heavenly realms, in the throne room. This is something that is on earth where sin has occurred.

When Satan fell, when he sinned, when he expressed rebellion toward God, he was cast out of heaven. His sin and the suffering that inevitably accompanies it went with him. No suffering in heaven because there is no sin in heaven.

So this creates this chasm, this uncrossable gulf between suffering and God. You have to look no further than Luke 16 to see this. In the afterlife, you have the picture of Lazarus.

You have the picture of the rich man. Lazarus is at peace in Abraham's bosom, in paradise where the angels have carried him. The rich man is in torment in a flame.

He is a picture of suffering. Where did that suffering come from? What sin sponsored the rich man's suffering? How does the story begin? He is faring sumptuously, eating fine dinners every day. Lazarus is at his gate.

Where is the sin? He has ignored the needs of his brother, his fellow Israelite in violation of God's exhortation and God's commands in the law of Moses to be sensitive and look out for the poor, the widow, the orphan. And this is a sin of omission. It is a sin of negligence.

It is a failure. He didn't go knock people in the head and leave them in the ditch like the man that is ministered to by the Good Samaritan. This is omission.

There was someone suffering at his gate and he did nothing about it. He had an opportunity to alleviate the suffering of Lazarus but it is left to the dogs to lick his sores. Because of this sin, unconfessed sin, unrepentant sin, in the afterlife, the rich man is pictured suffering.

I think that the details of that are in some ways metaphorical but it is certainly a picture of suffering. You can't get around that. He says, "Send Lazarus, dip his finger in water to cool my tongue.

"I am tormented in this flame." Suffering concomitant with sin. It does not say that Lazarus was a sinner or his parents were sinners and that's the reason he suffers at the gate. But the reason there is disease, the reason there is poverty, the reason there are circumstances of suffering in the world traces back to human sin.

Now, as a side note to point two, Jesus suffered to enter into our sufferings and to bring us to God and to bring us to the kingdom of God. Or possibly somewhere 0.1, 0.5, it's between 0.1 and 0.2. There are two broad categories or types of suffering. Those that are directly related to ongoing human sin, man's humanity to man, the insensitivity we've just described.

There are also what we term natural evils. People suffer due to disease, due to environmental factors that create everything from cancer to loss of life. The laws of physics create accidents.

There are natural disasters in the terms we see on the news, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, typhoons, and so on. And we say, well, who sinned? Were the people of Indonesia particularly sinful back when 260,000 people were killed in the typhoon close to 20 years ago? Was that just a rampant place of sin? When Haiti was ravaged by a hurricane, were the Haitians too much into voodoo and sin and so God sent a hurricane? No, these natural sources of suffering are in the world and they are direct causes of suffering. They are indirect reflections of human sin.

There is no notion of flood, hurricane, earthquake, pestilence, disease, and so on in the

garden prior to the fall. And we find that the whole creation groans waiting for the redemption of the sons of God. This is in Romans chapter eight.

Turn to Romans chapter eight. Paul, having suffered, has a great deal to say about suffering. The verse 18 and following, I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

The sufferings of this present time pale to insignificance at the glory which shall be revealed in us. The earnest expectation of creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. Why would creation be eagerly awaiting our culminating salvation? We are saved now, but we are not fully delivered.

We still are fallen creatures. We have fallen bodies. We live in a fallen world.

We are beset by the flesh and the devil, the minions of Satan, his influences in society, in culture, in other people, and our salvation is a process. It has a beginning and it has an end. You remember sometime back, we talked about how the coming of the Lord Jesus confuses people because they want to pick a day and say, this is the coming.

It is a process. The coming of the Lord Jesus, his parousia, his revelation begins with the rapture and extends through the appearance in the sky where he descends to the Mount of Olives. It splits.

Those who are still alive in the tribulation are delivered. And from that point, he sets up his 1,000-year millennial kingdom. 1,000-year millennial, that's repetitive.

They both mean the same thing. But it's a process. It has a beginning, it has progress, it has a culmination, and it has a result.

Our salvation has a beginning at the point of our faith. There is a process where we continue to be delivered out of this present evil age. We are delivered and continue to be delivered from our nature as God builds a new nature within us through his word and through his spirit.

It is a process of salvation. This is why I think it's a bit of an unfortunate question when people say, well, are you saved? Is he saved? I would like to answer that question if it is asked of me. I am in the process of being saved.

The process has begun because I have placed my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as my savior. And through him, I have been brought into relationship with God the Father. My salvation has begun, but it is not complete.

This is why creation in verse 20 of Romans 8 was subjected to futility. This is the suffering in creation. This is Hevel.

This is where trying to repair creation, trying to save the planet, trying to go green,

trying to fix the balance of chemicals and gases in our atmosphere, trying to repair glass beads that are going into the ocean. Creation has been subjected to futility. What does this mean? Creation reflects the effects of our sinfulness.

God has set creation up as a mirror to us. This is what happens when God is not running the show. There is a different God running this world.

