

Philippians 10-03-26b

We pick up our study now, we're looking at the biblical information that is given to us related to suffering and God's relationship to it, whether he is aloof and uncaring, whether he is involved, whether he has any purpose or point in it. Because according to Dr. Bart Ehrman, God has a problem, his Bible fails to say anything about why we suffer, which to me is just astonishing that you can call yourself a biblical scholar and then claim that the Bible has somehow failed to answer your question. In fact, well, there are several problems I see with this title, not the least of which is, it says the Bible fails to answer our most important question, why we suffer.

Is your most important question why you suffer? Is that the most important question? If there was only one question you could ask God, is this the one you would pick? Why do I suffer? We have no clue, we're just left... Anyway, I think, you know, you have to say things to sell books. He claims God has a problem and that the Bible fails to answer our most important question. Well, we've already gone through a host of passages talking about, first of all, God permitting suffering, secondly, God sending suffering, thirdly, God teaching and refining through suffering, and fourth, God does one of two things when suffering comes.

Sometimes he delivers us out of suffering, other times he sustains us through suffering. In both cases, God is active. God is not passive in the suffering of believers.

He either sustains us through it or delivers us out of it. If you as a believer are suffering for any reason, discipline, blessing, refining, slings and arrows, unknown cause, you know, choice D, other, whatever it is, God is still active in any suffering for the believer. Notice I said for the believer, we'll get to gratuitous suffering of unbelievers shortly, but he's either going to deliver us out of it or sustain us through it.

Delivering us out of it, Genesis 31, 42, Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night. Remember what the context of that is? Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, doesn't say anything about Jacob, so who's talking? Well, turn to Genesis 31.

The situation here with Jacob and Laban and the two daughters and the seven years is where you generally are when you get to the early 30s in Genesis. This is 31, 42. He says, I've served all of this time and you've come down and you're looking for your household idols in my stuff and you haven't found them.

That which was torn by bees, in verse 39, I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or by night.

There I was, and the day the drought consumed me and the frost by night, my sleep departed from my eyes. Thus have I been in your house twenty years. I served you fourteen years for your

two daughters, six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times.

Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night. God saw Jacob through his time of hardship, his time of suffering.

He sustained him in it and blessed him in it. 2 Samuel chapter 22, verses 17-19. You'll remember we looked at this chapter in our 2 Samuel study and we returned to it in our study of Ecclesiastes.

This is the great psalm of thanksgiving that David spoke on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all of his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And in verses 17-19 of this praise song, he says, God sent from above and took me. He drew me out of many waters.

He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place.

He delivered me because he delighted in me. He delivered me because he delighted in me. This verse is anathema to your Calvinist.

God can't delight in you. You're hopeless, helpless and useless. You're totally depraved.

You don't have anything that God didn't give you. Why would God delight in you? He has to sovereignly do everything. But David says, the reason God delivered me is because he delighted in me.

Why would God delight in David? Because David is a man after God's own heart. David has maintained his faithfulness and his obedience and his focus on God. And God delights in that.

And God says, you have learned. You've been refined. This has benefited you and now we're done.

I'm delivering you through it and out of it. He's delivered from this suffering. Jacob is delivered out of Laban's hand.

He suffers all along, but he leaves and he comes out and he has all those flocks and herds and wives and sons. David is delivered out from the hand of his enemies. 2 Chronicles 30 9 If you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land.

For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn his face from you if you return to him. I don't know how much clearer the Bible can make it over and over and over again. I constantly run into the errors of Reformed theology.

The dumbing down of the plan and purpose of God into a simple scratching of grooves into the rock and the predetermined path of things along those grooves and the sovereign omnipotence of God. When God has ordained free will, he created free will and he holds us accountable for its exercise. The Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn his face from you if he so decrees, if he so ordains, if he feels like it.

No, if you return to him. It's up to you. You can return or you cannot return.

The Lord will be gracious and merciful and will not turn his face from you if you return. If you don't return, he will turn his face from you. Your iniquities, say this verse with me, Your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear.

Your sins have hidden his face from you. Well, the sovereign, omnipotent face of God is all powerful. His face can't be hidden by anything I do.

This would be the logic of the Calvinists. The Bible says you can sin in a way that will obscure the shining, glorious face of God from you. And you can deafen God's ear.

