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November 26, 2018

Purpose Out of Suffering

1 Peter 3:16-17

Prayer: *Father, we just thank you and praise you for the fact that you are so praiseworthy. We thank you for who you are, we thank you for what you have done, we thank you for the cross first and foremost. And Lord, again, we just continue to thank you for your word, we thank you for this gift that continues to give and we pray this morning for the presence of your Holy Spirit. We cannot understand your word, we cannot make it permanently part of our lives without that presence; and so we pray, Lord, that you would give us the privilege of your Spirit and that again it would be worthwhile eternally and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, for the last 38 years now I have been planting a garden and this year was probably the worst one I've ever had, I mean, the rain just washed absolutely everything away and what wasn't washed away, the insects and disease took care of the rest. But you know I'm probably going to do it again next year and one of the reasons why is because I see a garden as a way of actually capturing time. You see, time passes for every one of us but somehow seeing heads

of broccoli and ears of corn sprouting up is a way of kind of squeezing purpose out of time.

Well this morning I want to shift gears a little bit from that perspective. I want to look at suffering with the same perspective. This morning we're going to ask how can we squeeze purpose out of suffering? Now we've been looking at 1 Peter for quite a while. We've spent a lot of time in 1 Peter 3:15 and before we leave Peter's epistle, I wanted to touch on the second part of that statement that he makes in that scripture. If you remember the first part has to do with being prepared to give an account for the hope that's within you. We spent a lot of time looking at prayer, proclamation, and personification as three different ways that we can be prepared to share the hope that we have in Christ; but Peter doesn't end his thought in that scripture with preparation. He takes on the idea of unjust suffering in the very next verse. Let me just read you this section. This is *1 Peter 3:15-17*, it says: *Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that within you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.* Now there's a thought in that second statement that many of us

evangelicals don't really understand or if we understand it, we just don't believe. It's this: It may very well be God's will for us to suffer and to suffer while doing good. I mean it's quite possible that we come from a culture that by virtue of its wealth, its power and its scientific achievement it has so greatly diminished the reality of suffering that we tend to view suffering itself as an anomaly, as some kind of deviation from the norm. That's a great mistake. You see suffering for many of us is at the very least an oddity. For others it is not.

Now just this past week John Allen Chau, young man from Washington state, he paid some fishermen to take him to an island off the coast of India that was occupied by a hostile tribe of Indians that have no contact whatsoever with the outside world. Chau was passionate about sharing the gospel with these people and he knew the risks involved included losing his life. According to his diary, he was prepared to give it. When he got to the island he greeted the tribes people, he had one encounter, then he went back and he had a second encounter and at that second encounter he was met with a flurry of arrows that took his life. The government is now trying to figure out how to retrieve his body since no one is allowed to have contact with these people. Meanwhile lots of folks, if you looked at the comments surrounding this, lots of folks are outraged at his attempt. They're describing him as

arrogant, as foolhardy, as a lawbreaker for daring to bring this religion he wanted to shove down people's throats. Well he may have been foolhardy, but in my view he was willing to lay down his life for the gospel. That makes him a hero in my book. But it's also interesting how he perfectly fits Peter's word to us this morning. Again *1 Peter 3:16*, it says: *Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.* See, God is still sovereign even over this situation and I believe the final chapter in this tribe's history has not yet been written and that John Allen Chau will one day be a part of it. This is a man who clearly suffered for doing good. I think if we open our eyes and look, we are going to see that that suffering is far more normative than we here in the west believe.

I want you to consider just for a moment the Christians of the Maluku Islands of Indonesia. Between the years 1997 and 2001 they underwent ethnic cleansing at the hands of militant Jihadists. They suffered attack after attack after attack and they grew more and more severe and at one point many of the Christians there retreated to a large church that had a stone wall protecting it. *Charisma Magazine* described what happened next when the church was overrun. It said this, describing some individuals, it says:

