



Sunday, July 19, 2020

God's Glory in the Midst of Human Suffering
Sermon by Pastor Zach Prosser

Care Group Discussion Guide **Celebration Church**

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The Bible Guarantees Suffering

- Suffering exists because of sin (Romans 5:12).
 - All of God's creation groans to be delivered from sin (Romans 8:22).
- We must endure much suffering to enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).
- There are many types of suffering (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).
- Suffering happens in community (Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 10:24).
- The suffering Savior is our example:
 - Hardship (Hebrews 12:2)
 - Temptation (Hebrews 4:15)
 - Sickness and Death (John 11:35, 40; Psalm 23, 34:19)
 - Persecution (1 Peter 2:21-23)

The Benefits of Suffering

- Suffering is a gift from God (Philippians 1:29; Matthew 5:11-12).
- Suffering furthers the gospel (Philippians 1:12-14, 19-22).
- Suffering perfects us (Job 23:10, Malachi 3:3, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 5:10).
- Suffering brings us closer to Jesus (Job 19:25-26; Philippians 3:8, 4:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 2 Corinthians 5:4).

The Joy of Suffering (from a letter by Dietrich Bonhoeffer written on December 29, 1942)

- At the beginning of a letter that in this solemn hour is meant to call you all to true joy, there necessarily stand the names of those brothers who have died since I last wrote to you: P. Wälde, W. Brandenburg, Hermann Schröder, R. Lynker, Erwin Schutz, K. Rhode, Alfred Viol, Kurt Onnasch, Fritz's second brother; in addition to them, and presumably known to many of you, Major von Wedemeyer and his oldest son, Max.

“Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads” [Isaiah 35:10]. We are glad for them; indeed, should we say that we sometimes secretly envy them? From early times the Christian church has considered acedia — the melancholy of the heart, or “resignation” — to be one of the mortal sins. “Serve the Lord with joy” [Psalm 100:2] — thus do the scriptures call out to us. For this our life has been given to us, and for this it has been preserved for us unto the present hour.

This joy, which no one shall take from us, belongs not only to those who have been called home but also to us who are alive. We are one with them in this joy, but never in melancholy. How are we going to be able to help those who have become joyless and discouraged if we ourselves are not borne along by courage and joy? Nothing contrived or forced is intended here, but something bestowed and free.

Joy abides with God, and it comes down from God and embraces spirit, soul, and body; and where this joy has seized a person, there it spreads, there it carries one away, there it bursts open closed doors.

A sort of joy exists that knows nothing at all of the heart’s pain, anguish, and dread; it does not last; it can only numb a person for the moment. **The joy of God has gone through the poverty of the manger and the agony of the cross; that is why it is invincible, irrefutable.** It does not deny the anguish, when it is there, but finds God in the midst of it, in fact precisely there; it does not deny grave sin but finds forgiveness precisely in this way; it looks death straight in the eye, but it finds life precisely within it.

What matters is this joy that has overcome. It alone is credible; it alone helps and heals. The joy of our companions who have been called home is also the joy of those who have overcome — the Risen One bears the marks of the cross on his body. We still stand in daily overcoming; they have overcome for all time. God alone knows how far away or near at hand we stand to the final overcoming in which our own death may be made joy for us.

Some among us suffer greatly because they are internally deadening themselves against so much suffering, such as these war years bring in their wake. One person said to me recently, “I pray every day that I may not become numb.” That is by all means a good prayer.

And yet we must guard ourselves against confusing ourselves with Christ. Christ endured all suffering and all human guilt himself in full measure — indeed, this was what made him Christ, that he and he alone bore it all. But Christ was able to suffer along with others because he was simultaneously able to redeem from suffering. Out of his love and power to redeem people came his power to suffer with them.

We are not called to take upon ourselves the suffering of all the world; by ourselves we are fundamentally not able to suffer with others at all, because we are not able to redeem. But the wish to suffer with them by one’s own power will inevitably be crushed into resignation. We are called only to gaze full of joy at the One who in reality suffered with us and became the Redeemer.

Full of joy, we are enabled to believe that there was and is One to whom no human suffering or sin is foreign and who in deepest love accomplished our redemption. Only in such joy in Christ the Redeemer shall we be preserved from hardening ourselves where human suffering encounters us.