God's all-hearing. The arm of the Lord is not short that it cannot save. His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear.

What has caused God to become deaf? It's not getting hard of hearing on God's part. It is your iniquities. You choose and you deafen God.

You choose and you darken God. You choose and you eliminate God's righteous right hand sustaining and delivering up. We choose and God acts accordingly.

The Bible is replete with references to this. It makes me so cotton-picking frustrated every time I get next to Calvinists who blind themselves to the obvious testimony of Scripture on this point. We choose and many times we make these choices in the face of suffering.

We are disciplined because we, like sheep, have gone astray and we get the knock on the head with the shepherd's staff. We get the hook. We get the shepherd's crook pulling us back in the direction.

God holds out His hands to us. He appeals. He disciplines.

He does whatever it takes to put us in the position to repent. But it is up to us. He will be gracious and merciful and will not turn His face from us if we return to Him.

2 Chronicles 30 verse 9 There is a great comforting verse in Psalm 30 verse 5 that you have heard before. His anger is but for a moment. His favor is for life.

God's anger is but for a moment. God's favor, God's grace is for life. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

It's a great old gospel song. Joy comes in the morning. I sing that thing all the time.

Psalm 34 verse 19 and 20 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers Him out of them all. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. You can stop and ponder on that for 20 or 30 minutes.

What? I thought if I was righteous, I would be blessed. I thought that was the way to have a happy, productive, and fruitful life, is to be righteous. Righteousness comes by faith.

Faith cometh by hearing. Hearing by the word of God. I get in Bible class and study and meditate and do all the things I'm supposed to do.

And here the Bible comes back and says, Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Well, that doesn't sound like a good deal. My whole point in doing agonizing Bible classes week after week was to get out of affliction.

Now I find out that the more righteous I get, the more afflicted I become. Many are the afflictions of the... It doesn't say few are the afflictions. Wouldn't that be a great song? Few are the afflictions of the righteous.

What a motivator. Let's get righteous. Rid of the afflictions.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers Him out of them all. He guards all His bones. Not one of them is broken.

We may stumble, but not so as to fall. We suffer, but we are bent, but not broken. We are crushed, but not powdered.

We are afflicted, but we're not destroyed. God guards our bones. It's that same principle we saw in Job.

He sets a limit. There is affliction, but we are not tested above what we are able to bear. Never tested above what we're able to bear.

I think one of the most profound learning experiences I ever had was going off to my initial year at a service academy and being pushed physically to places that I was sure I could not go. You're running with a group of your peers through the obstacle course or some distance, or you're having to swim, or you're having to do some other thing, and every fiber, every individual cell of my being was communicating to my brain, you can't make another move. Not one more step, not one more stroke, not one more foot of progress.

I'm done. I'm on fire. I'm nothing but a seething mass of lactic acid.

It's over. Stop. Quit.

And yet, amazingly, my feet kept moving. My arms kept flailing. I was able to do things I was sure I could not do.

And I learned at that point to mistrust the evidence of my senses telling me what I could not do. Because I discovered regularly I could do things that I couldn't do. And I thought, you know what, my idea of what I can't do is flawed.

I'm being deceived. My muscles, and there's a part of my mind, is telling me lies. I've got a lying conscience.

I've got lies and information coming to me that are false. So I began to disbelieve that stuff. I was sure I was going to drown during the swimming stuff.

I was sure I was going to be clocked and knocked cold in boxing. I was sure any number of ways I would be destroyed and humiliated and sent home with my civilian clothes trailing out the back of a badly packed suitcase. I was just sure that it was all over.

And it wasn't. The Lord delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones.

And what we have to learn is the same type of lesson in the spiritual realm. We're not bleeding, typically. We're not imprisoned.

We're not thrown to the lions. We're not put to the sword. Our suffering can be very severe, very grinding, very painful.

Especially suffering of long duration. Things that we know, you know, this isn't going to go away anytime soon. Bereavement is of that nature.

There are certain things that come along, and it is a heavy, grinding burden. It's a tough, tough challenge. However, we need to train ourselves to recognize that the evidence of our flesh telling us, I can't endure this suffering anymore, I can't sustain this pain anymore, I can't go forward anymore, is a big, fat lie.

We can go forward. Why? We need to retrain ourselves with fresh information. My fresh information came from experience.

