

The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Lamentations 3: 22-33

June 28, 2015

My Fellow Redeemed In Christ,

There Is Much Suffering In This World....But Really There Are Only Two Kinds: The Suffering That Comes From Other People.....And The Suffering That We Bring On Ourselves. Being Hit By A Drunk Driver Is An Example Of Suffering That Is Brought On By Other People. But We Can Bring Suffering On Ourselves With Bad Choices And Bad Behaviors. In Our Text The Prophet Jeremiah Is Talking About Suffering That We Bring On Ourselves By Our Bad Choices And Bad Behaviors. In His Day The People Of Israel Made The Bad Choice Of Trusting In The False Gods Of The Nations Around Them As Well As Their Military And Political Alliances.... They Put Their Trust In These Things Rather Than God. And These Bad Choices Led To Bad Behavior: They Became Immoral And Corrupt. God Tried To Warn Them Many Times By Sending By Sending Them His Prophets....But They Wouldn't Listen. So, Finally, God Sent The Powerful Babylonian Empire To Destroy Them. And They Suffered Greatly.....There Was Violence And Famine; Death And Even Cannibalism. And Jeremiah Saw It All And Describes It In This Small Book Called **Lamentations**. And In 2015 We Have Something To Learn Also About "**Sin And Suffering**".

I. Responsible Parents Are Always Warning Their Children ...And Especially Their Teenagers... Of The Possible Negative Consequences Of Sinful Attitudes, Words, Choices And Behaviors. And So Does God. But Just Like Children And Teenagers.... We Might Not Always Listen To Him. Sometimes We Have To Learn The Hard Way....And The Result Is Often Suffering. What Do We Do About Suffering That We Have Brought Upon Ourselves? Accept It In Humility. Yes, Accept It As Our Own Fault.

A. We Have No Right To Complain About Any Suffering That We Bring Upon Ourselves. Whatever We Suffer... We Deserve It.....It's Our Fault As Jeremiah Says: "**Let Him Sit Alone In Silence When It Is Laid On Him....**" (V. 28, **EsV**). There's An Old Saying: "**You've Made Your Bed...And Now You Have To Lie In It**". In Other Words, This Is Our Doing And Now We Have To Suffer The Consequences. Instead Of Being Mad At God Or Other People, We Need To Quietly Examine Ourselves And Admit That Our Suffering Could Have Been Avoided If We Had A Different Attitude, Spoken Different Words, Made Different Choices Or Had Better Behavior. So Jeremiah Says: "**Let Him Put His Mouth In The Dust....**" (V. 29, **EsV**). Just A Few Verses After Our Text Jeremiah Writes: "**Why Should A Living Man Complain, A Man, About The Punishment Of His Sins?**" (3: 39, **EsV**). There's Nothing More Pathetic Than Seeing An Adult Complaining About The Sufferings That He Has Brought On Himself. Humility Accepts The Consequences Of Our Sins. And The Earlier We Learn This Lesson In The Life The Better....As Jeremiah Says, "**It Is Good For A Man To Bear His Yoke... In His Youth**" (V. 27, **EsV**).

B. Our Lord Jesus Christ Is The Greatest Example Of Humble Suffering. He Too Suffered The Consequences Of Sin....Not His Own, He Didn't Have Any....But He Humbly Accepted Suffering For Your Sins And Mine....For The Sins Of The Whole World. So Peter Writes In His First Letter: **"For Christ Also Suffered Once For Sins, The Righteous For The Unrighteous, [Repeat], That He Might Bring Us To God" (3: 18, Esv).** And Yet, Even Though Jesus Suffered For The Sins Of Other People.....He Did Not Complain...In Humility He Accepted His Suffering As Jeremiah Says, **"Let Him Give His Cheek To The One Who Strikes And Let Him Be Filled With Insults" (V. 30, Esv)** And Isaiah Said Of Jesus, **"He Was Oppressed, And He Was Afflicted, Yet He Opened Not His Mouth (53: 7, Esv).** Because Jesus Willingly Humbled Himself To Suffer For Us.....We Have A Savior From Sin And Death.....But In His Humility He Not Only Became Our Savior.....But Also Our Example To Follow As Peter Says In His Second Letter: **"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" (2: 21, Esv).** So Then, If By God's Grace And Spirit We Are To Humbly Accept The Suffering That Is Not Our Fault.....How Much More Then Are We To Humbly Accept That Suffering That We Bring On Ourselves?

ii. However.....That's Not The Whole Story.....It's Not Enough To Humbly Accept The Sufferings That We Have Brought On Ourselves.....But We Also Need Faith In God To Trust In His Promises.....Otherwise Our Suffering Will Simply Overwhelm Us With Depression And Despair.

