

SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

By Rev. Jasper Tumuhimbise

If there was no pain or suffering how would your life run? What would church be or even prayer? Is there a hidden treasure behind suffering? Do the righteous suffer? Phillip Yancey wrote about the problem of pain and his book reveals that behind all pain there is a gold lining as set by God. Many atheists (those who think there is no God...not believe but thought because believe would make them deists and indeed they are....) ask that if there is a God why suffering and they fail to answer that if indeed He was not there then how would humans face suffering?

What is righteousness

As used of human beings it can mean a state of innocence (Genesis 6:9) this does not mean sinless it means blameless and beyond reproach and make no mistake we are declared righteous by faith like Abraham through Jesus only! It also means being in the right before the Law of Moses (Ps 5:12; 11:5; 37:21, 29) and of being placed in a right relationship with God. (Genesis 15:6; Romans 1:17). So outside God the only way is through our advocate Jesus Christ and 1 John 1:9 it is ...if we confess...conditional.

The other meaning is especially developed by Paul in Galatians and Romans: through Christ the righteous one God declares believing sinners to be righteous in his sight. (Romans 3-8; Gal 3). And hence there is NO condemnation for those who are IN Jesus....again if you go amiss you need to repent and come back to Him. I don't see another way. Peter came back, Paul says he beats his body so that he doesn't miss, he advises Timothy to pursue righteousness...2 Tim 2:22...

In the book of Peter, he addresses suffering as 'if it is God's will'. Specifically, in 1 Peter 3:17–18 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit. Can you imagine a merciful God making you suffer because it is His will....?

Earlier in 1 Peter:3.11-18 'He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.' And 1 Peter:3.12 "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

We must read ahead so that we are prepared to Suffer for Righteousness:

Peter 4:1–3 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in

the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

But another one of the good works that Scripture is given for is also to prepare us to suffer for righteousness. “Therefore” is the first word of chapter 4 that points us back to Peter’s discussion in

Theories of suffering:

These are theories but I want also to call them causes and while some are a combination, we must confront the following aspects

1. Purging/Cleansing: Some of the pain we go through is to help us be better and more like a purification process. If the clothes we wash would talk they would say....easy you are hurting me...the most painful place would be where the stains are and the bible on cleansing is clear 1 John 1:9...cleanse from all unrighteousness.... This is a kind of washing and if a ‘clothe’ would talk or shout they would state that the one washing them is hurting the place where it is dirtiest! How do you treat cleansing? It is pain and if soap is added then there are bitter tears that follow suit.

The first question is whether the righteous suffer and the answer is absolutely YES... and then what causes suffering and what do we mean by righteous anyway? In God's word as written by apostle Peter it reads thus...

2. Pruning: While the first one above is to make **clean**, the second one is to make **health**. And God loves us so much that in most times his pruning fork works on us for a better health plant but also for more fruit... and He seems to prune what we cherish most! Again a tree would discourage the pruner partly because it hurts and also because there are tears in the process.

3. Foolish choices: This is by far one of the most painful things regarding suffering. This depends on you more than any body. Choice of school, job, marriage partner, business, church, fellowship and all sorts of things confront us daily.... There is a choice between life and death, sin and righteousness, light and darkness and friends BAD COMPANY CORRUPTS GOOD CHARACTER. 1 Cor 15 and in proverbs a companion of fools meets tragedy... What choices are you making today? What about your past? Are there things you regret that have pained you? Repent and confess for God to heal you.

4. Nature/Environment: The places we live in and this world generally was corrupted by sin and there is no way to say we are not in the world- but we say we are not OF the world. The example I can give is the vehicle I drive. If it had a choice it would shout around the pot holes of Nansana that eeeeh...send me back to Japan... overloading, jams, service...this is the environment sometimes you find yourself in it can cause your suffering.

5. Fallen World (The World): This is related to the above but it also includes nature disasters because If you live in this world, believer or not, you will experience the tragic results of Adam. As our representative, Adam’s sin brought about the cataclysmic consequences of us being born sinful

(Ps. 51). When Adam sinned, this brought about the universal brokenness of our world, now groaning over its condition through natural disasters and the like (Rom. 8).