God has allowed somebody else to be in charge of the world, the God of this world. Creation has been subjected to futility. Creation reflects the effects of sin.

This is why natural disasters occur. The victims of a natural disaster are no more or less sinful. Jesus talks about this.

Do you think that when the Tower of Siloam fell on those people, they were any more sinful than anyone else? Nevertheless, Jesus says, unless you repent, you will likewise perish. It isn't the victims of a disaster. It is not the victim of suffering that is the focus.

It is the fact of suffering that is the focus. Victims can often be random in the general sense, particularly in the realm of unbelievers and of faithlessness in believers. There can be slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, as Shakespeare put it, that are generally happenstance for unbelievers.

It's a different thing if they are unbelievers who are eventually going to be believers. God can work in advance in the lives of those who will come to faith. If God knows in his omniscience and his foreknowledge that someone is going to come to the point of repentance and faith, he can begin to work in our lives ahead of time.

He's not restricted to the after period of our faith. And many of us can look back in our lives and see that God was at work even before we realized that he was there and before we placed our faith in Christ. There are others that God knows, like Pharaoh, there is nothing that will convert them.

There is nothing that will bring them to the point of repentance. And God turns them over to other forces. Read the last half of Romans chapter one.

Those who suppress the truth, those who willingly refuse to come to God after he has revealed himself to them, God turns them over and is no longer active. And what happens to them isn't a part of God's plan and purpose. They have been turned over to other factors and other forces.

Much of their misery ends up being self-inflicted and that is the source and that is the reason. Back to Romans 8 20, creation is subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. The carnivorous nature that we see around us, the uncontrollable forces that produce disasters and produce hardship and suffering, famine, pestilence, loss of life, starving children, disease, all of these things that are beyond

human control are an expression of the presence of sin.

It is the reflection of the effects of sin, not looking at the victims per se, but the presence of these factors at all. Futility, subjection in hope, because looking at these, we say, what can be done? Can we do better earthquake planning and build stronger buildings? Can we put supplies in place so that when there is a hurricane or a typhoon, we can quickly come in? Can we somehow keep 260,000 people from drowning and dying and losing loved ones and so forth? We can't. We are forced to either accept that there are just slings and arrows of outrageous fortune beyond our control, or we can go to God and find hope because it will not always be this way.

And we will live again in a future world that is not subject to futility, that does not reflect the effect of sin because it is the new heavens. It is the new earth where righteousness is at home. We are in the process of preparing ourselves to live in that environment.

How would you like to be the Adam of the eternal future who reintroduces sin into a perfect environment? I don't wanna be that guy. I don't wanna have a whole new Bible written where there is the first Sam and there is the last Sam who, you know, whereas by one Sam sin entered the world and death by sin, death passes upon all. So how does God prevent this from reoccurring? What if somebody goofs and sin gets reintroduced in the future? That's why we have today, this is our inoculation.

This is our exposure. I know firsthand what sin is like. And I know firsthand both from personal experience and from observation, the kind of suffering that sin has brought into the world.

Every single instance of sin is a reflection that there's something broken. And every single instance of suffering reflects that presence of sin, every suffering. It doesn't matter if it's an earthquake.

It doesn't matter if it's psychological. It doesn't matter if it's physical. It doesn't matter if it's caused by nature or caused by human action and human failure.

It's the presence of suffering itself to which we are being constantly exposed. We experience it, we grieve over it in the lives of those close to us and those that we see around the world. And for the believer, it is an occasion of hope.

Our faith in God tells us that there is a coming day when this phase will be over. And the benefit, God working all things together for good is that the level of suffering we experience and the level of suffering that we observe and the kinds of suffering that we experience and see will forever prevent us. Anytime a wayward stray thought in the eternal future comes into our future self, well, what would it be like if I was running things? What if I could be like the most high? Oh no, been there, done that, got the old dead body to show for it.

No, no, no. Imagine God trying to explain to the unfallen creation when all three thirds of the angels were in glory with him. Nobody's ever seen a sin.

No one has ever seen the effects of sin. Gabriel, Michael, Ariel, all of the other named and unnamed angels that you can think of, myriads and myriads of angels. And God says, listen, you really need to stick with obedience.

You need to understand my righteousness and go with me, be submissive to my plans and my purposes because if you stray from this, if you go your own way, I've given you free will, but you just can't imagine how bad things will get. And they honestly couldn't. Angels in glory could not conceive, could not picture in their much greater minds, much larger power.

They could not imagine, couldn't picture, couldn't conceive of, hadn't entered into their hearts or minds how bad disconnecting from God could be. When it happened with Satan, and when he and one third of the angels are cast out of heaven and sent to a planet, God not only has the unfallen angels look at them, we can often be blind to our own failings and we can be insensitive to the effects and the results of our own decisions. We justify ourselves, we vindicate ourselves.

Well, that wasn't my fault. That wasn't my responsibility. That was God's fault.