A. And We Have Such A Hope In Our God Because He Is A God Of Love. Listen To The Words And Phrases That Jeremiah Uses To Describe Our God: **"The Steadfast Love Of The Lord Never Ceases; His Mercies Never Come To An End....The Lord Is Good...He Will Have Compassion According To The Abundance Of His Steadfast Love" (Vv. 22, 25, 32, Esv).** God's Love For Us Is So Great That He Even Uses Our Suffering For Our Good. God Lets Us Suffer The Consequences Of Our Sinful **Attitudes, Words, Choices** And **Behaviors**....Not Because He Hates Us.....But Because He Loves Us. Parents Often Have To Learn This Truth With Their Own Children. No Parent Wants To See Their Children Suffer From The Bad Choices That They Make. But Parents Soon Learn That Children Have To Suffer Consequences If They Are To Learn From Their Bad Choices ...And Make Changes In Their Lives....The Key Phrase Here Is **"Make Changes In Their Lives"**.... Parents Are Tempted To Rescue Their Child From Bad Choices.....But If They Do That The Child Might Not Learn To Make Changes.....And So It Is With Our God As Jeremiah Tells Us: **"For He Does Not Willingly Afflict Or Grieve The Children Of Men" (V. 33, Esv).** God Knows Suffering Can Be For Our Good.....If It Leads Us To Reflect On Our Attitudes, Words, Choices And Behaviors...And Make Changes.....As Jeremiah Says Just A Few Verses After Our Text: **"Let Us Test And Examine Our Ways, And Return To The LORD!" (3: 40, Esv).** Just As A Five Year Old Learns Not To Touch A Hot Stove A Second Time... So Likewise God Wants Us To Learn From Our Suffering To Live For Him As King David Says In Psalm 19:

**"Before I Was Afflicted I Went Astray, But Now [After I Was Afflicted] I Keep Your Word" (V. 67, Esv).** In This Way God Loves Us Even In Our Suffering...Using It For Our Good. And So We Always Have Hope As Jeremiah Says, **"The Lord Is My Portion...Therefore I Will Hope In Him..." (V. 24, Esv).** There Is Hope Because In Jesus Christ God Forgives The Sin That Has Caused Us To Suffer. Thus Our Conscience Can Find Peace And Comfort. But What About Our Suffering? Well, There Are Two Possibilities. God Will Either Take The Suffering Away.....Or He Won't Take It Away.... But He Will Give Us The Ability To Accept It As Jeremiah Says: **.....The Lord Is Good To Those Who Wait For Him, To The Soul Who Seeks Him.....For The Lord Will Not Cast Off Forever, But Though He Cause Grief, He Will Have Compassion" (Vv. 25, 31, 32, Esv).**

B. And All Of This Is Possible Because Jesus Christ So Humbly Suffered The Consequences Of Our Sins. As Both Our Savior And Our Example ...In His Suffering Jesus Put His Trust And Hope In His Heavenly Father As He Said On The Cross: **"Father, Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit!" (Luke 23: 46, Esv).** Jesus Was Able To Endure His Sufferings Because He Knew That On The Third Day He Would Be Raised From The Dead And Be Seated At The Right Hand Of His Father. His Sufferings Would Be Temporary But His Glory Would Be Eternal. And So It Is With Us. We Know That After We Suffer In This Life We Too Will Be Raised From The Dead To Enter An Unspeakable Glory As Paul Says In His Letter To The Romans, **"For I Consider That The Sufferings Of This Present Time Are Not Worth Comparing With The Glory That Is To Be Revealed To Us" (V. 18, Esv).** How Often Do You Remember This Promise Of Glory? One Day, Just Like Jesus, You Will Be Raised From The Dead And Your Body Will Be An Eternal And Glorified Body Just Like Jesus Has. In The Midst Of Sufferings How Often Do You Think About This Hope? And So Jeremiah Says, **"It Is Good That One Should Wait Quietly For The Salvation Of The Lord" (V. 26, Esv).** Yes, Because That Day Will Come.....And Sufferings Will Come To An End.

Conclusion: Suffering Is Never Easy. ....No One Likes To Suffer. Suffering Can Lead To Anger, Resentment, And Depression...And The Suffering We Have Brought On Ourselves Has The Added Burden Of Guilt, Knowing That We Have Brought This Suffering Upon Ourselves.... But In Jesus Christ Our Sin.... That Has Caused Our Suffering.... Is Forgiven....And We Can Have Peace. And God In His Love Will Either Take Our Suffering Away Or He Will Give Us The Strength We Need To Bear It. But Either Way.....God Is With Us .....He Loves Us And At The Return Of Jesus He Will Replace Our Suffering With Glory... As Jeremiah Says, **"Though He Cause Greif, He Will Have Compassion According To The Abundance Of His Steadfast Love" (V. 32, Esv).** Regardless Of How Unfaithful We Might Be To God.....He Is Always Faithful To Us.....As We Sang In Our Sermon Hymn And As Jeremiah Reminds Us....**"Great Is Your Faithfulness." (V. 23).** Amen.