

Sunday, May 8, 2022

How to deal with hardship and suffering?

Intro

- Greeting
- Announcements
 - Prayer conference
 - Memorial Day sale
 - Contact Colleen at 9092730439
- Mother's Day
 - Gift cards to star bucks
 - two questions
 - Flowers after the service
 - Mothers/Grandmothers
 - Spiritual grandmothers
 - Importance of spiritual leaders
 - just because you have not had a biological child does not mean that you can have no impact
 - Pray over all the mothers and spiritual moms
- Ecclesiastes recap
 - Qoheleth
 - Professor, preacher, teacher
 - difference between teaching kids and adults
 - kids
 - adults

- the professor is not going to just tell us the truth but ask questions in order to get us to think
- Secular worldview
 - this life is all that we have, the here and now is all that is
- Actually a believer
 - God will do this and that
- Message of the book
 - If life under the sun is all that there is, if there is no God or eternity or heaven or anything supernatural, if all we have is this world with its time and space, then there is no basis for human value, no basis for meaning, no basis for anything rational. Everything and everything is pointless and vanity.
 - If under the sun is all we have then we cannot find deeper meaning in anything
- Why teach this on Mother's Day?
 - don't really like to preach around holidays
 - Common approaches to Mother's Day
 - Joy of motherhood
 - Character study of Mary or a famous mother in Scripture
 - It is easy to sentimentalize this day
 - let's deal with the hardships that come with it
 - struggle of parenting in the first place
 - wayward children
 - miscarriages
 - inability to get pregnant
 - single women
 - Let's be honest: motherhood is hard
 - thankless job

- hard to see deeper meaning in the day in day out
- What I want to do this morning is take a look at quite a few different views of suffering and hardship and how to deal with it in this life and I want to show that only Jesus gives us the resources that we need for our suffering. Motherhood is hard and if this life is all that there is then you don't have a basis for finding any meaning in it. But if there is more above the sun, then though motherhood is difficult, or even if motherhood is something you don't get to experience in this life, there is still value and resources to be found in the cross of Jesus. Let's pray
- Ecclesiastes 4
 - *Ecclesiastes 4:1–5:1 (ESV): Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. 2 And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. 3 But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun. 4 Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. 5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. 6 Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind. 7 Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 8 one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business. 9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. 13 Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. 14 For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. 15 I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. 16 There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.*
 - Says some harsh things in this chapter but the thrust of the message here is about injustice and suffering. If there is no meaning under the sun then it is better to not be born. That's a harsh thing to say but why is life better than no life? we can't say

that it is with any certainty unless we are measuring it by some value outside of itself.

- What I want to do is borrow from Tim Keller this morning and show you the answers that modern philosophy's give to unjust and random suffering. I want to look at them and critique them and then unpack the biblical understanding of suffering.
 - Everyone has to come to grips with the problem of evil and suffering. There is a whole slough of ways that people deal with it, even if they don't know they are doing so in one of these ways. So this morning is a bit of apologetics for you when you are met with people who disagree or hold a different view but the point of it all is to show you that only in Jesus do you have what you need to deal with hardship and suffering. Let's look at a few of the other views first.
- 1) Eastern philosophy (monism)
 - The world is an illusion
 - Eventually everyone goes back to the All Soul
 - Therefore suffering is an illusion
 - How do deal with suffering?
 - Deny it. Deny that it is real.
 - mind over matter, transcend it.
 - Think about it differently because suffering is an illusion
 - Problem with this view?
 - It trivializes our pain and deep hurts.
 - Lost a baby? Cannot have kids biologically? Single? Kids making terrible choices despite your best help? An illusion?
 - It might be nice to think that the suffering we see is an illusion and we really just need to transcend it but this view trivializes our hurt and the point that we see everyday in our own lives and in the lives of others.
- 2) Stoic
 - Stoicism has been around forever
 - Suffering is real

