

Suffering & the Gospel  
Philippians 1:12-14

**INTRO:**

Just last week, I was sitting with a friend over breakfast, and was having a discussion about one of the most common struggles we have as believers, and even as non believers. Many of you have probably struggled with this question, and you're not alone! This struggle has gone on for centuries! It had to go through the mind of Jesus on the Cross, the disciples, and Paul during his many years of ministry. This struggle has been the source of many to be frustrated or even doubt the truth of who God is.

**WHY DOES GOD ALLOW BAD THINGS TO HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?**

Am I right in assuming that many of us have struggled with this question? Perhaps that is a recent struggle for you, and one that is really testing your faithfulness to the Gospel.

**Examples – insert personal examples of struggles.**

**TRANSITION:**

Well, the truth is, God is always sovereign and always on the throne. He does allow the good and the bad to happen, but even though we don't always understand why, we can trust that he does have the "big picture" in mind. He knows the first from the last. He sees beyond and before our current space/time reality. God is not less of himself because bad things happen. He is still God and still loves us. But it requires trust and confidence in someone higher and bigger than ourselves to appreciate that.

I believe that Paul realized better than most, that when bad things happen, it's not a reason to doubt God, but a reason to continue celebrating the future hope that we have in Jesus, because after all – our present suffering will ultimately end with our eternity with Jesus!

**READ Philippians 1:12-14**

1. Paul's suffering served to advance the Gospel (v.12)
  - a. In spite of obstacles or road blocks for Paul, the Gospel was preached and ministry happened
  - b. Letters were written by Paul that we still use today! (Phil.)
    - i. Paul didn't allow his suffering to be an obstacle for his mission, for THE Mission of God.
      1. READ Boice, pp. 51-52
  - c. I read in one commentary, "not all suffering is for expressly for the advance of the Gospel. Some suffering is corrective, intended to get us on the right path when we have gone astray. Some suffering is instructive, intended to mold us into the image of Jesus. However, Paul's suffering was neither of those. It was simply a suffering allowed by God so that the Gospel might be spread to others."

- i. **WOW! How tough is that? Paul was allowed by God to suffer so much, but it was constantly Paul's desire to continue to advance the Gospel in spite of his suffering.**
- ii. **Consider the audiences he encountered along the way of his suffering...**
  - 1. **Rome, Prisoners, time to write to the churches, etc.**
  - 2. **"God has greatly honored you with this suffering, and you must take joy even in the midst of it as you see how your suffering has brought salvation to others."**
    - a. **Homeless to Harvard – a gift, a blessing, etc**

**2. Paul's sufferings brought honor to Jesus! (v. 13)**

**Understand, Roman prison – not good conditions! This was just some of Paul's suffering, but ultimately cost him his life...**

- a. **First of all, he always guarded his mouth and heart**
  - i. **He never griped**
  - ii. **He always pointed to eternal hope**
  - iii. **He always continued to fuel the flame of the Gospel**
  - iv. **He kept an eternal perspective**
    - 1. **"Why did Paul have joy in a place and at a time like this? And why do so few of us have it in affluent America? What was Paul's secret? What was the key that he had found? The secret is a simple one: Paul had filled his mind with Christ. – You cannot be thinking of two things at once. You can't think about your sufferings at the same time as thinking about Jesus. This Paul knew... he had filled his mind with Christ."**
- b. **His suffering brought honor to Jesus in 3 ways –**
  - i. **Locally – in prison, Imperial guard (v. 13)**
  - ii. **Regionally – to all the rest (probably those in the area, v. 13)**
  - iii. **Beyond (space/time) – to most of the brothers, us (v. 14)**
- c. **ILLUS: Think of the honor to the Lord from the suffering of particular people: Jim Elliot, Bonhoeffer, Jesus (CA girl), "Foxes Book of Martyrs," "Jesus Freaks," etc.**

**3. Paul's suffering was ultimately because of Jesus! (v.13)**

- a. **Sometimes we endure suffering as proof of God's presence in our lives!**
- b. **Look at v. 13 – he blames his faith in Jesus as the cause!**
  - i. **Note: it emboldened the brothers in the faith.**
  - ii. **"Paul is willing to suffer so much for this, there is merit to this proclamation!"**
  - iii. **History channel documentary of early church, martyrs – solidified my faith.**
  - iv. **It was because of Jesus, that the early church gave their lives – that is real suffering!**

- c. **God works most often through suffering, not through the channels of economic and political power that seem to be the new salvation!**
  - i. **Cuba: Theologian Thomas Oden visited the Methodist churches of Cuba five years after the collapse of the Berlin wall, he found that after 35 years of communist oppression of the church in Cuba, it had grown from 6,000 – over 50,000!**
  - ii. **Chinese churches are some of the fastest growing in the world, and they are completely underground – oppressed by govt.**
- d. **So, while not all suffering is to be blamed on Jesus, the suffering Paul endured was because of his adherence to the Gospel. While we aren't imprisoned for our faith, we deal with social and familial rejection, various forms of prejudice or mockery, and there are some in this room who may one day face some sort of physical harm because you have aligned your life with the Gospel of Jesus. Know that your suffering will not be new to God, many have suffered before you because of faith in Jesus.**
  - i. **\*\*\*Interesting distinction: Suffering because of faith in God/Jesus may be different than suffering BY God! While God allowed men to imprison Paul, I'm not sure God caused his imprisonment or pain.**

**Transition/Conclusion:**

Which brings me back to the original question of this whole sermon. **“WHY DOES GOD ALLOW BAD THINGS TO HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?”**

Looking back at this text, we see that Paul's suffering advanced the Gospel, brought honor to Jesus – locally, regionally, and beyond, and that Paul's suffering was due to the fact that he was a follower of Jesus. So, why did God allow bad things to happen to Paul? In his case, it was to advance the Gospel, and bring honor to Jesus.

\*\*\* I want to address a couple things with this question: “Why does God allow...” First, God allows because he is sovereign over a world filled with people who aren't, and people who are fallen in their sin, and in their free will act out accordingly (Pef). Secondly, there is no one on Earth that is truly “good.” How do we measure that? We can't judge the heart, good intentions and actions don't make the heart of a person good. Scripture tells us that no one is good or righteous, not one, except for Jesus. The only truly Good person to ever live suffered, and GOD ALLOWED IT – for the advance of the Kingdom and to ultimately bring honor to God (in his love he offered Jesus on our behalf – that is worth thanking God).

I'm convinced that God will not put on you more than you can bear, but there may be a time, or times in your life that God will allow suffering in you, and we have to decide if we will bring him honor and work through our suffering to advance the Gospel. **Realize: God did his greatest work through suffering – through the suffering of Jesus Christ on the Cross! And we see Paul's ambition in Phil. 3:8-11 (READ).**

So, as you suffer in your own life at various time, now or later, consider Jesus Christ, and consider that there is a bigger picture happening. Perhaps you can take on the attitude of Paul who never complained, who never looked at his sufferings as obstacles to

greatness, or excuses to quit serving Jesus. Perhaps you can see your suffering as an opportunity to rely on the strength of Jesus and to advance the Gospel.

Pray for those suffering: endurance, God's hand of deliverance, patience, etc.

Pray for those suffering: God's will to prevail (whether we endure or we are delivered)

Encouragement -