I looked around and discovered that the body telling me that I couldn't go any further was magically going further. I said, hey, wait a minute. It told me I couldn't go any further.

Look, I've gone another half a mile. What are you talking about? And I learned to put fresh information so that the next time I was sure I couldn't go any further, I thought, well, you know,

last time I thought I couldn't go any further, I did. And look, I'm still moving.

We need to do the same thing spiritually. God tells us. He will deliver us.

He guards our bones. None of our bones are going to be broken. We will not be tested above what we're able to bear.

So guess what? If you're being tested, whatever the test, you can bear it. You would not have that test if you could not bear it. The Bible makes a flat declarative statement.

We are never tested beyond what we're able to bear. Never, ever. God knows our limits.

And if we have a test, we can bear it. Every test we've ever had, we're still here to talk about it, aren't we? So we have to believe the word of God on this score with regard to suffering. Psalm 37, 32 through 33 talks about the audience surrounding us as we go through these tests.

The wicked watches the righteous and seeks to slay him. The Lord will not leave him in his hand nor condemn him when he is judged. Now, that's an interesting statement.

The Lord will not condemn him when he is judged. What is the judgment? The judgment is the evaluation. And the result of the evaluation is not condemnation.

You're weighed in the balance and found not wanting. Why? Who are we talking about? The righteous. The righteous is going to have many afflictions, but the Lord will not leave him in the hand the power of the enemy.

I had an interesting question over the phone this week from somebody listening to Dr. Criswell talking about Revelation. And I have read everything ever written in the history of mankind on the book of Revelation. There's nothing I have not read.

There's nothing I have not seen, it seems. But this guy floated an idea that I have never come across in all of my vast travels. He called up and he said, I've got a problem with what Dr. Criswell says about this particular part of Revelation because, I think it's in chapter 8, 8 is where the writers come out.

Anyway, it's the part where God says, who can open the scroll? And everybody is weeping, crying in the blues because nobody can open the scroll. There's none found worthy. And then, here's the Lamb, and He's worthy.

And He takes the scroll from God's hand. There's a scroll in God's hand and Jesus Christ takes it and He begins to break those seals. And then you have the seals and you have the trumpets and you have the bold judgments that follow.

And he said, Dr. Criswell said that nobody has ever seen God, nobody ever will see God. You see the Lord Jesus, but you're never going to see God. So, how did John see the hand holding

the scroll? And it never occurred to me that the anthropomorphism in that particular vision would cause anyone to stumble.

But I spent 20 minutes on the phone talking about, remember the elders that went up Mount Sinai? I was just trying to extemporaneously remember something that would be helpful to them. And I said, well, you know, the Bible says no man has seen God at any time and yet, you remember the parents of Samson when his birth was announced and they said, we've seen God, we're going to die. And he said, no you won't.

And the elders of Israel that went halfway up Mount Sinai and ate a meal in the presence of God, the glassy sea, they saw God and did not die. Moses came down with a glowing face, he saw the back part of God, he did not die. Anyway, I went on and on.

But the point is, that here it says, the Lord will not leave him in his hand. And I was explaining to the gentleman on the phone that the highly symbolic language of Revelation, when it says that the Lord Jesus takes this scroll from the hand of God, the hand represents something. I seriously doubt that God's got a great big five fingered hand and that this is a literal scroll.

You start getting into problems when you try to literalize these things. What heavenly sheep was killed, skinned and tanned to make this scroll? Where did the ink horn come from? Was it written with a quill? What heavenly goose donated this quill? Hand represents power and you can see it very clearly here. The Lord will not leave the righteous in the power of, under the sway of, the evil, the enemy, the wicked.

He will not condemn him when he is judged. Notice, you can be in the power, you can be in the hand of the wicked. That's part of the suffering.

And we look around and we say, why am I under the influence, why am I suffering at the hand of this clearly unrighteous person? Well, you're there, but two things are stated in this verse. A, God's not going to leave you under that power. And B, if you're righteous, when you're judged for your behavior, while you were in the power of the wicked, God is not going to condemn.

He will find you without fault. You will not be coming under condemnation. If you're righteous and you persist in righteousness while you're in the hand of the wicked, this is what the Lord Jesus did during his arrest, trial, crucifixion, then when you're judged, you will not be condemned.

