

“Understanding Suffering”
John 5:14
(Preached at Trinity, October 3, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 4** Jesus had left Samaria and returned to Galilee. **Chapter 5** begins, “After these things . . .” Jesus has departed from Cana of Galilee and has arrived at Jerusalem. There is no mention of His disciples.
2. We are told of a certain pool called Bethesda that was surrounded by many who were “sick, blind, lame, and withered.”
John uses a word that refers to a great number of people. It is translated here “multitude.”
3. John wants us to see the terrible extent of their suffering. Our attention is fixed upon a particular man who had been paralyzed for 38 years.
4. We live in a world of suffering. We often take for granted the great benefit of modern medicine. We have drugs and hospitals to help with the pain and suffering.
But suffering cannot be eradicated.
Why does suffering exist upon the earth? Many are prone to believe that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.
But we know this is not true. One look at a child suffering erases such foolish thinking.
5. The focus of this text is upon one man's suffering and his healing. Jesus came to Him according to His sovereign mercy and He brought healing—total restoration.
Why was this man paralyzed? Why was there a great multitude of people laying around the pool in various degrees of suffering?
Verse 14 sheds some light on the subject.
6. We read in **Verse 9** that Jesus healed the man - "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk."
We saw that the healing was immediate and total. The man stood up and walked.
This brought a temporary end to the interaction between the man and Jesus.
7. We see in **Verse 13** that Jesus had slipped away. The man had come into conflict with the Pharisees. He had been healed on the Sabbath which they said violated the Law. In addition, the man was carrying his pallet which also was a violation. The Pharisees insisted on knowing who had done the healing and commanded the man to take up his pallet. The man couldn't give an answer.
8. As we come to **Verse 14** Jesus has found the man in the Temple and is engaging him in dialogue. The text tells us that Jesus sought the man. Up to this point we have been told the man received physical healing but we've been told nothing regarding his spiritual condition.
 - A. Jesus reminds the man of his physical healing, “You have become well”
Then He says something unusual, “Do not sin anymore.”
 - B. It is implied that the man has sinned and is continuing in sin. It is also implied that there is a link between the man's sickness and his sin.
9. Is all suffering the result of sin? Tonight, I hope to give some clarity.

- I. Ultimately, all suffering is the result of sin
- A. The garden was a paradise
1. Adam and Eve were placed in a condition that reflected God's goodness
At the end of each day of creation God pronounced a benediction
Genesis 1:10 NAU - "and God saw that it was good."
 2. They were given bountiful food to eat
 3. They possessed immortality – no sickness, no death
 4. Most of all they were created in holiness
- B. The fall of Adam into sin resulted in much sorrow
1. He lost his state of holiness and communion with God
 2. Suffering became the norm of humanity
Genesis 3:16 NAU - "To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply
Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children"
Genesis 3:17 NAU - "Then to Adam He said, "Because you have
listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree
about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it';
Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the
days of your life."
(The word for “toil” means pain – same word as **Verse 16**)
 3. Sin has resulted in violence and enmity, disease and death.
Job 5:7 NAU - "For man is born for trouble, As sparks fly upward."
 4. Christians suffer much living in this fallen world.
1 Peter 4:12 NAU - "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery
ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as
though some strange thing were happening to you"
- C. For the lost suffering is only a foretaste of what is to come. It is a reminder of the consequence of sin
1. Every tear is just one of a flood that will flow for all of eternity where there will be constant weeping.
 2. Every discomfort is just a foreshadow of the place where there will be gnashing of teeth.
 3. In this life, sometimes God works adversity to their salvation
Sometimes to further harden them
- D. In this fallen world suffering comes upon all, not necessarily due to personal sin
1. We read of Jonathan's son
2 Samuel 4:4 NAU - "Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son
crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul
and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and
fled. And it happened that in her hurry to flee, he fell and became
lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."
 2. Job suffered greatly, but not because of personal sin
Job 1:1 NAU - "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name
was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and
turning away from evil."
Job 2:7 NAU - "Then Satan went out from the presence of the
LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the
crown of his head."