Sutarsi Selong was confronted by a soldier who ordered her to shout "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great"). When she refused, he put a gun in her mouth and sent a bullet through her cheek. Then he slashed her face with a bayonet. She survived the attack, but remains disfigured. A twelve-year-old boy, Nolede, watched as his parents were hacked with machetes and then buried alive. He managed to escape into the jungles, where he wandered for about a week before running into others who escaped the attack. Tina, a 16-year-old at the time, says, "I just didn't want them to take our church. I fell to the ground wounded and was helped by some of the young people. They burned my father alive and cut my brother to pieces with their machetes." Over the next two weeks, Christians hid in the jungle and struggled to make their way to the coast, where they escaped in small boats that were part of secret rescue missions organized by people in the neighboring islands. Along with thousands of other victims in the region, the survivors lived as refugees in Manado. According to media reports, the "ethnic cleansing" campaign between 1997 and 2001, including the attack on Duma, claimed the lives of 30,000 Christians and led to about half a million people being driven out of their homes. Since then, some of the refugees have returned to their homes and have even begun planting crops. While there has also been incidents of Christians attacking and killing Muslims in retaliation, the minority community has generally been at the receiving end.

Do me a favor. Just raise your hand if you've ever even heard of the Maluku Islands. One. I mean most of us never even heard of these people, myself included. You see, you can clearly make a case that our understanding of suffering in Port Jervis, New York, it's vastly different than our understanding of suffering in Maluku, Indonesia. There suffering for doing good is the norm for believers in Jesus Christ. You see while Peter's words may sound alarming in Port Jervis, they are actually comforting in Maluku. *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.* Now is God actually saying that suffering, not for sin's consequences but for actually doing good is in fact a good thing? I mean how could a good God say that? I mean it's cruelty, it's injustice, it's suffering that's most often cited as reasons why folks can't believe in God in the first place. You know, I can't believe in a God who would... and you just fill in the blanks. You see the problem is these folks never think through the alternative. When we dismiss God because of suffering, what are we left with? Well for many it's the worldview of naturalistic materialism and that simply means that nature and the material world define and describe everything there is about life completely. There is no such thing as God because there's no such thing as the supernatural, I mean, it's a fancy way of saying that when it comes to our existence, what you see is what you get. Naturalistic materialism says what you see is all you will ever

get, and in fact you are on your own. It insists that everything we are is the product of random chance and evolution without God. And in fact the only thing anyone can say with any sense of certainty is the fact that we exist. I mean in the short run, it really does give answers to about why bad things happen to good people and the answer is why not? See the bottom line in this belief is that everything about our existence is a crapshoot. And for some of us in Port Jervis it's going to turn out relatively good; for others of us in Maluku, Indonesia, hey, not so good. But it's all a matter of chance. And that's the way it is for all randomly produced products of chance from bacteria to rats to people.

Now Christians understand the world as a vastly different place. We understand it as a cursed place where everything is not the way it was originally intended. Romans 8 says: *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* You see, Christians see the original creation of God as altogether good and the curse of what creation fell to as bad. But those

terms are meaningless to naturalistic materialism. You see it cannot comment on why bad things happen to good people because terms like "good" and "bad" don't apply. It can only go back to the essence of created things which is their existence alone, I mean, something, it either is or isn't, and that's all there is to it. But you see there's a huge problem. It's those two words: "good" and "bad." See those two words describe a quality that everyone instinctively knows that mere existence cannot account for. You know it's been said that human beings simply cannot exist with "is" and "isn't" alone so "is" always tends to slide over to "ought." And "ought" is an expression of good or bad. You know we say that childbirth is a good thing so it's something that ought to happen. Cancer is a bad thing it's something that ought not to happen. But "ought" is a meaningless concept to a materialist naturalist. See to them we are no different than animals and animals themselves are quite comfortable without any concept of "ought."

