

Series: **Easter 2024 - Good Friday**

Today's Title: "The Last Song of Jesus"

March 29, 2024 - Selected Passages

OBJECTIVE: To help people see the love and care of God – even in painful times of life.

Praising God – Worshiping God – in the middle of suffering. When all we know in life is misery – pain – heartache – how can we praise God?

Why should we praise God in the midst of painful times?

One of the greatest challenges I have encountered as a Pastor – is the Christian's response to loss – death – pain.

There is an expectation of modern-day people – that life should be easy – or at least without major complications or problems.

It seems, compared to previous generations, we may be the least prepared to deal with suffering and pain.

Our Motto: Pain and suffering are to be avoided at all costs!!

In his book titled "*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*", Tim Keller captures the enormity of pain and loss in our world in his opening paragraph.

"In one hour's time, more than five children throughout the world will die from abuse and violence. In an entire day more than 100 children will die violently. But this is, of course, only one of innumerable forms and modes of suffering. Thousands

die from traffic accidents or cancer every hour, and hundreds of thousands learn that their loved ones are suddenly gone. That is comparable to the population of a small city being swept away every day, leaving families and friends devastated in the wake.”

Shakespeare once wrote,

“Each new morn, new widows howl,
new orphans cry,
new sorrows strike heaven on the face.”

These are the realities of this life.

But these realities are not experienced with equal levels of intensity by every person.

Some people are plagued throughout their years with difficulty and pain.

It's true that some people live in ways that produce a painful life. Consequences cannot be avoided when we make decisions that expose us to pain.

But there are many people who live good lives – honoring lives. They live trying to please God and live according to His truth, yet they still experience tremendous levels of pain and difficulty in this life.

Then there are others who seem to skate through life with a coat of Teflon – and nothing seems to affect them, and pain slips right off.

Some of them live in ways that are evil – cruel – hedonistic – yet they have a charmed life untouched by the misery of loss and suffering. Life is not fair.

The Psalmist writes:

Psalm 34:1-3

“I will extol the LORD at all times; His praise will always be on my lips.
I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt His name together.”

What a challenging and difficult thing to aspire to!

“...let the afflicted hear and rejoice.”

How can this be?

How are we supposed to rise to this level of praise to God – that even in the midst of suffering and pain, we still praise Him?

Truth be told – and if we were brutally honest with each other – we would confess that when life is difficult and dark, we feel like raising our hand and shaking our fist at God – asking Him *‘Why’* and *‘How can You let this happen!!!’*

Praising God – rejoicing in Him – is not the first thought that comes to mind.

And then there’s Jesus and His example.

If you’re a follower of Christ – if you’re a Christian – then you know that Jesus is our example.

We are called to emulate what He did.

Love like He loved.

Be merciful as He was merciful.

Praise God and worship the Father – as He did.

We read about the Last Supper – the Passover meal that Jesus shared with His disciples the night He was betrayed.

Before they went to the Garden of Gethsemane – before His arrest and the horrible torture and rejection He experienced, He spent the evening with His disciples sharing a meal they had eaten their entire lives – during the annual Passover celebration.

I'm sure the Jewish people – especially in Jesus' day – had similar feelings about the Passover meal as we do with our Thanksgiving meal and celebration.

Gathering with family and friends – eating a traditional meal – remembering the blessings of God.

But this Passover meal was different – and Jesus was the only one in the room who knew the fullness – and horror - of what was about to unfold.

Jesus knew His hour had come.

Jesus knew that Judas was betraying Him.

Jesus knew what was going to happen in the next few hours.

- His arrest...
- A corrupt trial...
- The rejection of the people and religious leaders...
- The cruelty and mockery of the Roman soldiers...
- The pain and immense suffering He would endure.

- The separation from the Father – as He would bear our sins.

Jesus knew that in less than 24 hours, He would be dead.

Yet, we read this small, but very significant detail in **Matthew** and **Mark's** accounts of that Passover meal.

Matthew 26:30-31 (also: Mark 14:26-27)

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”

“And when they had sung a hymn...”

Don't skip over that.

There were some hymns / Psalms that were sung during the Passover meal – and this singing was worship.

The Passover meal was a celebration – and reminder – of God's deliverance of His people from their slavery in Egypt. So, these songs were songs of praise to God – worship.

We know from **John 13:21** that before the meal started, Jesus was “troubled in His spirit” because of Judas' impending betrayal.

The actual elements of the meal – which pointed back through symbolism to the great exodus of the nation from Egypt – these elements were also prophetic in depicting details of Jesus' imminent death and burial.

This night was full of sadness, pain, and would soon turn into horrific suffering for Jesus.

Yet, Jesus led them in singing a hymn – in worshipping God.

Many scholars and theologians believe the Psalm they probably sang at the end of the meal was **Psalm 118**.