- But the universe was made by chance
 - First view said deny it, this view says ENDURE it
- Steel yourself against the hardships of life
 - Gotta be tough
 - This one is pretty common in some cultures, especially in how men are supposed to deal with pain and hardship. Don't let it affect you
- The first view trivializes your pain and hardship. It therefore trivializes your desires for joy and love, but this one removes them entirely.
 - It teaches, i will go crazy in this random and difficult life unless i teach myself not to care. The problem here is that when you teach yourself not to care, you end up losing your humanity bit by bit.
 - Mother's also know that though it might be easy to teach yourself not to care, you can't turn off your affections for your children. if you are childless, you can't turn off your desire for kids. You can't turn off these emotions, these longings, they are hardwired into you.
- 3) Dualism
 - Two equal and opposite powers in the universe
 - good and evil and they are locked in an eternal struggle
 - Sometimes this is how Christians view God and the devil. God is good, the devil is bad, God does good things and the devil is responsible for evil.
 - in this view there is suffering and hardship but God really has nothing to do with it and he can't really do anything about it
 - God is good, but life is hard, i have to believe that God doesn't control the hardship.
 - Similar to the stoics
 - you have to harden yourself against pain and suffering or you go crazy. you lose your humanity by doing this.
 - Big problem

- If God isn't ultimately in control of evil than there will never be an end to evil. There will never be a judgement day. It will go on and on forever, no side will every really get the upper hand if they are equally powerful.
- And if they are equal, how do you know which one is fundamental to reality? Which one is better or more value? Why should I side with good if evil is just as powerful? If both are equal, how can you tell me I ought to side with the good? Why not live a life of violence and selfishness.
- Mothers
 - Sometimes it feels that there is no end to the hardships you are facing
 - Just look at laundry and the dishes. Proof that sin is a real thing
 - No matter how much you clean up after your kids, the house is still a mess
 - But this just brings us back to the stoics solution. Forgive God for it and endure it. Is enduring really enough?
- 4) Existentialism
 - Defy the pain. Defy the suffering
 - The world is hard, suffering is real, but I will be good.
 - The world might be senseless, but my life will have purpose.
 - Sounds very noble
 - Problem
 - How do we know what purpose is? How do we know what good is? How do we know what justice and compassion are?
 - Existentialist says we don't know if there is a God, no absolute lawgiver, no absolute truth. Life under the sun is all there is.
 - If this is the case then isn't compassion subjective?
 - Why not hurt people? It has exactly the same basis for it's lifestyle as a life lived "good" if there is no measuring rod by which we compare the two.
 - No such thing as justice or compassion. No basis for morality. No braises for society

- 1) trivializes pain, 2 and 3) destroys your humanity but 4) gives you no basis for living
- Mothers
 - If this is true, how do you know that what you're doing matters? How do you know that your longings are legit?
- 5) hedonism
 - how do you deal with suffering? avoid it
 - not really a philosophy per say but generally how our day and age deals with suffering and pain
 - just avoid it. How? usually by being selfish.
 - Avoid commitments, avoid covenants. If something's begins to be unfulfilling, get out.
 - The problem here is that it is always temporary
 - no matter how many promises you avoid, no matter how many people you letdown, no matter how much money you spend on yourself to avoid pain and suffering, eventually it will all catch up with you and you will be crushed by it because you will be unable to face it.
 - you won't have the character or understanding to deal with it
 - Mothers
 - You know that if your kids are to thrive, you have to sacrifice. There are very long lasting ramifications if you chose this approach.
- 6) Romanticist
 - Good people have great lives, bad people have bad lives. If you are suffering it's because you are sinning
 - remember job's friends
 - deny it? endure it? defy it? avoid it? no they say "confess it"
 - If you are suffering it must be because you are a bad person
 - What is wrong with this view? It is superficial.

