

## ***“Born for This: Born to Suffer”***

*Matthew 27:27-44*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX  
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 30, 2014

Life is hard. Anybody ever noticed that? And it seems to involve a lot of pain and suffering. All of us face difficult times in life. Maybe there’s an illness or the loss of a loved one. Maybe a friend or family member who has hurt us. Christmas time can be especially difficult for some people. During what we might call the season of joy, some people experience the opposite – grief and depression.

Even if things are going fine in your personal life, all you have to do is turn on the TV or open the newspaper to discover that there is plenty of suffering in our world. There are riots in Missouri, violence in the middle east and the Ukraine. Nearly half of the children in the world live in poverty.

Some people look at all this suffering and say, “How can there be an all-powerful, loving God with so much suffering in the world? It’s not fair. What kind of God would allow that?” Many people see pain and suffering as evidence that there is no God. I would argue that it’s just the opposite.

Could God have created a world where there is no pain or suffering? Of course. In fact, most of the universe is free from suffering. Because most of the universe is made up of minerals and empty space. But the ability to feel and understand pain is part of what it means to be human. Pain is what teaches us not to touch the hot stove. In addition, the very idea that suffering is unfair points us to a good God. If there is no transcendent God then people don’t matter. But because we believe that each person is made in the image of God and loved by Him, that means we believe that each person matters. So when we see people suffering we are moved to compassion.

We cannot know why God allows so much suffering in the world, but we do know that sometimes pain is for our own good. Surgery is usually quite painful. But sometimes it’s what’s best for us. I’m not saying that all pain is beneficial. Obviously it’s not. But pain is also

not necessarily evil. God allows pain in our lives in order to help our faith.

There was a large study done several years ago that involved thousands of participants. They asked people when they felt their faith grew the most. Do you know what the number one answer was? Sadly, it wasn’t worship. It wasn’t during Bible studies. It wasn’t even in serving others. People said they grew more during times of pain or crisis than any other time. So when the elders meet this week we will be talking about how we can increase your suffering.

The reason that suffering can help us grow in our faith is because we believe in a God who suffered. Tim Keller writes, “Christianity is the only religious faith that says God himself actually suffered, actually cried out in suffering.” In today’s passage we learn how much Jesus suffered leading up to his crucifixion.

The first way we see that Jesus suffered was physical pain. He was already in pain by this time. He had been beaten when he was before the Jewish council. Now it’s the Roman soldiers’ turn. They began with the scourge, which was a beating with leather cords that usually had bits of metal or bone in the end. Then they put a crown of thorns on his head, spit on him, beat him, and then crucified him by nailing him to the cross. The physical pain was so great that Jesus was not able to carry his own cross. So the soldiers forced another man named Simon to carry it for Jesus.

Crucifixion was the most brutal form of execution ever devised. In fact, it was so brutal that the Romans refused to use it on their own citizens. Verse 34 says that the soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with gall to drink but that when he tasted it he refused to drink it. People have come up with different theories about this wine. One of the theories is that the gall acted like a narcotic to dull the pain or possibly a poison to speed death. Mark’s gospel says the

wine was mixed with Myrrh, which would have had a slight pain killing effect. If that's the case, then the reason Jesus refused it is because he wanted keep a clear mind and experience the fullness of his suffering. Jesus willingly went to the cross and bore the full extent of the suffering.

But it wasn't just physical pain that Jesus endured. He suffered humiliation and shame. The Roman soldiers mocked him by stripping his clothes off of him and putting a red robe on him. They put the crown of thorns on his head and put a reed in his hand as a mock scepter. They had quite the time at Jesus' expense. When they had put him on the cross they took all his clothes and gambled for them. Most likely Jesus was crucified completely naked, adding to the shame. He was cursed by the people passing by on the way in and out of Jerusalem, and especially by the religious leaders. Even the other two criminals mocked Jesus.

Closely related to the humiliation, Jesus suffered rejection by the very people he came to save. The chief priests and scribes and elders mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him." But they wouldn't believe, no matter what. Even after Jesus rose from the dead they refused to believe in him. The irony of this whole scene is that the things Jesus is mocked for turn out to all be true. They call him king and he really is the King. They say, "He saved others but he cannot save himself." In a sense that's true. In order for Jesus to save others he cannot save himself. Keller writes, "God came into the world and suffered and died on the cross in order to save us. It is the ultimate proof of his love for us." Jesus' suffering on the cross is what Christmas is really all about. This is why Jesus was born.

There's one more way that Jesus suffered and it's the most important. As we will see next week, Jesus suffered separation from God the Father. On the cross, Jesus paid the price for all our sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For our sake

he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus, who is God, experienced the full wrath of God.

So what we learn is that even though suffering is a part of life, God is present with us in our suffering. Suffering and pain are often the consequence of sin – either our own sin or someone else's sin. That doesn't mean God is punishing us, just that sin has consequences. But our suffering can be redeemed. We can grow in our faith. Pain helps us realize our need for Christ.

Jesus suffered on the cross so that we don't have to. If you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you will never experience the separation from God that Jesus endured. Whatever else we might think about Hell, it's primarily eternal separation from God. Because Christ suffered that separation you and I don't have to if we trust in him. We will still experience suffering. But no matter how far away God seems, no matter how much it seems like He has abandoned us, know that he will never forsake you. In fact, Jesus is always near to you. You are never alone. Consider this an invitation, then, to cultivate your relationship with him so that you never *feel* alone.

The last thing I want us to see from this passage is that sometimes God permits suffering in our life because it's part of His mission. Listen to verse 32: "As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross." I'm sure that carrying Jesus' cross was not part of Simon's plan that morning and I'm also sure that he didn't particularly enjoy it. But God allowed Simon to suffer. Mark's gospel tells us that Simon was the father of Rufus and Alexander. The only reason to include their names was because the early Church knew who they were. In Romans 16, the Apostle Paul says, "Greet Rufus." Could this be the same Rufus? If so, then it seems likely that Simon and his family became followers of Jesus following his resurrection and were known to the early church.

All of Jesus' disciples suffered for their faith. The Apostle Paul tells us how he was shipwrecked, beaten, falsely accused, jailed, and stoned. But God used all of those things to advance the Gospel. If you are genuinely following Jesus you will suffer, too. Being a follower of Christ costs you something because love always costs. You cannot love someone without giving up something of your self. Just remember that love cost God something. He suffered so you wouldn't have to. He meets you in the midst of your suffering. As 2 Corinthians

1 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too."

*Amen*