

The Blessing for Suffering

A story in the book *Bits and Pieces* told 'about Jack's mother who ran into the bedroom when she heard him scream and found his two-year-old sister pulling his hair. She gently released the little girl's grip and said comfortingly to Jack, "There, there. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts". Mom was barely out of the room when the little girl screamed. Rushing back in, she said, "What happened?" "She knows now", little Jack explained.'

Well, seems that both a brother and sister learned something about suffering! Hopefully, that lesson was a blessing. The lesson being that suffering, or inflicting suffering on another person is painful, and because we know that, we should without thinking seek to minimize other's and our own suffering. The opposite, to actually take pleasure in other people's pain, is sheer evil. Since we're seeing so much of that these days, by many in government to those who live in our own cities near and far, we must conclude that great evil is afoot all over our land, and the world.

Causing suffering is evil. If we cause ourselves to suffer by sinning, doing wrong things, then, as Peter tells us, that is not good at all. It's bad for you and certainly bad for others who see you, for in their sight, the Gospel of our Lord will be discredited. But he says in I Peter 1:14: "if you suffer for doing what is right,

God will reward you for it". For there is a reward in right suffering. There is a blessing for suffering. If we live on earth, then we will all necessarily suffer at times in our lives. Some is "good" suffering; some is bad suffering that we caused ourselves. We should avoid that kind of suffering at all costs. Not because it causes us suffering, but because it gives God a bad name in the sight of others. And that is a very bad thing indeed. Because it is an absolute lie. For God is good, perfectly good in every way. And for us to do anything, anything at all, that besmirches His name, that casts aspersions on His character, well, that is among the worst things we could do, and which cause Him the greatest pain. It is practically akin to that little sister pulling her brother's hair!

So suffering of various kinds is inevitable in this life. Yet, do we not spend an inordinate amount of time, energy and money to avoid as much suffering as possible? Consider how much money we spend on pain relievers. Physical pain is unpleasant. That's why it's called pain. But our bodies sense pain because it protects us. We touch a hot stove burner once in our lives, and usually never again! We learn a valuable lesson. Touching a hot stove, even though the burner is so pretty, glowing orange, causes damage to our bodies; therefore, after experiencing the pain one time, we know from thence never to touch a hot burner again, only to look at it from a good distance, if we're so inclined.

But we've all experienced many other kinds of suffering. Mental and emotional anguish are often among the worst. We try

to alleviate these, too, by going to sessions with therapists, with drugs, with stress-relieving spas. We innately want to both feel good about ourselves, and experience no physical pains either. But aside from these, there are things that many of us experience as suffering, when, in reality, they're only true suffering because our attitude regarding them is askew, tainted, or perverted. Such sufferings can be alleviated by a simple attitude adjustment. Indeed, most sufferings can be lessened to some degree simply by changing the way we think of them. Why Peter, in teaching about suffering here in his first letter, wastes no time to remind us that the Person Who suffered the greatest suffering in this world for all of time and history was none other than Christ Jesus our Savior. He suffered as a human being as we all do for all the years He was growing up before He began His ministry and went to the Cross. Indeed, it was because He suffered that ultimate, unimaginable sacrifice in Gethsemane and on the Cross that He became qualified to become the Savior of all the world and the multiverse.

So, if Christ Jesus had to suffer to fulfill His assignment to rescue the entire universe from the rampaging cancer of evil death aiming to swallow all of creation in permanent demise, all to spite God Who had so painstakingly made it, and furthermore, if part of Christ's assignment was to reveal to us the very heart of God's love for us, and if His loving us required such immense suffering on His part, and if the highest goal in all of existence is to draw ever closer to the very Source of Life, Love and Truth, in or-

der for us to escape the clutches of death and instead live eternally with our Gracious, Gentle Creator, to become more and more like Him, as the family resemblance becomes clearer and plainer, then, does it not follow that we are not just *to* become, but indeed *strive to* become ever more like our Savior God in every way? If, as Christians, which means “little christs”, we’re to become like Him in every way, and live on this earth as His ambassadors, to use our denomination’s emblematic designation, then if He suffered, then should we not suffer also? If He suffered in order to bring forth great glory and righteousness, indeed restoration and resurrection *from* the dead to life eternal, then we, too, must suffer from time to time, sometimes many times, in this life.

Did not our Lord Himself warn us ahead of time in Matthew 5:10-12 teaching us: “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are My followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way”. In short, persecution, in some form or another, is just one kind of suffering, and should really be inevitable for us as Christians at least periodically in our lives.

But in many ways those of us who grew up in an America that identified as a Christian nation, were “spoiled”. We had it so easy. Within our borders, hardly anyone ever questioned our

faith. Indeed, it was simply expected that a person was a member of one church or another, and faithfully attended worship services on Sundays. Remember the days of the blue laws, when all truly non-essential places of business were closed on Sundays, so as to not interfere with the general public's observance of worship to Almighty God on the Lord's Day? Many of us can ask, "where have those days gone?" We had a, more or less, Christian culture in this land for hundreds of years.

But just take a brief look around and we now see the exact opposite. Now the "mainstream" public face of the country, as presented by the current, illegal, unelected administration, is anti-Christian. Decidedly so. For example, we have a crisis on our southern border. But for the current administration, for the vast majority of democrats and corrupt republicans, it's no crisis at all. They are so deceived and manipulated by evil spirits, they either think what they're doing is good, or they know it's bad and they enjoy being evil. In either case, our border "crisis" is all on purpose, so that officials can get their massive payoffs, launder their illicit gains and live their lives of luxury and licentious lusts. Just about every word that proceeds out of their mouths are lies, and every action undertaken by their bodies are sins. Abominable sins. We who are Christians would be wise to disbelieve everything we see and hear from our so-called leaders. As I've said many times before, and as the Bible tells us that we must discern what we're exposed to, in the words of John, in I John 4:1: "do not

believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world". I say, do not even use the terminology of the world. Always speak the truth, God's truth, God's word, the Holy Bible, but kindly, in love. For we are to love all people, but expose them to the truth of God and His goodness, His gentleness, and His offer of salvation to correct us and reorient us back onto the path that leads to glorious, eternal life with Him in heaven.

When we hear of the unimaginable evils increasing all over the world, we may want to throw up our hands in despair and give up. Or when we or our loved ones are struggling in the midst of oppressive sins or seemingly endless physical infirmity, we may want to cease praying, thinking, "what's the use?" But doing so plays right into the devil's hands. That's exactly what he wants us to feel. He wants us to give up, because with each one of us he gets to lay down our arms, our prayers, it's just that much easier for him to make us and those around us ever more miserable. This we must not do! As Christ Jesus so often asked, "Will He find faith on the earth?", each of us must stand up and declare, regardless of whether our emotions are trying to betray us, just like the man in Mark 9:24, who said, "I do believe! Help my unbelief!" (CSB) For that's all that's needed. We pray, even for help to pray. And He delights in answering us, in the perfect way, at the perfect time. For God loves you and those around you. He truly does. You can bank on it! He guarantees it!!