Let me just give you an illustration. A few years back when I was up in Canada for our summer vacation, my sister-in-law's dog Billy was a little Jack Russell Terrier got attacked and he got attacked by a German Shepherd. He clearly would have died if there wasn't people there to separate them, but it wound up suffering only a punctured shoulder. And I remember the day that it took place. I

particularly remembered the aftermath. I remember Billy clearly laying low as the encounter left him not only with a very sore shoulder but a very healthy fear of the other dog. I remember sitting, seeing him sitting in the family room and he's just kind of panting away looking around at everything as if nothing had happened because that's all Billy was really thinking about, nothing really had happened. He was still content to play as long as his shoulder didn't hurt him. But let's say that Billy wasn't a dog. Let's say that Billy was actually a person. And let's say that Billy got stabbed in the shoulder, he got attacked. Well he'd have a sore shoulder and he'd have very healthy fear of his attacker but he'd have something else that's unique to humans. See, he would have a philosophical burden that would be inescapable. He would have within him this sense that that attack ought not to have happened. See "ought" is an expression of the fact that it's good not to be attacked and it's bad to be attacked and only humans think that way. I mean Billy's limping and he's nursing his wounds but I have no doubt that Billy was never caught up in thinking through the philosophical implications of the fact that he was attacked without warning for nothing that he had done. That thought never occurs to Jack Russell Terriers or any other animal for that matter. They don't wrestle with "ought." Only we do. And sometimes when even animals do particularly awful things, even materialist naturalists who are committed to never saying

something ought or ought not to be, even they find themselves at a loss for words.

Consider this article by science writer Linda Zeldovich. This is what she said. This is a very recent article. It says this: On December 2, 2016 marine biologists studying killer whales off the coast of Vancouver Island in Canada, witnessed a ghastly murder scene. First, they picked up strange sounds with their hydrophones -- mikes that detect sounds underwater. Then they watched an entire killer whale drama unfold before their eyes, in which the whales actually killed one of their own: A newborn calf. The scientists saw a small group of orcas that included a mother and a young calf, fleeing from a male orca and his mother. The calf was barely a few days old, researchers estimated. Eventually, the pursuing mother-and-son pair caught up with the fugitives -- and an attack ensued. The scientists saw "erratic movements and splashing suggestive of a predation event." Moments later, they realized that the infant was no longer next to his mother, but when the male swam past the research boat, "the fluke of the neonate could be seen in his mouth with the body intact trailing underneath his lower jaw." The young mother hopelessly tried to save her offspring. She struck and bit the male, "sending blood and water in the air," but to no avail. Moreover, the male's mother interfered, blocking the attack. The male then kept the baby

underwater until it drowned. Whales and dolphins must come up to the surface to breathe so the murderous duo's actions seemed deliberate. But why were they so determined to kill the baby? And is it normal behavior for the marine mammal species? Cetacean infanticide is very rare. In fact, the scientists have never witnessed orcas killing their young before. "This is the first account of infanticide reported in killer whales and the only case committed jointly by an adult male and his mother outside of humans," they wrote.

And as the article goes on, the author begins to speculate about some possible evolutionary reasons why this might take place, you know, that maybe killing a calf would make the mother receptive to mating again, and thus the genes of the young male would be passed on instead of the dead calf's. But clearly the scientific community was appalled by what had taken place. I mean the article's author described the event as -- quote -- "a ghastly murder scene." And the mother whale and her son as -- quote -- "the murderous duo." You know, but if naturalist materialism is true, I have to ask what's the fuss about? I mean from whence comes this moralizing? I mean if we're just biological machines put here purely by chance, then why not kill a calf in order to insert your genes into the gene pool? Well I'll tell you why. It's because deep down even an atheist knows the difference between

what is and what ought to be, and killing baby orcas ought not to be.

Jean-Paul Sartre was an atheist and he was the father of existentialism. He believed that you alone could give meaning to your existence because there's no overarching purpose to all of life itself. Everything was this gigantic chance happening just working itself out, but it turns out that even that Sartre could not live without "oughts." He came out against World War II. He said that war -- quote -- "ought not to be so." But if God doesn't exist as Sartre and the others believe, than war and cruelty and suffering, they're simply tools of evolution and no more significant to human beings than a dead orca calf. You see what happens? You see what happens when you give up God? When you give up God you give up the right to say anything ought to be. You give up that right because the only one capable of imposing "oughtness" on anyone else has to be someone greater than anyone else, and naturalism insists there's no such thing. See, naturalism says "oughtness" or what they call conscience is simply a collection of neurons and biochemicals that have evolved over millions of years. Well if that's what they are, then I'm certainly free to ignore them if it suits me. So if an atheist evolutionist tells me you ought not cheat on your wife or you ought to care for your elderly parents or you ought to help the starving children in Africa, don't

I have the right to tell him he has no right whatsoever to any oughts at all? They are after all just a random neural firing connected to nothing outside of me. You see materialist naturalism can only tell you what life is. It can never tell you what it ought to be. And it's only when we acknowledge that we are not alone, that we are mere creatures answerable to someone far greater than we are who is responsible for putting us here that we get the right to use the word "ought."

