**Purpose in Pain**

Most of us in the room, if not all of us, would denounce the Prosperity Gospel that we see preached on television or held too in some mainstream “Christian” circles. We would tell a new believer in Christ, and rightly so, that being a child of God doesn’t ensure our material blessing, perpetual health, or pain free life.

Yet what I’ve noticed about many, if not, most believers, including myself, is that OUR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY doesn’t always line up with our Biblical theology.

Track with me here… what is this, HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES AND RESPOND TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LIVES OFTEN PAINTS A DIFFERENT PICTURE OF WHAT WE REALLY BELIEVE… than the Biblical THEOLOGY we ascribe to and know to be true.

Though most, if not all of us would SAY God never promises the believer a smooth ride…when life starts to get bumpy… aren’t we crying out to God asking Him what is going on?

In John 16:33 Jesus said to His disciples, **“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world,"**

It confuses us that suffering, sickness, loss, or persecution comes often even though we’ve been walking in obedience and closely with Jesus. It’s almost as if we get this mindset that HOW WELL WE LIVE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD should somehow determine OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

This isn’t biblical. This is more in-line with the definition of Karma, than what Jesus said would characterize our lives.

Do you see how we can ascribe to the TRUTH, denying the HERESY, and yet in our REACTIONS, in our RESPONSES TO TRAGEDY, in our ATTITUDES TOWARD AFFLICTION…we show that deep down somewhere within… we really believe something quite different?

What is suffering?

A simple definition I found online is: ***the state of undergoing pain, distress, or hardship.***

A biblical definition from Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary is this: The experience of physical pain and/or mental distress.

The Old Testament and the New Testament present various perspectives on human suffering. On the one hand, ***suffering is the consequence of the flawed nature of creation***. In this view human beings are victims, exposed constantly to the perils of a created order gone away. On the other hand, ***a person's suffering is the direct consequence of his or her violation of God's laws***. *The same can be true of a collective meaning a national suffering*.

There is a fourth interpretation of the suffering of the righteous individual that comes to expression in the New Testament. ***Paul interprets his own suffering as a means of ensuring that he be ever conscious of his own weakness, so that he remembers always that the power at work in him is from God and not himself*** and so that he is not deluded into relying on his own power **(EXPLAIN IN OWN TERMS)**

**THIS LAST ONE IS WHAT I WANT TO FOCUS IN ON AS WE WALK THROUGH 2 CORINTHIANS 4**

After studying about suffering all week long here is a biblical conclusion I’ve come too.

Although the PURPOSE IN OUR PAIN is something we usually don’t fully understand, THE PROMISE of suffering, persecution, and hardships in life are assured to us by God. **(REPEAT)**

In a perfect world, there would be no suffering… let me rephrase that… WILL BE no suffering. God’s ultimate desire is that we are WITH HIM in HEAVEN (the perfect world) and in HEAVEN there WILL BE no more suffering.

**21 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” – Revelation 21:1-4**

And although this is God’s ultimate desire at the END AND CULMINATION OF ALL THINGS… God ALSO has a purpose NOW in our suffering.

**Let’s get through the first 7 verses of 2 Corinthians 4 and THEN we will see how this chapter ties INTO suffering and God’s purpose in our pain!**

**4 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.**

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth as a response to a favorable report that the letter of 1 Corinthians was well received by most.

What does He mean by “THEREFORE, SINCE WE HAVE THIS MINISTRY?”

In chapter 3, Paul addresses the ***glory of the NEW COVENANT***… He compares the Old Covenant of Law as a ministry of death, and the New Covenant that Jesus established as a MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT! Another way He words it is the Ministry of CONDEMNATION (Which was all that the Law of God did was reveal the condemnation of man through their sin) verses the MINISTRY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS which exceeds much more in glory.

He ends the chapter saying, ***“Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech…Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.***

So, following this same line-of-thought, He continues… Therefore, SINCE we have this ministry… THIS GREATER MINISTRY… THIS NEW AND LIVING WAY…THIS MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, OF TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH THIS COVENANT THAT WAS SEALED IN THE BLOOD AND PAIN OF CHRIST…THIS SURE HOPE…WHERE GOD HIMSELF IS TRANSFORMING US… FROM GLORY TO GLORY…ALL ALONG REMEMBERING THAT IT IS NOT OF US…BUT WE HAVE SIMPLY RECEIVED MERCY… BECAUSE OF ALL THESE GREAT AND PRECIOUS THINGS AND THAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO BE PARTAKERS OF THEM… WE DO NOT LOOSE HEART!

