

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

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Scripture: Ps. 119; Is. 53; Philp. 3:8-10

"Why Pain and Suffering?" (part 2)

A TOUGH QUESTION CONTINUED

Last week we began to address the question, "*Why is there pain and suffering in the world?*" It is a question that many people, believers and nonbelievers alike, struggle with, especially when we are in the midst of it.

Webster's Dictionary defines "pain" as "*a state of physical or mental lack of well-being or physical or mental uneasiness that ranges from mild discomfort or dull distress to acute often unbearable agony, may be generalized or localized, and is the consequence of being injured or hurt physically or mentally or of some derangement of or lack of equilibrium in the physical or mental functions.*" And "suffering" as "*The endurance of or submission to affliction, pain and loss.*"

I think Webster's describes pain and suffering quite well. And if you are like me, you generally want to avoid them. Most people do. But we found last week that there is a reason for the pain and suffering we experience in this world - we call it the Fall of mankind.

As a result of Adam and Eve's desire to be like God and coupled with Satan's deception and temptation that they could be like their Creator, they ate from the one tree That God told them not to eat, and sin, death and decay entered the human experience. God warned that they would die if they ate from the tree, but Satan said they wouldn't. They believed Satan and who ended up being right? There is a lesson to be learned right there!

The Fall of Adam and Even affected everyone - Satan, Eve and women in general, men, children, the animal and plant worlds, even the earth itself. We are all under the curse. And yet God in his mercy did not end it there. He did not give up. He did not want Adam and Even to give up. Do you remember what God did? Adam and Even made loin clothes to cover themselves - they knew they were guilty and they were full of shame. What did God do? He made for them animal skins to cover them. In order to make animal skins what was needed an animal - one that would have to be killed. It was a picture of the death that entered our world but it also is a picture of God's mercy. We will see that mercy in a moment.

GOD'S MEGAPHONE

But let's get back to pain and suffering. Why such things? The first reason is that it is the result of the Fall, and the second like unto it - it is God's way of telling us there is a major problem in our world. In here (our heart) with one another and with God. It is what renown Anglican theologian and writer, C.S. Lewis called, "God's megaphone." In his book *The Problem of Pain*, he writes "*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains...it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*"

It is a wake-up call that there is a major problem spiritually in our world - pain, suffering, death. It is a warning sign. Take for example just our physical bodies. The Bible says in **Ps. 139:14**: "*I will give*

thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well.” Indeed, our bodies are incredible works of God’s design.

And since the Fall, God has made our bodies sensitive to pain - Why? To let us know there is something wrong. The body’s nervous system is an elaborate network which relays to our brain sensations such as pressure, touch, heat, and cold. It tells us something is wrong by sending the message of “pain” to our brains. We respond by focusing on the problem area to remove or deal with that which is causing us the pain.

Now consider the largest organ of the human body: the skin. It covers our entire body and serves as a warning system, guarding us from the dangers of the outside world. Upon further study of this organ, one finds millions of pain sensors dotting the surface of the skin, not randomly, but in precise accord with the body’s specific needs.

And scientific studies have shown that the sensitivity of our skin varies in relation to the various parts of the body. Research subjects are blindfolded and then pressure is applied until they are able to feel the object touching their skin. Called *the absolute threshold of touch*, this scale is measured in grams per square millimeter of skin surface. This is what researchers have discovered: tip of tongue – sensitive to 2 grams of pressure, fingers – 3 grams, back of hand – 12 grams, back of forearm – 33 grams, sole of foot – 250 grams.

This variation demonstrates how well designed our bodies are for dealing with everyday life. Our tongues need to be extra sensitive for the need to taste food and form words. Yet we would never be able to get anything accomplished except from our beds if our feet were equally sensitive!

The cornea of the eye, however, is in a class all by itself. Due to its transparency (essential to admit light rays) it has a limited blood supply and is thus very fragile. A small wound could cause blindness, and any intrusion in the eye, whether a wood splinter or speck of dirt is a serious threat. Therefore, the cornea’s pain sensors have an electronic hot line to the brain.

Internal Organs and Referred Pain

Our internal organs, on the other hand, are not sensitive to the types of pain that the skin experiences. Go beyond the skin’s defenses and you could burn your stomach with a match, pierce the lung with a needle, cut the brain with a knife or crush the kidney with a vise, all with no pain!

However, if a doctor inserts a balloon in our stomachs and fills it with air, we would feel the pain of colic or gas. Likewise if we develop a small kidney stone our kidneys will send urgent messages of pain to our brains. And if I have a clot to the brain or stroke, I will have a headache and blurry vision or temporary blindness.

The latter also includes what is called “referred pain.” If our organs are not equipped to send the appropriate pain messages to the brain, it recruits nearby pain sensors. Like in the case of a heart attack, when victims may notice a burning or constricting feeling in the neck, chest, jaw or left arm. Skin cells, though perfectly healthy, send a message that they are “damaged.”

