

We lost a valued family member this week. Chuck Wilson finished his work here on earth and passed into the presence of Jesus early Friday morning. For Chuck, “the sufferings of the past two years are not worthy to be compared with the glory that has been revealed to him.” His suffering has ended, his glorious future has begun. That is our hope. The path to glory leads through the valley of suffering but our pain leads to purpose. Jesus proved it.

Our study in Luke’s gospel brings us to the final night of Jesus’ life. It is a challenge to consider the darkest night in history at Christmas time. I would prefer to fill your heart and mind with visions of sugar plums dancing in your head but that is not what the text gives us this morning. Luke 22-23 answer the “why” of Jesus’ birth. “The important issue of Christmas is not so much that Jesus came, but why He came. There was no salvation in His birth... Remember that it’s the triumph of Christ’s sacrificial death that gives meaning to His humble birth. You can’t truly celebrate one without the other.” John MacArthur

I was reading a novel recently and came across a quote by the Greek philosopher Aeschylus. He said, **“He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain, which cannot forget, falls drop by drop, upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.”** “Awful” does not mean bad or terrible but unexpected and painful. Beginning at Luke 22:39 and I want to highlight 6 pain points that Jesus encountered on His way to glory. My hope is that you will be encouraged as you realize that Jesus is sympathetic to our painful plight.

1. Unanswered prayer...22:39-42. Have you ever prayed and felt like your prayers were bouncing off the ceiling? “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.” And what followed? Silence. You’ve been there. You had a great need and begged God to intervene. And what happened? Nothing. What do you do in moments like that? Do you despair and argue with God in an effort to convince Him how to run the Universe, or you can embrace that all-important “Nevertheless.” Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” Lk. 23:42.

2. Betrayal...22:47-48. An intimate expression of love and respect was used to conceal Judas’ motive. His kiss said, “I respect and honor you,” at the exact time he was betraying Jesus. In that moment Jesus identified with the troubles of David, who wrote, “For it is not an enemy who taunts me then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God’s house we walked in the throng.” Ps. 55:12-14

The awful grace of God teaches us that all humans are flawed and fallen. If Jesus had a Judas in His life, we will have one in ours. The only proper object for our faith is Jesus, not our friends or even our family. Put no confidence in the flesh, even in your own flesh.

3. Denial...vv. 54-59. Jesus had said to His disciples, “You will all fall away because of Me this night.” But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.” Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.” All the disciples said the same thing too.” Mt. 26:30-35

There in the courtyard “Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” Lk. 22:60-61. I’ve always wondered about that look. Was it a look of disappointment? Was it a look of pity? Maybe a look that conveyed, “See, I told you so.” All I know is that Peter never forgot that look and made sure it was included in Luke’s gospel.

The betrayal of Jesus reminds us that we cannot put our faith in others. The denial of Peter reminds us that we cannot even trust ourselves. “What’s the matter dad, don’t you trust us?” No, I don’t trust myself in some situations.

4. Humiliation...vv. 63-65. Mockery, ridicule, scorn, sarcasm. Jesus was an easy target because to die as Jesus died was considered a clear sign of God’s disapproval. Dt. 21:23 says, “Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.” “In OT times criminals were normally executed by stoning and then displayed on a stake to show God’s divine rejection. When Jesus was crucified, it was evidence He had come under the curse of God.” This was a great obstacle to faith for Jews. If He were truly the Son of God, why would He be cursed by His father? “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” Gal. 3:13-14.

This Christmas, some of you may gather around the table with members of your own family who have contempt for what you believe. “You believe that God wrote a book? You believe a girl can get pregnant without the benefit of a man? You believe a dead man can come back to life?”