**2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.**

This follows closely with not losing heart… Paul is saying that first, we renounce shameful deeds. We turn from them. We don’t mishandle the Word of God… We are not sinning by USING God’s Word for personal gain like many false prophets and teachers were in Corinth…

God’s CALLING AND MINISTRY IN OUR LIVES…IS…OUR…REASONABLE… SACRIFICE. Our lives have been bought at a HIGH PRICE… THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST… THEREFORE OUR LIVES, OUR MINISTRY AND CALLING, ARENOT OURS TO MANIPULATE SINFULLY FOR PERSONAL GAIN… but NOTICE THE CHOICE OF WORDS IN THE LAST SENTENCE. MANIFESTATION… EVERY MAN…IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

We are on show for all the world to see whether you know it or not. As name-bearers of Jesus Christ… people are watching to see what happens in our lives AND HOW WE WILL REACT, RESPOND, AND GO FORWARD.

THE WORST kind of suffering we can go through…is provoked suffering. Suffering because of our own sin, our own WILLFUL REBELLION AGAINST THE WORD OF GOD grieves and pains God. He loves us, we are His children and He has paid a HIGH PRICE for us to be partakers of the New Covenant…

We have ALL these great and precious benefits as members, but when we continue willfully in sin, we forfeit God’s best and invite punishment. Wasted memberships stink!

King David suffered the LOSS OF A CHILD, all kind of family issues and striving because of His decision to follow His lust instead of His Lord.

When He slept with Bathsheba, and covered it up by having her husband Uriah killed, God responded by saying: ***‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.’ 2 Samuel 12:11***

God says David, when did you think that your sin and the consequences of it could remain hidden? You are the King! People are watching you and since you won’t show them through I am by your example, in justice, I have to show them by making an example of you.

**The first point I want you to take away about suffering, is that UNREPENTANT SIN in our life forces God’s hand. We will see later that RIGHTEOUS SUFFERING brings GLORY TO GOD…and is God’s will for our lives…**

**but UNRIGHTEOUS SUFFERING takes the focus OFF the power of the GOSPEL to bring victory and causes the unbelieving world to blaspheme God (Romans 2:24)**

**God takes no delight in our suffering, even if it is because we provoked it through our own in. God chastens those He loves, but doesn’t love the chastening! Good father’s discipline their kids BECAUSE they love them.**

**3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.**

I want to reread this from the Living Bible translation:

***3 If the Good News we preach is hidden to anyone, it is hidden from the one who is on the road to eternal death. 4 Satan, who is the god of this evil world, has made him blind, unable to see the glorious light of the Gospel that is shining upon him or to understand the amazing message we preach about the glory of Christ, who is God. 5 We don’t go around preaching about ourselves but about Christ Jesus as Lord. All we say of ourselves is that we are your slaves because of what Jesus has done for us. 6 For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made us understand that it is the brightness of his glory that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.***

***7 But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us—is held in a perishable container, that is, in our weak bodies. Everyone can see that the glorious power within must be from God and is not our own.***

**HERE where Paul starts to connect the dots in this chapter for us to understand the PURPOSE IN OUR PAIN. Don’t miss this!**

When we **DON’T** walk in sin, or try and win people over to the Gospel deceitfully…but instead of USING THE GOSPEL for means of personal gain (Remember my karma analogy…that personal gain could simply mean health, wealth, and a life of ease) but INSTEAD WE LET THE GOSPEL USE US… **THAT is when the POWER OF GOD will CAUSE THE GLORY OF GOD TO SHINE THROUGH US**… THAT IS WHEN JESUS WILL REVEAL THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS CHRIST TO THOSE WHO ARE IN DARKNESS…

DON’T MISS THIS… THIS WILL BLOW YOUR MIND. IT MAY SEEM SIMPLE BUT PONDER IT…AND LET IT SOAK IN.

