HaDavar Messianic Ministries

Making Sense of Suffering
With Pastor Jeff Carter

Week Four

Network: ICC_Guest1
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Review:
- Discipline, training, and refining are images scripture uses to describe the process God takes us through to make us more like Christ
- For individuals, sharing in the sufferings of Christ should be seen as a privilege, as a responsibility, and as something which should not take us as a surprise
- For the church, to help us understand sharing in the sufferings of Christ scripture uses the images of adoption and marriage.

Review:
- The sufferings of Christ are absolutely essential
- But they are not yet complete
- We believers participate in the Messianic Woes - the birth pangs (sufferings) that accompany the arrival of Messiah
- These will continue as the task of universal witness is opposed by Satan

VI. Messianic Woes
A. At the first Advent
1) “Messianic Woes” = “the birth pangs of the Messiah”
2) The Messianic age began with the first coming of Christ
3) But it will not be fully realized until His return
4) Horrible suffering did happen at the first coming of Christ
5) What was the pre-Christian conception of these Messianic Woes?
“Jewish apocalyptic writing, with its doctrine of the two ages ("the present age" and "the coming age"), frequently pictured the disasters and catastrophes coming upon the world (cf. Dan 12:1) as a prelude to the end-time which would usher in the coming anointed ruler of God. Plagues, war, famine and the like will fall upon mankind, and even God’s people will be called upon to suffer … When these horrors and cosmic disorders reach their climax, their appointed limit, the advent will come. The afflictions of these last days are called the “woes of the Messiah” as they immediately precede the arrival of the anointed ruler of God. They are the travail out of which the messianic age is born.”

VI. Messianic Woes

A. At the first Advent

6) The Jewish understanding of these “woes” was re-interpreted by the church

7) Israel initially viewed the future as simply an extension of the present

8) They saw a great deal of continuity between the present age and what would happen with the coming of Messiah

9) A new paradigm developed in Jewish thought

VI. Messianic Woes

A. At the first Advent

9) Intertestamental apocalyptic literature – I Enoch, IV Ezra, II Baruch

10) The 400 silent years were not silent

11) They begin to make a distinction between two ages:

   - a present evil age
   - the age to come
"...the coming of Christ disrupted the previous schema and required it to be modified. For Christ's coming and resurrection were indeed perceived as the eschatological climax—"the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4), the beginning of "the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4). But the end did not come: the dead were not raised; the judgment did not take place. The eschatological climax was thus incomplete; the completion of the divine purpose required a further climactic act. Christ, who had already come, must come — again! Then, and only then, the rest of the final events would unfold. In other words, the single division of the time line, dividing present age from the age to come, had itself been split into a two-stage division. Messiah, the end point of history, had become also Christ, the mid-point of history. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998)
VI. Messianic Woes

A. At the first Advent
12) The end times began with the birth, death and resurrection of Christ
13) The kingdom is now present in some respects (the mystery form of the kingdom)
14) Its arrival on earth in its fullness is still future
15) The already... but not yet

“Paul's gospel was eschatological not because of what he still hoped would happen, but because of what he believed had already happened. What had already happened (Easter and Pentecost) had already the character of the end and showed what the end would be like.” (Dunn)
“...as reflected in the NT texts, are experiencing a period of messianic woes in expectation of the future day of the Lord. Continued tribulation is seen as a necessary prelude to the return of Christ” (Porter)

VI. Messianic Woes
B. Throughout this age
1) When we can see suffering as a badge of honor, it will transform our understanding of suffering from “trouble” to “training.”
2) Suffering are a natural part of citizenship in the kingdom of God
3) Suffering are the birth pangs of the coming of the new creation

“...is not an expected or unexpected setback which troubles the outlook for the kingdom, but it is an unavoidable and recognizable indication of the presence of this kingdom on earth. That is why it is often spoken of in great soberness and in an undertone of deep joy.” (Berkhof)
“although the brunt of the eschatological woes has already fallen on the Messiah, all of the messianic community shares in the Messiah’s own experience, and thus continues to experience the woes.”

“But the consummation of restoration glory is only a “little while” away, and will be realized when the Messiah comes again.” (Dubis)

VI. Messianic Woes

C. At the second coming

1) Here the Messianic Woes reach their climax

2) This is the time of Jacob’s trouble (“woes” or “birth pangs”)

3) This is the time of the outpouring of the wrath of God

“Towards the end of the present aeon, sin, wickedness, and misfortune will reach a climax. The powers of nature will fail. There will be bad seasons and poor crops. Ominous happenings of every kind (‘signs in the sun and in the moon’) will take place. There will be rebellion and war, all men at strife with each other. These are the throes of the Messianic age, foreboding the last desperate resistance to God by Satan, his army, and the evil world powers, when God comes to put an end to him and the evil world order.” (Sigmund Mowinckle)
“Rev 3:10 ... describe[s] an ‘hour of testing’ [that] which will come upon all the earth in order to test the earth’s inhabitants. We should surely equate this with the messianic woes which constitute the seals, trumpets, and bowls of Revelation 6-16.” (Dubis)

