HaDavar Messianic Ministries

Making Sense of Suffering
With Pastor Jeff Carter

Week Three

Network: ICC_Guest1
Password: icchadavar
“Without our freedom there might have been no suffering as we know it, but neither could there have been sympathy. There would have been no hatred, but for the same reason, there could have been no voluntary love. There would have been no sorrow, but neither could there have been comfort. There would have been no danger, but neither could there have been courage or heroism. There would have been neither unkindness nor forgiveness... 

Without moral freedom there would have been no vice, but by the same token, there could have been no virtue; virtue that is not freely chosen is no more of the “virtue” of fire to burn, water to freeze, or light to shine. Mechanical robots programmed for certain behavior and deprived of freedom would have no privilege of fellowship with God. Both the very worst things in life and the very best are made possible by moral freedom. Freedom itself precludes having the good without the possibility of the bad” (JonTal Murphree, “A Loving God & a suffering world).

Review:
➢ The philosophical problem of evil
➢ Freedom necessitates the possibility of sin
➢ The existence of evil requires a good God
➢ Birth pangs is how scripture presents pain and suffering
➢ Every new beginning is preceded by birth pangs
➢ Suffering accompanies new births
➢ The church age embodies the birth pangs
➢ Birth pangs are a promise of coming glory
IV. Metaphors for sanctification

A. Discipline & training

1) “We are not put on earth merely to satisfy our desires, to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. We are here to be changed, to be made more like God in order to prepare us for a lifetime with Him” (Philip Yancey)

2) The process is painful

Hebrews 12:5-6, 11

My Son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives ... all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

“We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character.... Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble ... but over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves ... he will take endless trouble” (C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain).
IV. Metaphors for sanctification

A. Discipline & training
3) We need to see beyond the discipline to the end product
4) “…a developed ability to cope with difficult situations, which is acquired through training and exposure to the sort of difficulties that lie ahead” (Alistair McGrath).

5) The Christian life is a battle
6) The Christian life is also like a race
7) We are also being pruned

“Suffering is like pruning. It is cutting off spurious growths which might be of no value or stopping shoots which, were they to grow further, would weaken the vine. It hurts the branch to be pruned” (McGrath).

B. Refining
1) Suffering subjects us to intense heat and removes the dross and impurities
2) God is more concerned with our character than our comfort
1 Peter 1:6-9
“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”

“...our suffering has a purpose. It has a goal—the end of our faith is the salvation of our souls. Suffering is a crucible. As gold is refined in the fire, purged of its dross and impurities, so is our faith tested by fire. Gold perishes. Our souls do not.” (R. C. Sproul, Surprised by Suffering)

V. Sharing in Christ’s death
A. The Suffering of Believers
1) It is a privilege
   a) “Christians often tend to view the suffering of Christ as the means by which they will escape all suffering, but this simply is not the teaching of the New Testament. The Christian is called to imitate and share in the suffering of Jesus.”
   b) Phil 3:7-10—the fellowship of His sufferings
   c) Phil 1:29—”granted” to suffer for His sake
V. Sharing in Christ’s death
A. The Suffering of Believers
1) It is a privilege
d) “Suffering is seen as a potential mark of God’s favor and presence, as He allows us the privilege in sharing in the suffering of His own Son” (McGrath)
e) Acts 5:41—rejoicing they were considered worthy to suffer shame

“Suffering is a form of divine pedagogy, testing, or cleansing… Suffering evokes either rebellion or submission: rebellion, because no explanation of innocent suffering makes sense; submission, because faith in God’s hidden wisdom and communion with him are the only possibilities in the face of inexplicable suffering.”
J. Christaan Beker, (Suffering and Hope)

V. Sharing in Christ’s death
A. The Suffering of Believers
2) It is a responsibility
a) “...the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world” (1 Peter 5:9)
b) Rom 8:17—if we are to share in His glory we must share in His suffering
c) 1 Thess 3:3—Paul was destined for such suffering
d) Opposition from Satan will come
V. Sharing in Christ’s death

A. The Suffering of Believers

3) It should not come as a surprise
   a) “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mark 8:34-35)
   b) Unless you are willing to suffer for Me, then My suffering isn’t for you.

1 Peter 4:12-13

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though something strange were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing.”

