

The Grace of Gratitude

Seminar 3 – In sickness and in health

- ❖ **Two things which we know about life**
 - **Romans 8:28-30** – God works all things for our good.
 - **Romans 8:22-23** – The whole creation groans in pain – so do we.

1. Life is difficult

- ❖ **“This is not the way things should be”**
 - Suffering is folded into the fabric of our lives.
 - We live in the middle of the book.
 - **Ecc 3:1-10** - We know great swells of joy and the deep billows of pain.
 - Suffering is the greatest challenge to a life of gratitude.
- ❖ **The miracle of the church car park**
 - We hide our doubts and fears because we think that they show a lack of faith.
 - A third of the Psalms lament the pains of life.
 - Failure to express our grief may lead to negative emotions - anger, bitterness, frustration, self-pity, helplessness, fear, and guilt.
- ❖ **We must not confuse lamenting with grumbling**
 - **Grumbling** is when our trials drive us from God rather than towards Him.
 - **Lamenting** talks to God about our pain in humble faith.
 - A complaint is an accusation against God that maligns His character, but a lament is an appeal to God based on confidence in His character.
- ❖ **Psalm 13 is a model of lamentation**
 - **Turn (13:1)** – We turn to God and state the problem to Him.
 - **Complain (13:1- 2)** - We humbly and honestly identify our pain.
 - **Ask (13:3-4)** – We move on to ask for the Lord’s help.
 - **Trust (13:5-6)** - We end with an expression of trust in God

“No matter what precautions we take, no matter how well we have put together a good life, no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable with friends and family, and successful with our career — something will inevitably ruin it.” Tim Keller

- ❖ **In what ways do we experience suffering in this fallen world?**

2. The foundation of gratitude – knowing God

*“Thanksgiving is a deeply theological act
His glory is your protection
His grace is your help
His wisdom is your direction
He is infinitely smarter than us and we can trust him.”*

Luther’s three pillows

a) God is Sovereign

- “God has an eternal and all-embracing plan which cannot be defeated and will result in His glory and the good of His people”
- **Daniel 4:34-36** – His dominion is an eternal dominion.
- **Genesis 50:20** – Who sent Joseph to Egypt?
- **Acts 2:22-24** – Who sent Jesus to the cross?

b) God is Good

- **Deuteronomy 32:4** – “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”
- To be good is to be worthy of approval.
- God is the final standard of goodness.
- God’s character, actions and intentions are always worthy of approval.
- **Psalms 34:8** – “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”
- **Romans 5:6-8** - The death of Christ proves that God is good.

c) God is Wise

- God’s wisdom mean that he always chooses the best goals and the best means of achieving those goals.
- **Psalms 18:30** – God’s way is perfect.
- **Job 38-41** – God does not explain all His ways.
- **Deuteronomy 29:29** – The secret things belong to God.

❖ **What other attributes of God should inspire our gratitude?**

3. Gratitude sees that even in our pain God has a purpose

- **James 1:2-3** - "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness"
- "We want an explanation which bestows meaning on the events of pain and suffering" Peter Berger

1) God is deepening our fellowship with Him

❖ Suffering drives us into the arms of God

- **Psalm 73:13-22** – It drives us **to** God or **from** God – the choice is ours.
- "God whispers in our prosperity; he speaks in his word; he shouts in our suffering." - C S Lewis
- **Deuteronomy 8:3** – In the Wilderness we learn that we do not "live by bread alone".
- **Job 42:5** - Job confessed, "I had heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you".

❖ The experience of God's people

- **Elisabeth Elliot** - "I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God."

❖ Suffering deepen our prayer lives

- **2 Chronicles 20:12** - "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you".
- **Nehemiah 1:3-4** - Devastating news causes us to weep, to fast, and to pray.
- **Romans 8:26** - When we lack words to pray, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness," interceding for us "with groanings too deep for words".
- Humble prayer cultivates dependence on God and challenges our pride.

2) God is making us like Jesus

❖ This is God's ultimate purpose

- **Romans 8:28-30** – God's good purpose is to create people like his Son.
- "The greatest thing God does today is to take a sinful man or woman out of a sinful world, make them like Jesus, put them back in a sinful world and keep them like Jesus"
- We are to make Jesus visible, intelligible, and desirable.

❖ Three images

- **Psalm 66:10-12** – We are being refined like silver.
- **Hebrews 12:1-13** – We are being chastened like a beloved child.
- **John 15:1-8** – We are being pruned like a fruitful vine.

❖ Suffering increases our gratitude for Jesus

- **Luke 22:42** - Jesus tasted the deepest cup of suffering for us.
- **Isaiah 53:5** – He was "wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities".
- Suffering makes us more aware of Jesus's pain and increases our gratitude.

3) God is strengthening our faith

❖ God wants to grow our faith

- **2 Corinthians 1:8-11** – Trials happen so “*that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*”
- **1 Peter 1:7** - Trials prove the genuineness of our faith.
- Suffering makes us resilient.

❖ Trials magnify the grace of God

- **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** - The thorn was a painful, chronic, limiting, and humiliating problem. It magnified the grace of God in Paul’s life.
- Suffering humbles us and removes our pride and self-reliance and teaches us how fragile we really are.
- “*We never really know that God is all we need until God is all that we’ve got.*”

4) God is preparing us for heaven

❖ Psalm 90:12 – “*Help us to number our days aright...*”

- **Psalm 139:13-18** – Our life is in God’s hands.
- **Romans 8:18** – Present suffering will result in future glory.
- **2 Corinthians 4:17-18** – These light and momentary sufferings are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory.

❖ Hebrews 2:14-15 - **Jesus destroys the fear of death**

- **1 Corinthians 15:20** – He is the firstfruits of those who will be raised
- “*But resurrection is not just consolation — it is restoration. We get it all back - the love, the loved ones, the goods, the beauties of this life - but in new, unimaginable degrees of glory and joy and strength.*” Tim Keller

❖ Rev 7:15-17; 21:1-4; 22:1-5 – **God is the final reward of His people**

- The greatest attraction of heaven is the presence of God.
- He is the ultimate reward of His people.
- “*The mark of a saint, a child of God, is not that we have attained or are perfect, but that we long for Christ, we thirst like hungry babies for his Word and fellowship and power. And the better we know him, the more we love him. And when we finally enter into his presence with rejoicing, our endless song will be, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.” Your mouth is always full of praises for what you value most. ‘To you who believe, he is precious.’*”

John Piper

❖ **How can we best minister to others when they are in pain?**