“There is a great want about all Christians who have not suffered. Some flowers must be broken or bruised before they emit any fragrance.” (Robert Murray McCheyne)

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

**VI. Messianic Woes**

D. The Necessary path to glory (for Christ)

1) Jesus knew it was the only way
2) The scriptures foretold it
   - “My servant will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11b).
   - The language, content, message, images, pictures and types of scripture require the cross
3) Mankind needed it
4) Our sin required it
“God is a being of infinite or perfect holiness and goodness. An offense against Him is much more serious than an offense against an ordinary sinful human.” (Millard J. Erickson)

“Christ in His death fully satisfied the demands of a righteous God for judgment upon sinners and, as their infinite sacrifice, provided a ground not only for the believer’s forgiveness, but for his justification and sanctification.” (Walvoord)

“There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward that has no natural connection with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it… The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activities for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.” (C. S. Lewis)
"When a seed is planted in the ground, it begins to grow and will eventually bear fruit. Can we say that its bearing fruit is a reward for its growth? No. We would say that there is an organic and natural connection between one and the other. That is just the way things are. It is not a question of declaring, in some arbitrary way, that a seed which grows will be rewarded with fruit, or that the prize for growth is fruit. Rather, we view germination, growth, and the bearing of fruit as all part of the same overall process. They are all stages in the natural cycle of growth and development." (McGrath)

"…are part of, but represent different stages in the process of growth in the Christian life. We are adopted into the family of God, we suffer, and we are glorified (Rom. 8:15-18). This is not an accidental relationship. Each step is intimately connected within the overall pattern of Christian growth and progress toward the ultimate goal of the Christian life—being finally united with God and remaining with Him forever. Heaven is the consummation of a process of which suffering is a present part." (McGrath)

VI. Messianic Woes
E. The Necessary path to glory (for Christians)
1) There is a natural order of events
   “To be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain.”
2) We cannot now sustain the weight of glory that He has planned for us. Perhaps we need to suffer more—to grow more.
VI. Messianic Woes

E. The Necessary path to glory (for Christians)

3) Suffering and glory are linked
4) Suffering is not pointless
5) Death is just the final stage in the process of our outer man dying
6) It is the promise of Heaven that makes suffering endurable

“*The Christian hope of heaven is deeply embedded within the gospel. It is not some add-on feature, some optional extra which got tacked on to the gospel at a later stage, and which can be discarded at will…. it is part of an overall pattern of growth and development, comparable to the germination of a seed, leading to the growth and final coming to fruit of the resulting plant.”* (McGrath)

VI. Messianic Woes

E. The Necessary path to glory (for Christians)

7) Our suffering for Him and with Him is testimony to the fact of our being ‘in Him’.
8) It is the hope of resurrection and of heaven that links the ideas of sharing in His death with sharing in His glory.
9) We must try to get the comparison of finite suffering and infinite glory in perspective
VI. Messianic Woes

F. Summary

1) The six blind men from Industan
2) We glean from tiny snippets, over-great ‘truths’
3) We just aren’t in any position to make definitive claims about something that may indeed be unknowable
4) “Through suffering to glory” is a foundational truth of life

VI. Messianic Woes

F. Summary

5) Suffering leading to glory is seen in every new beginning
6) Present sufferings are the birth pangs that will eventually usher in the new age

“Both the first and second comings of Christ are actually the one act of God, but are separated in time, and it is in this separation that the Christian finds himself.” (James M. Connolly)
VI. Messianic Woes

F. Summary
5) Surrounding the event of the comings of Christ are the Messianic Woes
6) The suffering of believers is something to be expected
7) The suffering of the church and the suffering of Christ is necessary
8) We fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of the Messiah...the suffering that accompanies the task of bearing witness

VI. Messianic Woes

F. Summary
9) The suffering of the Messianic Woes applies to the first coming of Christ, the suffering throughout this age, and the suffering of the tribulation
10) Glory is the organic, natural outgrowth of suffering—it is suffering itself in consummation

VI. Messianic Woes

G. Conclusion
1) Suffering must cause us to live in hope
2) Sharing in Christ’s suffering is the guarantee of sharing in His glory
3) Hope comes in an unbreakable chain; through character and perseverance, as brought on by tribulation
4) We must approach suffering with the proper mindset
VI. Messianic Woes

G. Conclusion

5) Awareness that ‘this is happening for a reason’, and awareness that ‘this too shall pass’, as well as the awareness that suffering is our calling in Christ, gives us the context within which we can make sense of suffering.

6) Hope is the link between “sharing in suffering” with “sharing in glory”

7) Suffering should cause us to live in gratitude