“...such an ordeal is wholly in keeping with their profession of faith in Christ; it admits them to fellowship with Him in His earthly experience of suffering at the hands of the rulers of this world.”
Francis Wright Beare (The First Epistle of Peter)

“Now that [the Gentiles] had pledged allegiance to the true and living God of the universe with whom all power resided, they certainly would not expect to suffer (or, in their minds, be persecuted) for it.”
Hall (For to This You Were Called)
“Dire sufferings will precede the end—for this reason the sufferings should not surprise the readers. Such sufferings are a necessary prelude to the eschatological age. Inasmuch as these sufferings are an unavoidable link in the eschatological sequence of events, the readers should not be shaken that, as the end draws near (1 Pet 4:7), they themselves participate in these eschatological woes.”

V. Sharing in Christ’s death
A. The Suffering of Believers
4) Participating in the sufferings of the Messiah
   a) “Messianic Woes”--an early Jewish conception of a time of eschatological tribulation which early Jews regarded as a necessary preliminary to the age to come.
   b) “The Messianic woes denote a period of trial which the Jews believed would take place before the arrival of the Messiah … out of them the New Age was to be born.”

V. Sharing in Christ’s death
A. The Suffering of Believers
5) Christ is our example
   a) “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Pet 2:21)
   b) Suffering is the path by which we come to the place of preparedness for the kingdom.
   c) It is the link between our present state of lowliness and our future state of glory.
V. Sharing in Christ’s death
A. The Suffering of Believers
5) Christ is our example
   d) “...after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (1 Pet 5:10)
ed) “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17)

“The trials and tribulations that beset the child of God must be kept in perspective. They are not meaningless. They are a witness to the glory that has been set before them.” Dial (The Role of Suffering)

V. Sharing in Christ’s death
B. The Suffering of the church
1) Suffering is our destiny
2) “The idea that to become a Christian is to enter the experience of the suffering people of God, who are able to witness to God through that suffering and draw nearer to Him as a result of it pervades the New Testament” (McGrath)
3) “…in this world, you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33)
V. Sharing in Christ’s death

B. The Suffering of the church
4) The church is pictured as a body
5) We do not participate in the redemptive sufferings of Christ
6) We are also seen as “adopted” into God’s family

“To be an adopted child is to have the same inheritance rights as the natural children.... We are heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ. And what does this mean? It means that we can, in due course, expect to inherit everything that Christ received as an inheritance from God. And what did Christ receive? According to Paul, in the first place suffering, and in the second, glory. No suffering, no glory. Through faith, we come to share in this pattern of divine inheritance mapped out for us by Christ: suffering, followed by glory.” (McGrath)

“Faith is like a marriage bond. It unites two people in a real and personal union. To be a Christian is to be in Christ—that is, to be united through faith to the risen Christ.... To think of faith as a marriage between the believer and Christ thus emphasizes the real and personal nature of the union between them. Faith is not knowing about Christ; it is knowing Christ and being known by Him.”
“Faith unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. As Paul teaches us, Christ and the soul become one flesh by this mystery (Ephesians 5:31-2). And if they are one flesh, and if the marriage is for real… then it follows that everything that they have is held in common, whether good or evil. So the believer can boast of and glory in whatever Christ possesses, as though it were his or her own. And whatever the believer has, Christ claims as His own…

…Let us see how this works out, and see how it benefits us. Christ is full of grace, life and salvation. The human soul is full of sin, death and damnation. Now let faith come between them. Sin, death and damnation will be Christ’s. And grace, life and salvation will be the believer’s.”

V. Sharing in Christ’s death
B. The Suffering of the church
7) Our relationship with Christ is pictured as a marriage
8) Everything that Christ has is ours
9) “…a sense of perspective in which [we] can feel and see the contrast between the shortness of time and the lightness of [our] affliction here, and the infinite eternity and overwhelming glory beyond.” Hall
“No event of time or eternity compares with the transcending significance of the death of Christ on the cross. Other important undertakings of God such as the creation of the world, the incarnation of Christ, His resurrection, the second coming, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth become meaningless if Christ did not die.” (Walvoord)

V. Sharing in Christ’s death
C. The Suffering of Christ
1) Why must Christ suffer?
2) The holiness of God required this suffering
3) “Christ by His death redeemed or paid the price for sin. This payment constituted a propitiation or satisfaction of God’s righteousness. This freed the love of God to act in grace toward the sinner in reconciling the sinner to Himself on the basis that Christ has died in His place.” (Walvoord)

V. Sharing in Christ’s death
C. The Suffering of Christ
4) “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col 1:24)
5) What is lacking?
6) Atoning, mystical, or eschatological?
“...no where else in the NT is the phrase ‘Christ’s afflictions’ used of His redemptive act or general experience of suffering. Instead, Paul uses the concepts of ‘blood’, ‘cross’, and ‘death’ to refer to that act of redemption.”