3. In **John 9** Jesus declares that suffering does not always have a direct connection to personal sin.
John 9:1-3 NAU - "As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "*It was neither that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was so that* the works of God might be displayed in him."

II. Sometimes suffering *is* directly connected to personal sin

- A. We cannot dismiss the wickedness of our own sin
 1. Too often we relegate the suffering of sin to the end of the age
 2. We are shocked when suffering comes knocking upon our door
 3. Too often we think of the sin of our first father Adam as bringing suffering upon the world while somehow dismissing the reality of our own sin.
- B. This man's sickness seems to be directly connected to sin
John 5:14 NAU - "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."
 1. Jesus may have been speaking of a particular sin that was committed 38 years in the past. We have no indication of the nature of the sin but it presses upon us that sometimes our sin will have lasting consequences. How many suffer from diseases due to a promiscuous lifestyle? How many lives have been destroyed by drugs and alcohol? How many homes are destroyed through sins that result in divorce?
 2. Jesus could have been speaking in more general terms regarding this man's sin. This man was alienated from God by his life of sin. This is the condition of all men and it results in the ultimate destination of pain and suffering—the eternal flames of hell.
 There is nothing worse than eternal suffering
- C. Scripture often draws a link between sickness and our personal sin
 1. We can see it in James 5
James 5:14-16 NAU - "Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."
 - a. This passage deals with sickness. Anyone afflicted with sickness should call for the elders. As a pastor I've spent many hours in emergency rooms. It is my duty to go and your duty to call.
 - b. Notice the connection between the sickness and sin

“the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.”

2. In **Psalm 38** David understood clearly the link between his sin and his suffering.

Psalm 38:2-5 NAU - "For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, And Your hand has pressed down on me. ³ There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. ⁴ For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. ⁵ My wounds grow foul *and* fester Because of my folly."

David speaks of his iniquities in **Verse 4** and his folly in **Verse 5**

3. Miriam was smitten with leprosy because of her rebellious heart in speaking against Moses.

Numbers 12:1 NAU - "Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses"

Numbers 12:9-10 NAU - "So the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed. ¹⁰ But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam *was* leprous, as *white* as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she *was* leprous."

4. Uzziah, king of Judah was smitten with leprosy because he entered into the holy place reserved only for the priest.

2 Chronicles 26:16 NAU - "But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense."

2 Chronicles 26:21 NAU - "King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD."

5. In the New Testament we read that members of the Church of Corinth had been smitten with illness because they came to the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

D. Suffering is often the tool of God's chastisement upon His children.

1. We have to have a clear doctrinal understanding of God's chastening of His people. It is always disciplinary in order to return us to holiness. It is never punitive or any form of punishment. God's chastisements are motivated by His great love for us.
2. In **Psalm 38** David understood his suffering to be from the hand of God
Psalm 38:1-2 NAU - "O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath, And chasten me not in Your burning anger. ² For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, And Your hand has pressed down on me."

E. Suffering for the Christian is always delivered from the hand of love

1. For the Christian God has designed every trial for our good – Rom. 8:28
 - a. He brings affliction as a reminder of the sin in this world and our being saved from it.
Acts 14:22 NAU - "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
 - b. God sometimes sends affliction to prove our faith genuine –
1 Peter 1:1-7
2. God is drawing us ever nearer to Himself. He is conforming us more and more to the likeness of His Son. He is making us holy
Romans 8:29 – “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”
3. God brings us through trials to prove Himself faithful. We learn to trust Him more and more.
4. God comforts us that in our weakness He is strong
2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NAU - "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Conclusion:

1. Suffering is consistent with living in a fallen world. It is the consequence of sin—the sin of Adam and of our sin.
2. But the Christian does not go through suffering without design. God’s is merciful to us and will sustain and keep us as we suffer.
Psalms 34:17-19 NAU - "*The righteous* cry, and the LORD hears And delivers them out of all their troubles. ¹⁸ The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit. ¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all."
3. As we suffer and experience the mercies of God we are able to comfort others as they go through affliction.
2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NAU - "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."