

THE MANY FACES OF SUFFERING - Refresher course (Nov. lesson on adversity)

INTRO: Psalm 88 - Unique among the Psalms. Every verse a lament. Heman the author. "Oh, God of my salvation," vs. 1,2 "Oh, God of my deliverance!" Few fragments of hope in the whole Psalm. Glimmers of hope on a bed of sickness. Flickers of light in the dark tunnel of pain. Also vs. 9 and 13. He asks why, but still calls out to God, as did Job.

Job 6:1-9 - Despairing of life and wishing for death, Job is overwhelmed with both physical and emotional suffering. [The back story?]

Let's lay out the secular and biblical views of suffering. First, the SECULAR view, which explains neither the true reason nor true response when facing suffering.

I. SECULAR VIEW

- A. Unfair due to indiscriminate distribution in the world.
- B. Second causes only (the only logical reason for the atheist).
- C. The great humanistic task is to mitigate/eliminate it through reason and intelligence (philosophically and scientifically). Or just live with suffering as a normal, evolutionary consequence of life. There is neither rhyme nor reason to it.
- D. Punishment or illusion according to Eastern religion.

II. BIBLICAL VIEW

- A. Universal and merited
 - 1. Job 5:1 (Eliphaz - universal)
 - 2. Genesis 3:17-19; Psalm 38:3 - merited
 - 3. Romans 3 ("all have sinned . . .")
 - 4. Romans 6:23 ("wages of sin is death")
 - 5. Romans 5:12-14; 8:20-22 - 'Every creature has a quarrel with a sinner.' Watson
- B. Many-faced - List different kinds of suffering: physical pain, emotional, disaster related, aging (weariness), genetic, racial, gender, persecution, guilt, isolation (prison), others?
 - 1. Psalm 107 - Wandering, imprisoned, foolish sinfulness, storms on the sea, hunger, thirst, general affliction

2. James 1:2; I Peter 1:6, 7 - Various
 3. Psalm 143:3, 4 - David's spirit is overwhelmed
- C. Painful
1. Job 2:7, 8 - Some are in pain right now. Some will be in pain later today. All of us have been branded in its fire.
 2. II Corinthians 11:23-28 - Paul's litany of suffering
- D. Ordained of God - Not a popular truth in today's churches. Many teach a sovereign Satan who directs all suffering and pain, or teach that weak faith is to be blamed.
1. Exodus 4:11; Deuteronomy 28:20; Deut. 32:39; Ruth 1:20, 21; I Samuel 2:6, 7; 2 Chron. 7:13; Job 10:8; Psalm 88:6, 7; Psalm 90:7; Isaiah 45:7; Lam. 3:1; Amos 3:6; I Cor. 11:32; Hebrews 12:10; Rev. 3:19 - Thomas Watson: "Whoever brings an affliction, it is God who sends it."
 2. I Peter 1:19, 20 - and if Christ's sufferings were ordained, so every one of ours is also.
 3. Ephesians 1:11 - God works all things according to the counsel of His own will. Even sin: "Behind every evil deed, there is the God who works and intends all things for His good, not in reaction to evil, but long before that evil thought was entertained in the minds of the wicked." - Grayson Gilbert
- E. Purposeful - Not without a plan, not capricious, not by chance
1. Isaiah 26:9 with Romans 2:4 - Both the goodness of God and His judgments should turn people to Him in repentance
 2. Hebrews 12:10 - Purification in our sanctification - William Secker "As waters are purist when they are in motion, so saints are generally holiest when they are in affliction."
 3. Romans 5:3; James 1:2 - Should we be praying for healing then? Or sanctification in our suffering?
 4. I Corinthians 1:4-6
 5. I Peter 1:7 - Crown of life - "Suffering reveals Christ to us, produces a genuineness of faith, and causes us to endure to gain our final inheritance and finally see Him face to face." - Gilbert

6. II Corinthians 12:7-10 - Humility
7. Romans 8:28 - 1689 Conf. "So that whatsoever befall any of his elect is by his appointment, for his glory, and their good."

F. Prayed for

1. II Corinthians 12:8 - "I pleaded with the Lord three times"
2. Matthew 26:44 - Jesus praying three times in the Garden - What did He pray for? Both relief of pain and God's will.
3. Psalm 40:1-3 - David's attitude and action throughout the Psalms

G. Temporary - Were Heman's prayers answered? I Peter 1:6 - "a little while"

1. Revelation 21:1-4; 22:1-5 - This world's pain should point and prod us to long for heaven and perfect righteousness, where there will be no curse, pain or sorrow.
2. II Corinthians 5:1-8
 - Dean Coleman's testimony - rejoicing in pain, soon to see his Savior and lover of his soul