When John says in *1 John 3: By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.* When Peter says in *2 Peter: Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in the lives of holiness and godliness.* When Paul says in *Ephesians 5: So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself,* they're acknowledging that it is God alone who gives meaning to the word "ought". From an evolutionary standpoint these biblical oughts are absurd, but from a biblical perspective so is materialism. I mean am I going to lay down my life for a set of randomly evolved neurophysiological patterns or because I answer to a God whose power gives meaning and purpose to all the "oughts" that govern our lives? You see the contrast couldn't be greater. No God, no good or bad but no meaning to suffering. Our God, a life full of "oughts" and a

purpose in suffering. And whether we view God's words about suffering as alarming or comforting has a lot to do with how much we are willing to trust him. You say, well, how could the love of God or how could a God of love ever say that suffering is a good thing? Well, it all has to do with how God used suffering. You see the scripture says that suffering is not a curse, it's not an illusion or even an enemy for that matter. In God's hands it is simply a tool, and it can be a learning tool, it can be a sharing tool or a showing tool but in God's economy it is never a useless tool. It always has purpose and it always has meaning. And the ultimate purpose is to shape and mold us into the image of Jesus Christ.

You know by now I think most of us in this church have had Romans 8:28 almost memorized. God says: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.* But you know, we believers have a problem with this, and our problem is not with that statement itself but with God's definition of what that word "good" really is. Our default position of "good" is we think good is, it's health, it's wealth, it's happiness. God says not necessarily. And God very clearly defines what "good" is in the very next verse. He says: *For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.* That means that God designs all things

including suffering with one ultimate good in mind and that is that those things that life consists of, that those things which shape and mold us into unique representations of the image of his Son. Suffering is one of those things. *Hebrews 5:8* says suffering is first and foremost a learning tool. It says of Jesus, *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*

Okay. So how does suffering teach you obedience? Well, for one, obedience is never proven till it's tested. It just so happens that suffering is a perfect test. Let me give you a very mild version of this. Let's say I sat down to dinner with my young children and I tell them, "Children, I want you to obey me right now. I want you to eat up your M&M's, I want you to drink your sodas and finish up all the ice cream on your plate." They may be enjoying themselves but they're not learning obedience through suffering. You see it just so happens in this instance that my desire for obedience and their desire to obey, they happen to coincide. But the more that these desires differ, the more that the children suffer, the more obedience will be proven. Now for instance if I say to my kids, "Children, I want you to obey me right now. I want you to eat up your liver and onions. I want you to drink your soy milk and take that cod liver oil that's right there in front of you," that would be much closer to a genuine

obedience. Now you add a level of ignorance and uncertainty to a child's mind and the suffering actually increases but so does the obedience as it deepens in quality. See if I told my four-year-old diabetic child that he had to have insulin shots three times a day, he's not going to understand about blood sugar levels but he will understand through suffering the need to trust and obey. And that obedience will be deeper and broader than simply eating what you're told to. I mean there's a principle at work there, do you see it? God used suffering to produce obedience in Jesus Christ and it wasn't the obedience of hostile surrender, it was the deep trust of a Son growing in his Father's wisdom.