A WORLD WITHOUT PAIN

But what if our physical pain sensors were cut off? What would life on this earth be like without physical pain? One only needs to go the Carville, Louisiana. Here they treat patients whose bodies have lost the ability to sense physical pain. Originally begun as a leprosarium it is now a major medical center and leader in dealing with painless diseases. What is the problem in what is now called “Hanson’s Disease?” Loss of pain. What doctors had thought was the result of some fungus or bacteria they now understand is due to the damage done to the nerve ending of our bodies’ extremities. Dr. Brand was the first to discover this correlation after spending 20 years in India studying the disease. He noticed that after he and his medical staff treated their patients, they would return with further injuries or their original wounds would continue to get worse. Because they could not feel pain, they would continue to injure themselves. Like the time Dr. Brand saw a man pick a potato out of a hot fire without flinching, or finding the fingers of sufferers of the disease severely damaged because rats had nibbled away at them during the night without their knowledge because they couldn’t feel the pain!

Though leprosy or “Hanson’s’ Disease” is under control now and in most cases can be stopped at an early stage, one problem usually remains – the loss of pain. Add to leprosy, afflictions such as diabetes, the effects of drug and alcohol addiction, and the rare disease known as “the congenital indifference to pain” and one can see the dangers inherent in a world without pain.

Of course, not all-physical pain is good, in the case of the person who has crippling arthritis or terminal cancer. But Dr. Brand of the Carville Hospital (see below) sums it up well when he says, *“The one legitimate complaint you can make against pain is that it cannot be switched off. It can range out of control, as with a terminal cancer patient, even though its warning has been heard and there is no more that can be done to treat the cause of pain. But as a physician I’m sure that less than one percent of pain is in this category that we might call out of control. Ninety-nine percent of all pains that people suffer are short-term pains: correctable situations that call for medication, rest, or a change in a person’s lifestyle*

Clearly, pain is a remarkable gift that God has given us to help us deal with the challenges of everyday life. Whenever our body hurts, it wants us to listen to the pain and do something about it!

We have looked at the physical body and the role pain plays as a protective agent. The same can be said of emotional and spiritual pain. Emotional and spiritual takes two main forms. First, there is the pain of loneliness and insecurity. We have these feelings as a result of being out of relationship with others and with God. God created us to be in relationship, and therefore they are indicators of our need to be in relationship with our fellow man and with our Heavenly Father. They are warning signs that we need God and each other.

Second, there is the pain of guilt and shame. It is the result of when we do something wrong. Sometimes it can be felt even if we are not responsible (another example of the Fall). Such pain helps us to turn away from doing wrong as well as extending forgiveness to others. If we lived in a world in which we did not experience this emotional and spiritual pain, our world would self-destruct. This pain reminds us of our need to be in right relationship with our neighbor and with God. It also reminds us that only our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can fill the spiritual void within us, heal the guilt of sin, and change our hearts so that we can truly live for God and others in holiness and righteousness and peace.

GOD’S ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM

You see pain is not the problem, it’s the thing that causes the pain: the disease, the addiction, the chronic illness. It brings us back to last week’s point – pain and suffering aren’t the real problems in our world – sin and separation from God are the problem.

And so this leads us to another reason for pain and suffering. It is not only a warning that there is a problem but it is a clarion call that we need God. God is the only One who can truly heal our pain and suffering. First, He has given us His law. God’s commands are good because they are given for our protection: spiritual, personal, and societal. It is why the entire **Psalm 119**, the longest chapter in the Bible exalts the law and word of God. In fact in its first two verses we hear, *“How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the LORD. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart.”*

And yet, God’s law is not enough. We will still break His Law and we will still suffer the consequences whether it is our fault, someone else’s fault or nobody’s fault in the present. Somehow the curse has to be dealt with personally by God, Himself. And we know He has. Remember **Revelation 21**? In the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no more pain, no more mourning or crying or death, behold the old has passed away the new has come! When will this happen? When the Son of God returns.

But this hope is not just for the distant future. The truth is we can overcome pain and suffering in the here and now. Why? Because God took our punishment and our pain on Himself, in the Person of Jesus Christ. Please turn to **Is. 53:4-5** and see the incredible prophecy concerning the Suffering Servant (the Messiah): *“Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.”* Jesus took the Father’s wrath upon Himself and our pain and punishment were nailed to the cross with Him! It is the power of Christ and of His Holy Spirit that sets us free from the bondage of sin and suffering and death.

And yet, the way of life is still also the way of the cross and there will be times when we will go through sorrow and loss and pain. And there will be times when we will wonder why the particular trial. But ultimately, suffering brings us to our knees in acknowledgment of our sin and our need for God so that God can raise us up. So that God can do His work in our lives. Please turn now to **Philippians 3:8-10**. I want to close with this powerful passage. Look at what the Apostle Paul wrote, *“8More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

Wow! Everyone wants to experience the power of Christ, but no one really wants the sufferings. And yet what did Paul say? They go hand in hand. We can’t really know the power until we experience the suffering. We can’t fully grasp our sin the evil of our sin until we experience the pain. We can’t really know the love of God, unless we see the suffering of God. And we can’t really be victorious unless we trust Him completely in our sufferings. Let us pray....