This is the last of what's referred to as the 'Passover Psalms'.

Psalm 118:1-2

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever.
Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."

The last verse repeats **vs. 1**:

vs. 29

"Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever."

There is a section in this **Psalm – vs. 21-29**, which speaks of the rejection of "the cornerstone" – which we know from both Paul and Peter is a reference to **JESUS** (Ephesians 2:19-20; 1 Peter 2:4-6).

It goes on to speak of the "festal procession up to the horns of the altar" (vs. 27) – which is an obvious reference to sacrifice.

Jesus knew full-well that He was about to be **THE** sacrifice offered on the altar of the cross.

Psalm 118:22-29

"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.

The LORD is God, and He has made His light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, and I will exalt You.

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever.”

Imagine Jesus – knowing everything – imagine Him singing those words – on that night.

Do you ever feel like skipping church – because of the pain and difficulty of life?

Do you ever come to church – and the last thing you want to do is sing – to worship – because it feels like God has abandoned you – like you’re struggling through life without any help from Him?

Do you think Jesus **FELT** like singing?

Do you think His heart was heavy – or cheerful?

Yet...before leaving for the Garden, they sang a hymn.

I came across a story this past week about George Mueller.

George was born in Germany in 1805, and he became a Christian as a young man.

Soon after he sensed God wanted him to be a missionary to England.

He arrived in England – and became a pastor of a small church.

He was a man who trusted God for everything in his life.

He is most famous for his work with orphans.

Over the years, more than 10,000 orphans lived in his orphanage.

George Mueller dedicated His life to serving the Lord – and to serving others.

But he also suffered greatly.

He suffered the loss of 3 children, endured seasons of unrelenting physical pain, buried his father without seeing him come to know Christ, and outlived 2 wives he loved greatly.

After 39 years of marriage, Mueller’s first wife, Mary, contracted rheumatic fever, which was a known mortal illness. During the last minutes of Mary’s life, George read **Psalm 84:11** to her: “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”

Mueller said of the last phrase,

“No good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”

- I am in myself a poor worthless sinner, but I have been saved by the blood of Christ; and I do not live in sin, I walk uprightly before God. Therefore, if it is really good for me, my darling wife will be raised up again; sick as she is. God will restore her again. But if she is not restored again, then it would not be a good thing for me.

Mary died shortly afterward on February 6, 1870.

Within a few hours of Mary's death, George went to an evening prayer meeting, where he lifted up prayer and praise to God. Someone in attendance was struck by Mueller's words and recorded them:

Beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, I ask you to join with me in hearty praise and thanksgiving to my precious Lord for His lovingkindness in having taken my darling, beloved wife out of the pain and suffering which she has endured, into His own presence; and as I rejoice in everything that is for her happiness, so I now rejoice as I realize how far happier she is, in beholding her Lord whom she loved so well, than in any joy she has known or could know here. I ask you also to pray that the Lord will so enable me to have fellowship in her joy that my bereaved heart may be occupied with her blessedness instead of my unspeakable loss.

Mueller's Funeral Sermon

Five days later, on February 11, some 1,200 orphans and thousands of grieving friends joined Mueller in mourning at her burial.

After recovering from a bout of his own sickness, Mueller preached her funeral sermon. His text was **Psalm 119:68** - "You (God) are good and do good." As he preached, he laid out 3 simple yet stirring points: "*The Lord was good and did good . . .*"

1. "in giving Mary to me . . ."

2. “in so long leaving Mary to me . . .”

3. “in taking her from me.”

Reflecting later on Mary’s passing, Mueller said, “*My heart was at rest, and my heart was satisfied with God. And all this springs . . . from taking God at His Word, believing what He says.*”

It’s understandable – to a point – that when we endure pain, hardship, loss, or some level of suffering, that we tend to focus solely on our circumstance.

We cry out for help – for comfort – for blessing.

But it’s helpful to remind ourselves that no one has suffered more than our Father in heaven.

No one has paid more dearly for the allowance of sin into the world.

No one has so continuously grieved over the pain of a race gone bad.

No one has suffered like the One who paid for our sin in the crucified body of His own Son.

No one has suffered more than the One who willingly went to the cross – to pay for our sins – to give us unending love and grace.

One of the most common reactions to deep, lasting pain in our life – is to blame God. In a sense, this reveals some good theology – a belief in God’s sovereignty and omnipotence.

Does God care about our pain?

1 Peter 5:7

“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”

Pain in life does not mean God has abandoned you or He doesn't care for you.

He most certainly does.

The writer of Hebrews tells us:

Hebrews 4:14-16

“...we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Will you praise Jesus tonight?

If you're in a painful or difficult time of life right now – will you still come before the Lord and confess that “...He is good; His love endures forever.”

Come and cast your anxiety and pain on Him.

He not only cares for you...

He loves you...

The cross proves it.

Transition to communion.