- It is arrogant because it believes that there could be no purpose in suffering other than punishment
- It won't last. Eventually it will catch up to you and when it does you will be unprepared for it. You will be crushed with anger, crushed with guilt.
 - You spend your life knowing you are doing something wrong you just don't know what it is. If you're suffering, it must be sin. Confess it.
 - Mothers
 - Do you struggle with mom guilt?
 - Always comparing yourself with everyone else, especially over social media? do you beat yourself up constantly with your failures and the "shoulds"
- 7) Politics
 - The political approach to suffering says blame it. Blame race, blame gender, blame family, blame somebody. Keller says
 - "The theory is if I'm angry enough at somebody for my suffering, I won't hurt. The only problem with the politicizing approach to suffering that says, "Blame it on people," is that's one of the main reasons we have suffering in the world. It's one of the causes of suffering, the politicization of suffering. "Somebody's to blame. I'm going to get somebody. I'm going to get you, sucker, because I'm suffering."
- 8) Masochistic approach
 - don't deny it, not endure it, not defy it not avoid it, not confess it, WELCOME IT.
 - some people don't feel that they are alive unless they are suffering. Don't feel that they are worthwhile unless life is hard.
 - Because I suffer I'm better than you. A hedonist avoids commitments to avoid suffering, a masochist looks for commitments that entail suffering. Keep piling it on.
 - Life is hard, so let it be hard. The hard gives it meaning. Give me more.
 - Christians

- These aren't just critiques of other views, these are areas we fall into. Christian's who essentially deny the reality of hardship and suffering by just praising Jesus all the time? I'm just praising Jesus. Is it spiritually immature to cry?
- We become hedonists by avoid commitments because we don't want to be inconvenienced.
- Listen, friends, it's easy for Christians to slip into these, but if you are not a believer, if you don't know where you stand with Christ, you are confined to these positions, and none of them work. They superficialize you. They trivialize you. They dehumanize you. They're inconsistent. You can't build a life on them. You can't build a society on them, and you're stuck with them unless you believe in the God of the Bible.
- Close this way
 - Every one of these denies two important truths that the professor tells us about God
 - God is an all powerful judge of history, God is the wise and loving weaver of history.
 - Because God is creator he has the right to deal out judgement, he has the ability to discern what is just, he has the power to execute it.
 - The problem we have is that he isn't doing it now. Why is there injustice? Why doesn't good do something?
 - Jesus and the demoniac
 - They say, we know that you'll judge history, but it isn't the right time.
 - Jesus fixes the situation, but only partially because today isn't the days when everything in the world is put to right.
 - So why does God delay?
 - Glad it wasn't ten years ago. Glad it wasn't yesterday. God delays judgment out of love for his people.
 - Any philosophy that denies the idea of judgment day I tried to show you is not a philosophy on which you can even build a society or a life. If there isn't a judgment day, if there isn't a time at which evil is going to be judged, if there isn't a moral truth that has an absolute validity by which reality is judged, an objective truth, then you have no basis for telling anybody what's right or wrong. Everything is subjective.

- But let me tell you something else. If you don't understand judgment day, if you don't practice the doctrine today, psychologically you're in tremendous trouble. Why are some of you bitter? Because you're not waiting for judgment day. You're having it now. You're not waiting for the Judge to show up, the only One who's qualified. You're doing it for him, and you're miserable! It doesn't work. You're bitter because you're trying to be judge.
 - What about the masochist types? What about those of you out there who need to suffer? What about those of you who always seem to put yourself into commitments where you're the one who has to suffer? Why is it you're beating yourself up? I'll tell you why. You can't wait for judgment day. You're having it now, and you're doing it to yourself. You are in his place. You are trying to be the judge.
 - What about you confused romantics? Do you know who you are? You sit there and you're looking at your life, or maybe your friend's life, or maybe your family's life, and you're looking and saying, "Why? Why? If this, then why this, and if this, then why this?" Do you know why? You're trying to be the judge. You're trying to figure it all out. Only he has the ability to discern judgment, only he has the right to mete it, and only he has the power to execute it.
 - Keller says Don't you remember the place where David was supposed to go out and face Goliath and Saul put on his armor? He said, "Well, why don't you wear my armor?" Well, the armor was three sizes too big for David! It's ludicrous looking. It's dangerous. He would've been defeated if not crushed under the weight of it. I would say to those of you who are confused, those of you who are bitter, those of you who are beating yourself up, because you have on the gear of the Judge and you're not qualified for it, you don't have the framework for it, you don't have the right to it, you don't have the ability for it.
- God is loving and wise and is the one who controls history
 - Corn maze? Hedge maze?
 - From the air they make really cool patterns, but you can't see them from the ground.
 - Bible tells us that history only makes sense from teh air.
 - If i don't see a purpose for suffering there can't be one