This fundamental flaw passed down to us through Adam creates the potential for suffering of every kind. Not only did Adam and Eve die that day, but all creation was given an expiration date. All suffering finds its root, on some level, in the Fall. It doesn't matter what type of person you are morally or religiously, all are impacted by the Fall. But not all who suffer grow in the midst of it.

6. Sinful Lifestyles and Systems (The Flesh): Suffering also happens as a consequence of our personal sin and systems of sin that come under our response to the Fall. Because of our natural tendency to sin, given to us from Adam, we suffer under the tyranny of the flesh. Personal sins like greed, pride, or sexual immorality can cause suffering personally. For instance, someone who has a child out of wedlock can find themselves paying child support, which could become a burden to their finances and cause economic suffering. God can redeem the situation, but sometimes the Lord doesn't remove all of the consequences. For the believer, this is called the discipline of the Lord. God will use the most difficult forms of suffering to conform us into the image of Christ. Hebrews talks about this in detail. Peter talks about personal sin that we endure the consequences of as suffering in 1 Peter 2.

Individual sin isn't the only form of suffering we endure, however. No man is an island to himself, and corporate sin creates systemic problems in our society. Sin works like a virus in our communities; one man's sinful disposition can infect his neighbor's. This is why Paul is so aggressive toward false teachers and those who lead others into sin. Systemic sin is contagious like a pathogen, eating away at consciences of individuals. Policies can be made to preserve and promote sin. Just think of the Jim Crow Laws, or Hitler's Aryan Clause. Millions of people suffered, not just individually, but as an entire nation of people.

Everything from racism to socioeconomic oppression can become systems of sin that cause us suffering. But even then, even when all the odds are stacked against us, God can use it to sanctify us until He removes it as an encumbrance to our lives.

7. Spiritual Warfare (The Devil): Not every type of suffering is the work of the Devil directly, though some might think that is the case. The Bible says that our war is not against flesh and blood, but against an invisible enemy that wreaks havoc on couples, singles, families, sons, and daughters. Satan, the great deceiver, works in the inner city, as well as the suburbs.

8. Test: Like Job you are in a testtube and the cosmic forces are testing whether you can stand or not. Abraham was tested to see whether Isaac would be given up.... With a test you can prepare to give a testimony. Imagine if exams had no tests or research without marking! It would be a disaster because one would not prepare.

Suffering levels:

1. God's will

There are three levels of God's will:

a. Perfect will-which means that whatever you do and wherever you go you are aligned to His throne.... Acts 5.41 Apostles loved suffering and stated that He found them worthy to suffer for His Name....they were in the perfect will.

b. Permissive will- God speaks to you and you refuse to listen and you insist to go your way- He will allow you but that is permission rather than pardon! Many of us are like that in Numbers we have Barlam operating in the permissive will when he looked for money when God had told him not to go... the story of Samson also shows us the issue of the permissive will...though normally there is pain like loss of life for Barlam and eyes and life for Samson.

c. Preventive will -where God now acts to prevent you from going in the way of destruction for your sake... a vehicle brakes down.... internet bundle expires (miraculously), you send a message -it refuses- you want to talk but you cannot... some of those are indicators that He is preventing something that would be catastrophic- Paul states that he was prevented by the Spirit to visit Rome...

2. Prevention

In another section Peter makes suffering even more plain...

I will try to talk about the causes of suffering in line with the righteous because those outside Jesus suffer per excellence and so their cause is clear - sin and disobedience.

This now begs a question that I want to leave with you.... are you prepared to lose your comfort if it is in the will of God to send you. In the NT church whenever persecution arose the gospel would spread.... may be Uganda we are too comfortable to preach in offices, taxis, families and even sometimes in churches we fear condemning a wrong ... because we are comfortable and we are not about to lose it! Are you like the earlier church and apostles willing to suffer for Christ... will you this week refuse a certain offer, condemn a certain act as long as that is in God's perfect will as stated in His word....?