Perhaps the best example we have of suffering as a learning tool to produce obedience is Abraham. *Genesis 22* says: *Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."* Really, was there ever a more difficult test of obedience? When you think about it, it's unimaginable the suffering that Abraham undergoes as he takes a three-day journey with his beloved son and only he knows the journey's purpose, it's to offer up his son as the sacrifice. Why are we going to Mount Moriah, asks Isaac. Why are you doing this,

God, asks Abraham. See Abraham learned obedience through suffering. Folks say how cruel of God to make Abraham suffer so just to prove his loyalty. But that completely misses the point. See, God didn't do this for his own sake, he did it for Abraham's sake. God already knows the future. He already knew exactly what was going to take place. In fact he placed a ram in the thicket just so Abraham would have an animal to sacrifice instead of Isaac. God clearly knew the future. The whole point of the exercise is that Abraham who did not know the future so that he could not know the extent of his own obedience would have an opportunity to be tested and tried. I mean God had great and mighty plans for Abraham but Abraham first had to learn by experience the depth of obedience he actually had. And the tool God used was the learning tool of suffering.

God also uses suffering as a sharing tool. If you remember what God said to Ananias about Paul, Paul obviously was a terror to the early church, God approaches Ananias after he has blinded Paul and sends Paul to Ananias for an anointing and he says this to Ananias in Acts 9:15, he says: *"Go, for he -- that's Paul -- is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."* Why do you suppose God said that? I mean you think he's just trying to get back at Paul for all the

times he attacked the church? Or was suffering a tool that God was going to use to bring Paul to a depth of understanding of his Lord's sacrifice that Paul could not get any other way? See Paul was God's chosen vessel to share that message. You have to understand, our understanding of pain is woefully limited until we experience it ourselves.

I once had a good friend who was a physician who worked in hospice and she did a lot of work in pain management. She told me her fondest wish would be that someday somebody would invent a machine that you could hook up to other doctor's brains so that they would receive the exact pain that their patients were feeling. She said it would revolutionize pain management overnight. We call it empathy. That's feeling someone else's pain. I mean I obviously have no idea what the pain of childbirth is really like and I never will. My ability to sympathize and to empathize is limited by my ability to really ever enter into that kind of circumstance. I mean I can sympathize with my wife and my daughters in their pain but you women know all too well that only you can readily identify with it. Understand that's one of the reasons why Jesus came into this world. Jesus entered into this world precisely so that God himself could participate in the experience of the pain of his fallen creatures and having experienced every single thing that we experience, to do so without sinning. See Jesus knew by experience

what suffering was all about. Sympathy is the ability to feel somebody's pain. Empathy is really the ability to enter into that pain. And Jesus knew by experience what it meant to be hot and cold and hungry and thirsty and tired. He also knew by experience just what it meant to be lonely and rejected and abandoned and hated without a cause. He also knew again by experience exactly what it felt to be beaten and flogged and spit on and stripped and crucified. See, he sympathized and empathized with us completely and ultimately. You can make the case that what Jesus went through had to have been the worst experience a human could ever experience across the board, whether it be loneliness, physical pain, any kind of pain, whatever it is, whatever it is that makes up the human experience, nobody had it worse than Jesus, because if they did have it worse, they could go to Jesus and say, "You don't know what it feels like. You haven't been where I've been." And the only way Jesus could say "I have" is if his was the worst. *Hebrews 2:14* says: *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.* That's what Jesus did.

Now is it a surprise at all that God would expect that the very ones that he's shaping and molding into the image of his son should also not be strangers to suffering? I mean Jesus said in *Mark 8:*

"Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." It was Joni Eareckson Tada who wondered aloud how could you possibly take up a cross without suffering? Suffering, you see, is a sharing tool. It's a sharing tool that God uses to bring us into the experience of his Son. Paul even said in *Philippians 3:10*: *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.*

Suffering can be a learning tool like it was for Abraham, it can be a sharing tool like it was for Paul, and finally suffering can be a "showing" tool. That's a tool that God use to display his love and his power. But understand that this power is exactly the opposite of the power that runs the world. And again to bring us back to our text this morning, it says: *Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.* John Allen Chau is being slandered today and he's being slandered as an arrogant American who tried to shove Christianity down the throats of natives who didn't want it. Some say he deserved the martyrdom that he received. He said in his diary that he feared death but his love for these people compelled him to take this risk, and so he took that risk and he died trying to tell these natives about Jesus. And you know, a lot of the Christians, if you look at the