So these are the things that we have to feed into the equation. Here's the thing. We're talking about Ahriman, we're talking about challenges, we're talking about suffering, all this.

But if you think about the concept of suffering, there are really two questions that matter to us. One much more than the other. The less important question is, how do I respond when somebody says it's just a totally unfair situation? If there were a God, if your God actually existed, and I don't believe he does, it would just be totally illogical because of suffering.

It would be nice for us to have a cogent answer to that challenge. Be ready always to give an answer for your hope. That's the less important.

The really important question is, why am I or why are those near me suffering? And what, if anything, should I do about it? Isn't that really the question? We encounter hard times, really hard times. Painful, stinging, bring tears to your eyes hard times. Painful, painful things.

What is our response? If we're making any effort at all to live in a way that pleases God, what is our response? Well, these scriptural statements, these truths, these realities communicated to us from God in heaven are what we have to reach out and grab hold of. We cannot rationalize. We can't just say, well, they'll be pie in the sky, by and by, every cloud has a silver lining.

Count it all, joy, brother. Some sort of just mindless, sort of numb survival. That's not why we're here.

We're not here to numbly, dumbly suffer and survive. But a lot of us do. But that's not the path of righteousness.

Righteousness doesn't come from surviving. Righteousness comes from faithing, from trusting, from believing and intelligently coping with and navigating a conscious course through suffering. Anybody can just shut their eyes, put their fingers in their ears and wait till the thunderstorm is over.

Any rank unbeliever can get through horrible suffering. They get no credit. Why? And we as believers, if we just come out on the other side of suffering, that's not creditable.

That's not something that God is going to look at and be pleased. What pleases Him? We think our way through it. We doctrine our way through it.

We figure out what's going on based on the clues of circumstance and the statements of the Word of God. This is the only way. What's really bad is to suffer and it not accomplish anything.

It reminds me of when Elizabeth had to go to the hospital with acute appendicitis and they were fixing to do an appendectomy. And you know that deal where they stick that thing in the vein of your hand and put the little plastic socket on there so that they can attach all manner of tubes and they just do it one time. They tape that thing to your hand.

You've seen those things. Well, she was a little tiny person. She had little tiny veins.

She was small. And this person trying to attach one of these adult sized plastic put the tube on it things couldn't get it there and tried four or five times inflicting incredible screaming pain on a child that's got acute appendicitis and is already suffering enough without some ham-fisted ne'er-do-well chopping the back of her hand all up and internal bleeding. It was horrifying.

Elizabeth, with full reason and right, was pretty much screaming at the time. It made her forget all about the appendix. Well, if they just gave up and said you know, we can't get the thing in.

We can't attach the tubes. Goodbye, we're just sending you home. That would be meaningless, pointless suffering.

And what a tragedy to go through all that and get no happy result. Thankfully, somebody who had more experience was able to come in, find a better way of doing it and get it done. Everything proceeded.

But, you know, the mangling of the first five or six attempts was largely unhelpful and pointless. I don't want to go through suffering of that nature where I just get pain inflicted on me and it doesn't do anybody any good. And ultimately, and finally, whether or not you believe Ahriman, whether or not God's got a problem, whether or not there's theodicy, whether or not anybody in Ethiopia is suffering to no purpose, what really boils down to is my suffering, I know about my suffering.

You know about your suffering. You know about your challenges, your pain, your tests, your hard times. And the real burning question, the most important question is what do I do? And the outcome is going to be one of two things.

It's either going to be suffering that ends up being worked together for good, suffering that has a benefit, suffering that ends up with a good that outweighs the bad. It's going to end up, by comparison, being a momentary light affliction. Or, it is going to be gratuitous.

I just went through all that trouble for nothing. It did no good. And this gets to the answer to the question that was raised last week.

And we'll see some scripture for it here in a minute. But is there gratuitous suffering, purposeless suffering that does no good? People dying horribly in foreign countries under great oppression, brutally tortured and killed, and it accomplishes nothing. It isn't woven into any part of the productive side of God's plan and purpose.

Yes, it absolutely happens. And it shouldn't throw people for a loop. I'm astonished that Dr. Ehrman can't figure out why that happens.