Since we know the causes we need to learn how to prepare in case of suffering and the following are the things we need to do to help us better prepare rather than live in denial because again in this fallen world- Jesus says ...you will have many troubles and all his disciples except John suffered death through persecution and many of us cannot be different unless if we have missed something? And by the way suffering IN GOD does not take away abundant life so to say...

The theme of declaring sinners righteous is developed from Isa 40-66 where God's righteousness is presented as his saving activity on behalf of Israel to place them in the right place with himself. This is corporate righteousness imputed again to us by God.

The following are the causes of suffering and many of them are apparently positive.... because without pain or suffering I am not sure whether you would go to church, read the bible, pray or even share. suffering is more like a test in an exam that encourages you to read... and we know that

without a test there is no testimony- we see His grace more through pain than pleasure as we shall see shortly. Many of us look at ourselves in pleasure and then when pain strikes we focus on God.

Meanwhile we had seen that you prepare for suffering because 1. The righteous suffer and 2. The fact that it is better to suffer if it is God's will.....!

The other is **3. Because Christ suffered in His body** In essence we are dealing with clearly a fact of life... OT persons suffering but more so all disciples of Jesus suffered martyrdom except John...who out of persecution also suffered exile and to even think that there is no suffering is an absurdity because out of those tests...that is where the testimony comes from. I wonder sometimes if I had not met challenges whether I would know God... . If you have all- I do not know how your prayer life becomes...but as of now we know that the kingdom of God suffers violence...and the violent will.... I encourage you to confront suffering with the mind of our Saviour- not my will but yours be done....

1 Peter:4.1

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

Hebrews:10.32

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.

Hebrews:10.33

Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.

Hebrews:10.34

You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

Peter is not asking us to look out for problems -he is asking us to prepare- arm yourself with the same attitude... Jesus said let this cup pass.... but not my will but your will be done. So in persecution or suffering you fix your eyes on one person JESUS....

Suffering for the faith brings you to a point where you look beyond NOW but to eternity and the author of that who is Jesus Christ.

Hebrews:12.1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Hebrews:12.2

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews:12.3

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

When I refused to do something a powerful boss had wanted me to do- I knew the world would be tough and a young family would suffer but I also knew where my help comes from Psalm 121 states that it comes from....will you fix your eyes on Him so that your current condition becomes bearable? He will supply the grace and the peace you need!

4. Having an attitude of Christ- Like His soldier willing to die: How do you normally talk to a discouraged person? By the way do Christians who are struggling come to you or you are like many of us who tell a young believer that 'accept Christ and all your problems are gone? Is that soldiering? A soldier trains (painfully) and arms themselves for war. What have you been fearing to train in!???? He is able and hence He encourages you tofight the good fight... This life and Christianity is therefore a battle but we are sure of winning because our commander is more than a conqueror and we are also more than conquerors through Him who loved us.... Again imagine how you conquer without a fight- getting up at 3 am my friend is not baby stuff! Praying for a baby who is sick is not for the timid.... Allowing God to use you is not to help you sleep.... It is to make you a better soldier and IF UGANDANS AND KENYANS were willing to suffer as Christian soldiers all aspects of our nations WOULD BE DIFFERENT! Are you willing to be a fighter? There are giants!

5. Carry your own cross-Again there is an unfortunate fallacy and gospel that when you are declared righteous then there is no 'cross to carry'! Life becomes what you declare- Paul who authored more about righteousness does not imply that wow all is obtained! No in fact in one of the signs that he suffered for the gospel....he writes in Philippians that I rejoice in my suffering but also he carried his CROSS.

6. Grace in weakness

Paul addresses a 'thorn in the flesh...' a messenger of certain! This scripture is one of the first ones I memorised- the 9 verses because I knew that grace is revealed not through power- but weakness! That is why I appeal to you- If you are teaching a proper gospel you need not to respond to those against you! Because your advocate and defence is elsewhere.... But look at us today! Some of us are live wires....! So Paul states thus:

2 Corinthians:12.1

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.