If God hadn't put me in such a powerful position, I never would have decided that I could be like him. It's God's fault. And we don't learn from our own failures.

Often it has to be the failures of others, like that wonderful story that Nathan tells David about the poor man that has one sheep and his rich neighbor. The rich neighbor has a visitor who comes and he wants to slay a lamb for the visitor. And so he goes and takes the poor man's lamb and slays it.

And David says, find that man and bring him before me. He is going to be punished to the limits of the law. And Nathan says, you are the man, because he's talking about Bathsheba and he's talking about Uriah.

You are the man. It has to often be something outside of ourselves. This is why the Bible is replete with narrative, to teach us, to let us see objectively what we can then apply subjectively to ourselves.

So Satan and the fallen angels can't fully appreciate what they have done just from the effect of themselves. They'll just explain it away. Have you come to torment us before the time? No, human history is the demonstration.

Human history is the parable. Human history is the means by which God teaches both angels and humans the awful, horrific effects of sin. The primary expression of which is profound, deep, excruciating suffering.

So our point, suffering entered the human world as a result of sin. Jesus, this is the second point, suffered to enter into our sufferings and to bring us to God. Now, why does the Lord Jesus suffer as a part of our salvation, as a part of redemption and reconciliation and propitiation? The atonement requires a sacrifice that suffers death.

And over and over again in the New Testament, you see the work of the Lord Jesus pictured as suffering. He suffered once for all. It doesn't say he offered a beatific sacrifice in the glowing realms of glory, where he strode majestically to an altar, where he laid down, closed his eyes, dismissed his spirit, waited three days, the Holy Spirit comes and raises him and he majestically sits back up in his flowing robes of righteousness and says, it is finished.

Why suffering? There are two profound reasons for this that you can just deduce even before we look at the scriptures. First of all, humanity puts Jesus on the cross. It is sin rampant amongst the leadership of the people of God that sponsors the crucifixion.

There wouldn't be nails being pounded and crosses being erected if there weren't people responsible for this heinous form of death and those who drove Jesus into the arms of the Roman soldiers to be crucified. And they did it on purpose. Jesus raises Lazarus, they wanna kill him.

Jesus speaks truth to power and they wanna kill him. Jesus points out hypocrisy, points out arrogance and self-righteousness. Well, I can't look at myself and see those things, there's something wrong with Jesus.

And I'm tired of him talking that way, so let's end him. He's starting to sway the people and we're losing power and influence and we're jealous. And we feel like we're being undercut and undermined.

And these feelings of hatred and vituperation extend to the point of killing someone else. This is why hate is pictured as murder. Hating your brother is the same as murdering your brother in the same way that looking at a woman to lust after her is on the same level as adultery and fornication itself.

So that's one reason. It exposes us as the authors of suffering and execution, expressions of our sinfulness, but it does something else. One could perhaps imagine that, well, God doesn't know what it's like to be me.

God doesn't understand, even though he is exposing us and causing us to suffer and saying it's for our own good, he doesn't really know what this suffering entails. He hasn't been me, he hasn't experienced what I experienced, he's in glory. He's untouched, he's unruffled, he even in his divine omniscience hasn't experienced suffering, so how would he know? Well, that problem has been solved.

That argument has been eliminated because God himself has experienced what it is like

to be human. God himself has experienced what it is like to be ill treated at the hands of other people to the point of being murdered by them. He has suffered hunger and deprivation, rejection, depression, not only the physical suffering, but the mental anguish, the spiritual suffering that is often a part of our lives as the result of sin.

He has been personally attacked by Satan himself, in person, the strongest, most powerful, most intelligent, able to sway with both appeals to reason and appeals to emotion, which we've been seeing in Proverbs chapter three, Proverbs chapter two and chapter three, the perverse man and the immoral woman who ply the vulnerable with both appeals to nature and appeals to instinct and appeals to emotion and appeals to intellect. Jesus faced them from the master tempter. He knows what it is like to be us.

God has voluntarily entered into our suffering. And this becomes something that we now have in common. What would we have in common with God without this? Could say, well, in my best self, I could share with God a love of beauty, a love of those things expressed in the fruit of the spirit.

I love joy, I love peace. I admire those who are patient and those who are good, those who are generous and self-sacrificial. I admire these wonderful qualities.

We would have a shared enthusiasm with God for righteousness and its fruit, right? That's fair. Even unbelievers wish for a world that is characterized by peace and prosperity and everybody is happy. However, those who appreciate goodness and mercy and peace and prosperity and a lack of suffering and a lack of disease, you can appreciate those things and yet not be bonded to God.

Unbelievers, altruistic people who reject God or anything that reminds them of God are not drawn to God and bound to God by that shared appreciation for what is good. As we go to the break, think about this. To recognize that we also have in common shared suffering and a knowledge of the effects of sin and the need for sin to be eradicated and eliminated, this is an essential part of what binds us to God through Christ.

It is the suffering of Christ that brings us to God. And ties us eternally to God. Ponder as we go to the break.