“...the kinds of travails to be experienced not only by the Messiah but by humankind in general in anticipation of the messianic kingdom. The travails include various kinds of turmoil and evil, including a general lack of humanity, earthquakes, famines, fire and various mysterious portents on the earth and in the heavens. This was a fairly common idea in several strains of Jewish, especially apocalyptic, thought.”

“...the idea was current in some Jewish apocalypses that there would be a period of worldwide tribulation, occasioned by the rising tide of human sin, a time that was to be both the death throes of this age and the birth pangs of the age to come.” (A.T. Lincoln)
“With the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ the “coming age” has been inaugurated. The present age continues so that Christians live in the overlap of the two aeons. The woes of the Messiah, the afflictions of Christ, have already begun and when their appointed limit has been reached the coming age will be consummated and this present evil age will pass away. All Christians participate in these sufferings; through them they enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22; cf. 1 Thess 3:3, 7). Suffering with Christ is a necessary prerequisite to being glorified with Him.” (O’Brian, Colossians)

“Since in this passage Paul used the term ‘tribulations’ of the Christ rather than ‘sufferings’ (‘afflictions’, NIV), he wrote in an eschatological framework. It is significant that the word ‘tribulations’ is never used of Christ’s redemptive work. Instead the word regularly used is ‘suffering’.”

“As God had set a definite measure in time and the limit of the tribulations at the end so there is a definite measure of suffering that is to be filled up.”

“During this period a quota of suffering would have to be borne by the people of God before the age to come could be ushered in.”
“...is contributing to the sum total of the Messianic afflictions through his service and suffering ... on behalf of Christ’s body. By filling up what was lacking of a predetermined measure of afflictions which the righteous must endure, Paul also reduces the tribulations other believers, especially these Gentile Christians at Colossae, are to experience. The more of these sufferings he personally absorbed, as he went about preaching the gospel, the less would remain for his fellow Christians to endure. “

“Mark 13:8 and its parallels speak of sufferings that must precede the end: “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines; this is but the beginning of sufferings.” ... Luke’s description (21:24) of this same prediction concludes with a clear quota reference: This “great distress shall be upon the earth ... until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” The author of Hebrews after cataloging the sufferings of previous heroes of the faith suggests that more suffering needs to be accomplished to complete what they began...

...Rev. 6:11 depicts those who had been killed for the word of God being told that vindication would have to wait “until their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”
V. Sharing in Christ’s death

C. The Suffering of Christ

7) Is it an arbitrary amount of suffering?
8) The early Christian church reinterpreted these earlier Jewish understanding and applied it through a messianic lens
9) This new understanding connected the idea of universal suffering with universal witness

“Early Christians reinterpreted this concept [of a quota of suffering], focusing attention on the Messianic community, which, in light of the Messiah’s death and resurrection, must first share His suffering if it would share His glory (Rom 8:17). Certainly in Paul’s thought and in other parts of the NT suffering is one of the major characteristics of the period of the overlap of the ages, and one of the others is the proclamation of the gospel … Within this pattern of thinking, it is claimed, the quota of suffering is no longer some arbitrary amount that has been assigned deterministically but that which the task of witness to the gospel demands” (Rev 6: 9-11).

“Once the idea of universal mission is introduced into apocalyptic thinking an intelligible pattern emerges to which all the major apocalyptic passages of the New Testament conform. It is the worldwide preaching of the Gospel which involves the Church in worldwide persecution, and the movement is towards both a climax of persecution for the Church and a climax of judgment for those who reject the Gospel. The two great “not yet” aspects of New Testament apocalyptic are universal Gospel-preaching and universal tribulation...
...Their necessary connection in early Christian thought is quite sufficient to remove the sense of arbitrary determinism from the idea of a “quota” of suffering which must be fulfilled before the end (IV Esd. 4: 36; Rev. 6: 11): the suffering required is that which the task of witness demands.”

V. Sharing in Christ’s death

C. The Suffering of Christ

10) "What is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” in Col. 1:24 are the “Messianic Woes”

11) Something is lacking because the task of worldwide witness is incomplete. As Satan opposes that witness, we will suffer.