2 Corinthians:12.2-10 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know-- God knows. And I know that this man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows--was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast

about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

7. Suffering will end One of the things you need to know is that indeed the things you are passing through will come to an end... there are three things that you need to know that God uses to make you better....

a. Foundation that you get a strong foundation when your faith and belief is shaken... and that is the pattern.... Joseph Pit to Prison to Palace- where was his foundation in the pit and palace as a houseboy for a thing He never did! But the Lord was with Him!

David.... Shepherd, Rebel, Palace.... Foundation was the sheep and the defence he gave the sheep before joining the as a soldier was the basis of him being a good king.... so there are certain foundations you must pass through to become a strong leader....

b. Formulation this is the place in the wilderness or prison... where sometimes you doubt God and begin wondering your calling Joseph in Prison and David in the wilderness of Engedi and Israelites for 40 years in the wilderness is wow... a tough situation! And that is the step we would all be glad to jump! Peter denying Jesus was the foundation but he went fishing and Jesus asks him three times 'do you love me? was formulation- he went to fish fish.... not men! Where God deals with your ego to make you better! David was anointed but in exile, Joseph was in Prison, Moses tending sheep....

c. Formation/Function This is a place you rich after passing through foundation and formulation.... You are formed to function for the purpose you were created to do.... Joseph one day reached the Palace, David after 17 years became a king, Peter after Pentecost reached.... Joshua and Caleb reached the land of Canaan: friend today is better than yesterday- what you are passing through will end and yes tomorrow is better than today- recall and count your blessings not your sufferings!

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

Psalms:30.5

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

As I end let me now tackle solutions to suffering:

1. Prayer: The individuals prayed through suffering and in many cases it indeed ended- and in few cases where it never God revealed His will and gave the grace to go through... Jesus, Paul, Peter (asked to be crucified upside down), all prayed and God gave them the grace and then the victory.

2. Read the word This is a manual for all sorts of things a human being needs to know and or may pass through! I encourage us to read the bible each day and let that wonderful manual from the Manufacturer be your FIRST GUIDE! Study and see that you are not in the worst situation- ask Ruth, Esther, David, Paul, Peter and through this manual their life will tell you that it is not ease but God will make it easier

3. Fellowship:

Please pick a church and a fellowship that does the above 2 items. Let them encourage you.... there are times when a testimony makes me wonder why I was complaining! May God direct you to a proper one....!

4. Get an encourager If you are female look for a fellow mature female who can walk with you. Not compete with you or discourage you but WALK. In the valley you need a b Joshua if you are Moses, a Caleb if you are a Joshua, a Naomi if you are Ruth, an Elisha for Elijah and a John if you are a Peter.....I have men who are encouraging me and we meet every Friday at 7-8:30 am Do you have one? if it is the opposite sex look for a mature one who will not abuse your vulnerability... A Mordochai for an Esther and a Shunammite woman for Elisha "(2KINGS)"....

5. Refuse to give up NEVER EVER GIVE UP.... there is a light at the end of every tunnel- The Presence of the Lord is your strength.... David says even when I walk in the valley of the shadow of death THOU ART WITH ME... you prepare a table before me in presence of my ENEMIES....the more the enemies the bigger the table.... Do you fear enemies, suffering....? Don't Lo am with you always....

6. Refuse to sell This is the last and a cracker.... your body, land, and family as well as destiny is being contended for! And the offer may seem nice but like Naboth -refuseeeeeee! Let the person or enemy know that you are beyond! Sex, marriage, jobs, properties.....aaah refuse! Let the enemy try elsewhere....

The Lord forbid.... and he was killed but he is one of my OT heroes...he refused to sell out! May this season and the remaining part of your life on this planet be ---I refuse to sell out my inheritance from my Father in Heaven... my body, my brain, my family, my job, MY COUNTRY,is my inheritance I refuse to sell out even if I suffer death....! Amen.

1 Kings:21.1

Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

1 Kings:21.2

Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth."

1 Kings:21.3

But Naboth replied, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."