Why does it happen? Why does it happen? How did we introduce our study tonight? There is sin in the world. Why does everybody shrivel up and get decrepit, disintegrate and die if you don't get hit by a truck ahead of time? Why? It is an inevitable concomitant of separation from God. When your iniquities separate between you and your God as a believer, and your sins hide His face from you, that's more than God no longer hearing, and God no longer helping, and God no longer seeing.

Any separation between us and God is an entrance into the vacuum of everything that is not God.

There is no good. There is no good where there is no God.

And if we are separated, if we allow iniquities to separate us from God... We used to get the old stuff about you're out of fellowship, you need to claim 1 John 1.9, and it was understood by some to be kind of a mechanical thing. I'm in fellowship, I sin, I'm out of fellowship, I confess, I'm in fellowship, I sin, I'm out of fellowship, I confess, I confess, I'm in fellowship, I'm just flipping the switch back and forth, in fellowship, out of fellowship. That perspective really misses a big point.

If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship. And in that fellowship, we gain all the benefits of connection with God. God is light, God is life, God is righteous, God is health, God is energy, God is everything positive you can think of, and maintaining a connection with Him.

Fellowship is not just, I haven't sinned lately. Fellowship is the necessary connection like a child in the womb has with its mother. Everything comes through that umbilical cord.

You cut that cord and your life is going to be measured in seconds. To be cut off from our heart, to be cut off from our brain, is to die almost instantly. Every part of your body, did you ever wonder, I've wondered about this, and I hope I don't sound too weird, I mean you probably already think I'm weird for looking at old people and wondering what they were like when they were young, but here's my question.

If a masked gunman came in here, pulled out a .45 and shot me through the heart right now, and my heart stopped pumping for obvious reasons, some kind of way, the cells in my fingertips and behind my kneecap and in my shoulder and everywhere else in my body, suffer for the fact that my heart got punctured and quit. And it's pretty quick. You die faster than you think you would.

Here's what I remember, obviously circulation stops, but why does it happen so quickly? You think, well, can the cell, is it literally just a matter of seconds without blood flow in the cell, all of the protoplasm and all the little mechanisms and machinery and everything in there, it's all going to shut down? Why can I not? There was a girl they showed the other night on the news that was in a boating accident and the propeller whacked through her arm, did you see that? The x-rays and the bones were just like this and they miraculously, but the reason was there was a nursing student on the boat with her who knew what to do. Applied a tourniquet, cooled the limb, got her to the doctor quick, and because they cooled the limb, the limb didn't know that all the arteries had been severed, nearly all the nerves had been severed, most of the connective tissue and muscle and everything and bone had all been severed, but the limb didn't know it because it was cooled, and a couple of hours later they reattached the thing and now she's painting and doing all kinds of, she's nearly normal with the hand, it's miraculous. But here's my point, there's a connection there, and you think, well, if you could just cool an entire body off, I get shot through the heart, so grab some ice, cool me down, take me to the hospital, take out the pierced heart, sew in a jarvik heart or a pig heart or a replacement human heart, and get the paddles and start me back up.

Why does it not work? They talk about evolution and how, oh, you know, if you just have the right chemicals in the soup, it will turn into a cell and it will divide and it will become, you know, from the goo to multicellular life and all this. Look, you take a completely formed person, they've already got all the cells, all the advanced systems, all the chemicals, everything is there, and, you know, drain out the blood, put in fresh, take out the pierced heart, put in a fresh one, sew it all together, try to do the Frankenstein thing, it never comes back to life. Life leaves.

There is a connection there. And when life leaves, you're done. You can't undo the death.

You can't take, you know, reanimating. The only person that's ever done that is the Lord Jesus. Lazarus coming out of the tomb after four days, this is why it's classed as a miracle.

It doesn't happen. Cutting you off from your brain, if you sever your head, your body is going to die very quickly. I mean, I would think it would take my foot like three or four hours to know that my brain was gone.

And yet, you know, the heart stops and everything shuts down because the connection is severed. Losing fellowship with God. We need to understand how critical connection with God is.

Why is it that in eternity we're in the presence of God? Why do we die on this earth? Where is God not? Like he was in the garden. Why did Adam and Eve begin to die when they got kicked out of the garden? Where God would spend time. Contact with God.

Connection with God. He is life. He is light.