**INSTEAD OF USING THE GOSPEL, WE NEED TO LET THE GOSPEL USE US…EVEN IF THAT MEANS USING US IN PAINFUL WAYS.… IN ORDER TO REVEAL WHO CHRIST IS TO EVERYONE WATCHING!**

**THAT** is what Paul meant when He said… **to live is Christ, but to die is gain**. He no longer counted his life is own… He saw Himself as dead…and Jesus Christ now living His life through Him, inside of Him. He was WILLING TO SUFFER, to endure hardship, pain, much like His master did… so that when OTHERS AROUND HIM SAW HIS STEADFASTNESS OF HEART! HIS PERSERERANCE! HIS JOY! HIS LOVE IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION… THEY WOULD NOT BE SEEING PAUL, THEY WOULD FINALLY COME TO RECOGNIZE THAT THEY WERE LOOKING AT SOMETHING SUPERNATURAL IN THIS MAN…THEY WERE WITNESSING GOD HIMSELF LIVING IN HIM AND THROUGH HIM…

Don’t forget believer. WE have received mercy! We have a responsibility AS MINISTERS OF HOPE… JUST AS Paul said… The unbelieving world has no hope. Suffering to them is simply pain without a purpose. Their pain is only EVIDENCE of WHAT IS COMING THEIR WAY… THAT IS WHY IT IS SURROUNDED BY SO MUCH SORROW, MISERY, AND ANGER… BUT THAT ISN’T TRUE OF US!

GOD HATES TO SEE US IN PAIN, THE LORD is close to the brokenhearted! Yet, He doesn’t want our pain to be wasted by us responding the SAME WAY that the unbelieving world does who have no hope.

THAT IS WHY PAUL TOLD TIMOTHY in 2 Timothy 2: 1-4

“2 Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. 2 You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

3 Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 Soldiers don’t get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them.”

THAT, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IS LETTING THE GOSPEL USE YOU… INSTEAD OF YOU TRYING TO USE THE GOSPEL.

When THIS becomes your perspective in life… than nothing can move us. THIS is where God desires to bring us… WILLING TO SUFFER! WILLING TO ENDURE ANYTHING THAT GOD WOULD BRING…SO THAT THROUGH THE CRACKING AND BREAKING OF OUR “CLAY VESSEL” OUR PHYSICAL BODY AND EMOTIONAL SOUL… WE WOULD SHINE HIS LIGHT IN THE FACES OF EVERYONE AROUND US!

**8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.**

SO… Now that we know that GOD HAS A PURPOSE IN OUR PAIN… HOW was it that Paul was able to bring Himself to a place where He could endure suffering and still be at rest in His soul?

How did He find the COURAGE to endure as a good soldier of Jesus Christ through such affliction, ridicule, and mockery?

Here is the difference. Here is what I and so many of us MISS that keeps us from glorifying God IN our suffering.

1. Paul knew that suffering wasn’t just something that happened by happenstance for the believer. **HE LIVED EXPECTING IT.**

When we respond wrongly to suffering in our lives, and FOREFIET OUR WITNESS OF HOPE TO OTHERS, it only shows that we had the WRONG perspective to begin with. We were expecting something other than what Jesus told us to expect.

2 Timothy 3:10-12 “**10**But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, **11**persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. **12**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

AND number 2, is also listed in these verses.

Not only do we need to expect suffering, we need to also expect **DELIVERY!**

Expecting suffering WITHOUT delivery is no GLORIOUS HOPE at all! BUT WE KNOW WE HAVE THE VICTORY! GOD WILL BRING DELIVERY! SOMETIMES IN HEALING IN THIS LIFE, OR IN THE ULTIMATE HEALING IN HIS PRESENCE IN THE LIFE TO COME.

**5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Romans 5:1-4)**

**11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.**

God called Jeremiah to a ministry where ridicule and incarceration and weeping would be his daily portion! He could have said… Lord, I don’t like this… I am going to suffer! Ezekiel suffered and was called to do very difficult things for God’s name sake like lay on his side and eat rations to illustrate points!

We’ve been talking about Joseph… You don’t think it was God’s will for Joseph to be thrown into the pit? To be in jail? To suffer during all these things?

Yet, JOSEPH was ONLY ABLE TO BE USED BY GOD SO MIGHTILY because HE REMAINED STEADFAST IN FAITH! UNMOVEABLE IN EXPECTING THAT GOD WAS IN THE MIDST OF HIS SUFFERING… AND THAT GOD WOULD ALSO BE IN THE MIDST OF HIS DELIVERY! GOD HAD A PURPOSE IN HIS PAIN, AND HE KNEW IT… AND THEREFORE EVENTUALLY ALL ISRAEL KNEW IT TOO!

**20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. (Genesis 50:20)**

How was the DEATH, SUFFERING, AND PAIN that was BEING WORKED OUT IN PAUL… becoming LIFE for the Corinthians? It was strengthening their hope, their endurance, and making them more bold and confident of the Gospel when they saw Paul unwavering!

**This brings me to my 3RD point!!! Our suffering isn’t just for us. God CALLS US TO SUFFERING and walks through it with us, so that we can comfort others, strengthen others, and remind them of the HOPE we have in Jesus Christ!**

**Share struggles with mental issues, work, home, and Chin being there.**

**13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.**

This is an AMAZING statement! Let me paint the picture for you real quick! Let me give you an example.