comments, even the Christians, they said what a foolish waste, a 26-year-old guy, full of life. Never got a chance to even speak to the natives, cut down and dead. What a foolish waste, they say. God doesn't see it that way. In fact one of John's friends said, "This can make a statement to the world that this faith is worth dying for." I'd say it's already made that statement. Again, *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.* And it's better precisely because suffering is the primary venue that God uses to display his power. You know, the Christians of Maluku, Indonesia understand that far better than we do because they've learned obedience through suffering. They've also shared the reality of the cross through suffering. But what about us? I mean if God does all of these things in us through sufferings, why are we so shocked and surprised when it arrives on our door? If you are not or have not experienced suffering, there's something you need to know, and that is you are the exception, you are not the rule. God has ordained suffering as normative for his children. And I know that flies in the face of the "name it, claim it" prosperity preaching that so pervades this culture. But just listen to God's own words just one chapter back from our text this morning. This is *1 Peter 2*. He says: *For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when*

you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

This is our eighteenth message in 1 Peter and I sure hope by now you're very familiar with those words. Christ suffered for you leaving you an example. Why? *That you should follow in his steps.* Why? *For to this you have been called.* See our role as Christians is to be just what that word means, we are to be little Christs taking up our crosses for the same reason that Jesus took up his, that the Father might be glorified. Now are you trying to tell me that it's not good enough that we do good according to God we also have to suffer for it? Why's that? I mean how does our suffering bring God glory? Isn't that perfectly backwards? Well, look at our text this morning and it tells us why, it says: *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous.* God says we, too, are to give good for evil just like Jesus did. Peter tells us that Christ suffered for us leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps.

And as Jesus Christ's suffering displayed not defeat but victory, not weakness but power, not death but life itself, so too we little christs are to follow in his steps because just like Jesus was, we, too, are on display. And Ephesians tells us we are on display: *So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.* This is an amazing scripture and what God is saying is now we, the church, that's the people that are here, people gathered around the world, all of us gathered together, we represent the manifold wisdom of God today, being displayed to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. So how do we represent the manifold wisdom of God? Well, we do that by following in the footsteps of our master, and he suffered for doing good. We do likewise.

A few years back there was a popular song that said God is watching us from a distance. You know that's only half right. See, God is watching us but it's not from any distance at all, it's from the centers of our own individual unique hearts, and every one of us stands before him profoundly naked to the very core of our beings acting out a drama we know almost nothing about. The drama itself is why you and I exist. I mean we think of our homes and our jobs and our careers as the things that really matter but we're wrong

and someday we will see that suffering for doing good was the most important job we ever had. I suspect John Allen Chau right now is reaping the blessings of that understanding. Five hundred years from now he's going to be able to turn to those folks and say, "Who's the fool?"

I said at the beginning of this message that a garden was something that I use to redeem the passing of summer. You know we can't stop time from passing but we can make its passing worthwhile. The same is true for suffering. You can't stop it from coming. God promises us that it will, but you can make its arrival worthwhile. You can see suffering as a learning tool for obedience, as a sharing tool to enter into the fellowship of Christ's suffering, or you can know it as a showing tool where we follow in the master's footsteps to show the world the God that we worship. Because he's told us quite plainly that it's better if it's God's will to suffer for doing good.

Are you suffering for doing good right now, today? If you are, realize this is not an accident, this is not a mistake. This is actually the will of God. God tells us plainly *to this you were called*. Ask him today, ask him now for the grace to take up your cross and follow him and remember no suffering for doing good is ever wasted. And that's not just my opinion, that's God's

statement of fact. Let me leave you with Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:17. Paul says: *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for giving us the ability to understand through your word that there is purpose in suffering. Lord, I pray that the life of John Allen Chau would not end with this story being the way it is, that there would be something that we would actually see of the continuation of this. There's so many connections between his death and Jim Elliott's that I would love to see that tribe further on having some kind of positive effect, but even so, Lord, only you know what that purpose in suffering was but we trust that you do know and you sovereignly control it. And Lord, individually we all have these different instances of suffering in our own lives and we all wonder why in the world you would allow that to happen. I pray, Lord, that you would give each and every one of us the understanding of what it means to suffer and what a blessing it is to have purpose in that suffering. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.