- The Bible tells us that suffering tests us. It refines us. It strengthens us. This is the place where we have to leave qoheleth and realize the ultimate and final and only biblical answer to the problem of suffering in history is the fact of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Every other religion and every other philosophy thinks it's ridiculous to believe God could come to earth and suffer. Every other one thinks it's ridiculous.
- Some of them think it's blasphemous that God would actually come to earth and become fragile and become subject to the apparent crapshoot of history, to become subject to the unjust suffering of history, and yet that's exactly what happened. Friends, it's the only religion, therefore, that doesn't just have suffering as a peripheral problem, but suffering is at the heart of the Christian message. The Bible makes no sense without it. God has come into the midst of the suffering and has taken the suffering in.
- Now maybe you think it's appalling and even illogical that God would come to earth and take part in the unjust suffering. In fact, Jesus' death is the only truly unjust suffering ever in history because he's the only person who deserved no suffering at all. There was no sin in his life. He deserved nothing. The only unjust suffering ever.
- Do you think that's appalling? Do you think that's illogical? I don't know, but I'll tell you this. It's wonderful because Jesus Christ, the Bible says, has taken part in our suffering. What have you been doing when you go to the throne of history? Here's God on the throne of history. Do you go to the throne of history and say, "Why did you let this happen?" or do you go to God on the throne of history and say, "Why did you let this happen to your Son?"
- It says in Hebrews 4, when you approach the throne of grace, you can know he'll love you and he'll give you help because he suffered as you. He was on the table. Jesus Christ has been on the table. There is no other religion that would dare say such a thing about their God and their founder. There is no other religion that even comes close to saying God so understands unjust suffering that he took it into his belly.
- So now when you approach him you don't have to say, "Why did you let this happen? Why did you let this happen?" Those are superficial questions. The real question is, "Why did you let it happen to you?" Do you know what he says? "Because I love you. Because I wanted to settle the punishment. I wanted to get rid of your punishment for sin so someday I could judge the evil of history without judging you."

- Please trust him. Please obey him. Sometimes it means that to really obey Jesus and to hold him by the hand through your suffering looks like it's not going to get you anywhere. To forgive, to tell the truth, to stay sexually pure, sometimes it looks like it's not going to get you anywhere. But I tell you, the suffering of this life is like a river.
- Jesus is the only One who knows the fords. He's the only Guy who knows the crossings. A crossing is a place where you can walk across and not be swept away. Unless you hold his hands, I tell you, everybody in this room will go into that river, everyone in this room will be swept away unless you've held him by the hand.
- Look at Jesus in the garden. There was perplexity. "Father, is there any way I can get out of this?" It wasn't a eastern approach. "Well, it's mind over matter, Dad?" It wasn't a stoic approach. He knew it was a cup. There was a purpose to it. It wasn't the masochistic approach. He says, "Father, is there any way I can get out of this?" It wasn't the hedonistic approach. He says, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." He doesn't avoid it. He doesn't despise it. He doesn't defy it. He doesn't invoke it. He doesn't endure it. He uses it. He uses the suffering. He manhandles it.
- He says, "If I suffer in obedience and trust to my Father, I will bring him honor and glory and I will redeem myself and my friends." Would you do that today? There's a river out there. Hold his hand and use the suffering. Don't waste your sorrows. Humble yourself under his mighty hand and he will exalt you in due time. Let's pray.