Suffering IN THIS WORLD IS the direct consequence of sin entering this world through man. Suffering in this world is going to happen because the world is corrupt. Natural disasters happen like floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, or drought and famine… and all these things cause suffering and pain… but none of these things were a part of God’s original design… THESE THINGS came into the world because of sin… sin didn’t just corrupt OUR NATURE, it also corrupted NATURE in this world…So therefore when a tornado plows through Oklahoma and kills a family… It wasn’t necessarily because God is somehow punishing that family for some sin, but it is just a natural consequence of a fallen world…BUT… God can USE that suffering, that tragedy... for glory. He can USE the response of those believers AFFECTED by this suffering and tragedy… to SHOW OTHERS THE HOPE AND JOY THAT ISN’T MOVED when these things happen… and when others see this hope, that is more evidence in the Gospel’s power than any piece of knowledge.

That is EXPECTING suffering and not being surprised or caught off-guard. That is also expecting DELIVERY! Knowing that those loved ones knew the LORD and are with Him…which is NO NEED FOR MOURNING!

In that situation… God took something bad, sin’s consequence in nature, and used it for His glory to show the hope He provides to unbelievers.

The same is true when illness in our lives present itself! When persecution! (Share about Frank and co-workers)

Paul is saying, HEY when these things come… TAKE FAITH! TAKE COURAGE! REMEMBER, that no matter what, in the end we will be resurrected to be with Jesus Christ! All these things that happen to us… are happening for a purpose… They are acting like a conduit of grace! It is through our suffering, and others seeing Jesus shine through these WEAK clay pots… that GRACE is transferred INTO THEIR LIVES AND FAITH IS BIRTHED INTO THEIR HEARTS! GOD USES OUR SUFFERING TO REACH A LOST WORLD IF WE HOLD FAST IN FAITH! IT’S ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD!

THAT is EXACTLY what happened at the Cross.

How come we are so moved by the cross? How come the CROSS is so precious to us?

Because it was where God USED SUFFERING, PAIN, AND DEATH… the DEATH of HIMSELF, of His ONE AND ONLY SON… to bring about LIFE FOR ALL OF US… for EVERYONE ELSE…

**Why don’t we think God would want to do the same with our lives that He did with Christ’s?**

**I mean, Christian, what do you think Jesus meant when He said… Pick up your cross and follow me?**

**Matthew 16:24-26 “24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?**

Does that make sense to you now? The CROSS is the greatest SYMBOL of suffering in all of human history… and YET TODAY WE USE IT AS A SYMBOL OF GLORY! OF VICTORY! OF PRAISE TO GOD!

GOD IS SOOOOOO AMAZING, SOOOOOO POWERFUL…. THAT HE COULD TAKE WHAT THE ENEMY MEANT TO USE AS THE GROSEST, MOST SICK FORM OF SUFFERING AND PUNISHMENT… and yet MADE IT MAJESTIC! MADE IT THE VERY SYMBOL OF GOD’S OWN VICTORY OVER DEATH AND SUFFERING!

JESUS DIED… NOT WITHOUT PURPOSE… HE SUFFERED… NOT FOR WASTE… BUT FOR YOU! TO PAY FOR YOUR SINS! **AND HERE PAUL WAS DRAWING THE SAME LINE FOR THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS! JUST AS JESUS DID… I ALSO EXPECT AND ENDURE SUFFERING FOR YOUR SAKE AND OTHERS SAKE… SO THAT THEY WILL SEE GOD… AND COME TO KNOW HIM!!!**

**WE HAVE TO PICK UP OUR CROSSES IF WE REALLY WANT OTHERS TO COME TO THE CROSS! WE HAVE TO HOLD THE CROSS HIGH… AND BE WILLING TO PARTAKE OF WHATEVER GOD BRINGS OUR WAY, SUFFERING, OR EASE, WELL-FED, OR STARVING…**

**Let’s read the last three verses and finish up.**

**16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

Let this truth change your perspective so that you won’t lose heart and take God’s PURPOSE out of your pain. EXPECT SUFFERING, for the sake of others, and God’s glory. Yet, EXPECT THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO ALSO BRING DELIVERENCE…EITHER IN THIS LIFE OR THE NEXT… If you will hold steadfast to this… you will be unmovable and greatly used by God!

**18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of [f]corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (Romans 8:18-25)**