Fellowship is a lot more than a status of some sort of a ledger book. It is a vital, necessary connection. If our choices keep us separated from God.

As unbelievers, if we never choose to connect to God, it is inevitable that we will die. Die the first death. Die the second death.

Die the ultimate death. Die, die, die. You cannot exist.

Satan and his angels, we want to go off and do our own thing. You can't. That's what this human life and human history demonstrate.

You cannot function. Why is there death? Angels don't appear to die. Is there anything in the Bible that says any angel has ever died? I see nothing to that effect.

I think for the angels it was a shocker when the first human death occurred. Animals had perhaps been dying outside of the garden. I think they had been tinkering, doing their robot wars with the animals.

The angels had been for a long time. But sentient life is a whole different thing. And when Abel

was slain, I think there was just, you talk about front page news, whatever passes for the internet or newspapers or whatever in the angelic world, every angel in God's created universe had to come.

And this is why God told Cain, your brother's blood cries from the ground. Every sentient creature in the universe knows what you just did. And that your brother's been slain.

There's not a creature in the universe that isn't looking at that bloodstained ground. His connection with life was severed. And the angels and mankind began to get a grasp of what it means to be separated from God.

The angels hadn't gotten there yet. They'd been sentenced, but the sentence had not been carried out. What does it mean to actually be separated from God? Look at what had been a living, vital, beautiful human being as dead as any animal.

Cut off from life. And it communicates. And this is what God built in.

People say, listen to Hitchens and some of these others talk about the Levitical sacrificial system and this bloody Old Testament Israelite God with all of these bloodbaths. Why is death so central in the Levitical sacrificial system? Every celebration you're killing animals right and left. Why? It is a reminder that you are worshipping and fellowshiping with the God who keeps that from happening to you.

Something else died. Death has been removed. Death has been relieved.

Animals die. We don't die. Sin and the nature of temporary flesh passes away.

Eternal life is possible, is offered, is a gift from God. It's the most powerful way to communicate that truth. That's why there's suffering.

That's why there's death. That's why it's as awful as it could possibly be. And you can see the most heinous, shocking, troubling instances of suffering and death in the world.

Why? Because that is the dark relief against which the bright light of life and salvation and the presence of God and fellowship and connection with God is set. We could never fully appreciate that if we didn't see the alternative. And as ugly as it is, and as painful as it is, it does make that point.

And the uglier and more heinous and shocking and awful and incomprehensibly bad suffering and death are, the more distance is placed between what Satan and those angels and every unbeliever chooses and what God has given to us through Jesus Christ. And it is the biggest irony of the universe that in dying, Jesus Christ secured life for us. It is an analogy.

It's a symbol of what God has done in all of history. It is in allowing, permitting, and even causing

death that God makes life such a valued and appreciated thing. And for all of eternity future, every one of God's creations is going to remember that lesson.

It will never have to be done again. Just like the cross. Those who crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame, He died once.

The sacrifices in Hebrews goes on for a chapter and a half about how the sacrifices, yearly by yearly, had to be repeated and repeated because there is no sacrifice that could take away sins. But what could not be done through the law, Christ did in dying once. Once for all.

And in a larger sense, this human experiment, this human demonstration is a once for all. In the context of eternity, it's like the 30 years of Jesus' life. It's like the 3 years of His ministry.

It's like the 3 hours on the cross. It's a momentary thing. It seems huge because we're so small and it's so large in comparison to us.

But in the scope of eternity, this is a comprehensible thing. So, that's what the Bible is trying to show us over and over and over again. Why God delivers from suffering? He couldn't deliver us if He didn't first allow it or cause it or bring it.

And when He delivers, He works it together for good. Psalm 112, unto the upright there arises light in the darkness. It's one thing if you've always had light and you've never seen the dark.

It's something else if you're in the darkness and those who sit in darkness have seen a great light. Remember that great Christmastime passage? Those sitting in darkness have seen a great light. And appreciation, there's nobody that appreciates freedom like a former slave.

There's nobody that appreciates sight like someone who had lost it. And there's nobody who appreciates life like those who started in death and started in darkness and have been given it through the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness.

He is gracious and full of compassion and righteous. Even in allowing the darkness, it enables Him to send the light. And in doing that, He is gracious, full of compassion and righteous.

Psalm 146, verse 7, God executes justice for the oppressed. He gives food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord raises those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers. He relieves the fatherless and widow. But the way of the wicked, He turns upside down.

He makes just the reverse. He makes just the opposite. Colloquially speaking, that's what it's

saying.

And how much do those people appreciate the grace of God if they have been fatherless, if they have been widowed, if they have been a stranger in a strange place, to appreciate the compassion and the grace of God? Well, there are many, many other passages. Isaiah 25, verse 4. We've seen this already in our Sunday study. You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat.

For the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Nothing makes you appreciate your nice weather-tight house like a great big barreling storm outside. Big sleeting, hailing, snowing, nasty winter storm outside.

You're safe, warm and dry inside. You say, I love this house. I love this technology.

I love this electricity. I love this gas fire. Instant, turn a crank, put them in a match, instant fire.

I love this stuff. Every single time I step into a hot shower, I am as amazed as the first guy that ever stood under one. You turn a thing on the wall and fresh, clean hot water rains down on you endlessly.

It is the hugest, biggest gift. You think about the cowboys. You think about people just 120 years ago who had to wait a week to get into somebody else's lukewarm, dirty bath water.

You think about people trying to commune and pass each other in the street and why they wore all those heavy clothes. They were just trying to muffle the smell for the week until they could get into the bath. Why did they have Saturday night bath? Go to church on Sunday.

Hopefully you won't see anybody you know for another week. Hot showers are just the greatest thing. If you've ever been in the field, if you've ever slept in a muddy hole all night, if you've gone for days and days, how much do you appreciate that shower? There's never a time, not one, that I've ever stepped into a hot shower that I just didn't want to practically get down on my knees and thank God.

I've heaped blessings on whoever invented all of that technology. You appreciate what you have done without in a way that nobody else possibly could. This is a big part of the perspective on theodicy.

How could we possibly appreciate God for who He is if we did not see Him in contrast with that which is not God and all of the lack and all of the loss and all of the horrendous evil that is consequent when God is rejected, when God is not there. To me, it utterly answers, refutes, rebuts, contradicts, confounds, crushes, powders, pulverizes, buries this kind of objection, Ehrman's objection. God's got a problem.

He hasn't explained suffering. What Bible are you reading? Where have you been that you can't

see? I haven't touched I've probably not covered 2% of the verses I've got listed here that talk about suffering and what God is doing in suffering. And to claim that you're a Bible scholar and overlook hundreds of verses there are easily 600 verses in my list here on the subject of suffering out of the word of God.

There is none so blind as he who will not see. That's all I can say. We'll look at a little bit more of this next week, but we will finish our biblical perspective on suffering in the first session next time.

Somebody make a note of what I'm saying so I'll remember to do what I say. We'll finish our biblical perspective on suffering in the first session. In the second session next week we're going to return to Ehrman's book because he's got a very interesting challenge about vicarious suffering.

People mock and deride the idea that God would accept substitutionary atonement and that there could be any biblical concept of the suffering servant. They say that the Jews never believed there was any such thing as a individual who could suffer on behalf of the nation. This is a later Christian interpretation pushed back into Isaiah.

These two things are both important to understand for two reasons. One is because these arguments are without merit. Secondly, it is very important for us personally as we go through suffering to understand why the Lord Jesus suffered why he was able to suffer because there are verses that talk about us and Matthew coincidentally pointed one of them out in Philippians where Paul says it has been given to us both not only to believe but also to suffer for his namesake.

It is a privilege. It is a gift. It is a gift that we are given if we are righteous if we have the same attitude that Paul had.

It has been given to you also not only to be a believer but you can enter into this great privilege of sharing the sufferings of Christ. I thought the sufferings of Christ were paying for sin. How can I enter into that? That is what we are going to look at in the second session next week.

It is very fascinating to me to get a grip on our sharing Christ's suffering. It is something you don't hear a lot about. We will close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the great light that it sheds on this subject. The confidence and the comfort that it imparts to us.

The perspective that it gives to us. The strength that we gain from knowing your word and from having the presence of the Holy Spirit to enable us help us not only to understand but also to apply it and to implement it in our lives. We pray that as we do so the Lord Jesus will be glorified we will grow in grace and knowledge we will be equipped for good works both now and in the ages to come and in all things your glory will be reflected in and through us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.