5. Injustice...22:66-23:12. In the final hours of Jesus' life, He was tried for blasphemy but of course His trials were a joke. There were numerous illegalities overlooked by the Pharisees and Saducees in their haste to get this deed done before sundown, the beginning of the Sabbath. They had to get the Romans to sign off on the execution. So, they hauled Jesus off to Pilate, the Roman official. His only question was, "Are you King of the Jews." (23:3). Pilate had no interest in religious squabbles but he could not tolerate insurrection. If Jesus claimed to be a king, then that was treason and treason was punishable by death. Jesus' cryptic answer, "You say," or, "you have said so," is a qualified "yes." Yes, He was and is King, but not in the worldly sense Pilate was concerned about. Pilate was no dummy. Pilate was no dummy. He recognized that this whole trial was motivated by envy and jealousy...15:10. So he tried to release Jesus but the crowd supported the evil plans of the Jewish leaders...23:13-19.

6. Duplicity...23:13-25. There is one character in the story that enjoyed a really good Friday. Barabbas. The cross that Jesus died on was meant for Barabbas. Who was he? He must be important because he is mentioned in all four gospels. Luke tells us Barabbas was "a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder." Lk. 23:19. Barabbas was an insurrectionist, a radical activist, a rabble-rouser, a revolutionary.

Barabbas had a lot in common with Jesus. They shared the same name. Jesus Bar Abbas (Simon Bar Jonah). They shared the same objective - to set their people free. They shared the same criminal charge - insurrection, sedition, attempting to overthrow the government. They both had loyal followers.

The difference - Jesus was innocent. Barabbas was guilty. The innocent Jesus was condemned as a criminal, while the criminal Barrabas was released as if innocent. Barabbas is important. Barabbas is Everyman. I am Barabbas. You are Barabbas. That cross that was intended for Barabbas was also meant for me. But Jesus took our place on that cross. The innocent One was sacrificed so that the guilty would be set free. Jesus "suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" 1 Pe. 3:18. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds your fatal disease has been cured." 1 Pe. 2:24. On the cross, Jesus got what we deserved so that we can get what He deserves. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Cor. 5:21.

There is no darker valley of the shadow of death than the one Jesus walked through. But there was a divine purpose for His pain. When Jesus was on the cross, He actually “became” sin so that we might be clothed in His righteousness. His love covers our shame. When Jesus died, our sin died — all of it, past, present, and future. All of our sin is dead and gone forever, and it died with Christ.

There is a purpose in your pain too. Unanswered prayer, betrayal, denial, humiliation, injustice, duplicity, all of it reminds us that we are not home. In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis points out that “The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world: but joy, pleasure, and merriment, He has scattered broadcast. We are never safe, but we have plenty of fun, and some ecstasy. It is not hard to see why. The security we crave would teach us to rest our hearts in this world and oppose an obstacle to our return to God: a few moments of happy love, a landscape, a symphony, a merry meeting with our friends, a bathe or a football match, have no such tendency. Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.” C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

So let me leave you with a couple of parting gifts.

1. The awful grace of God gives us wisdom. **“He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain, which cannot forget, falls drop by drop, upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.”** Those who lack wisdom always wonder why bad things happen to good people. The wise person knows what the apostle Paul knew, “Suffering (light momentary affliction) is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond comparison.” 2 Cor. 4:17. We don’t need to go out looking for suffering but we do need to remember that our suffering is not the end of the story.

2. The awful grace of God gives us hope. There is a purpose behind our suffering. Peter made his share of mistakes while Jesus was alive but as he aged, he grew in wisdom and in hope. In 1 Pe. 4:13-14 he encouraged his friends with these words: “to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

2020 has been a hard year but we live with the hope that it will not always be this way. The cross is a symbol of the awful grace of God that makes the amazing grace of the resurrection possible.

“The cross looked like the supreme achievement of the Devil, the supreme moment of victory when all the powers of darkness were howling with glee as they saw the Son of God beaten and wounded, rejected and despised, hanging upon a cross, naked, before all the world. It looked like the triumph of darkness....But it was at that very moment when the Devil lost. In the cross all that he had risked was defeated, beaten down, and the Devil and all his angels were disarmed and openly displayed as defeated by the power of Jesus Christ. This is what God does all through life. The Devil sends sickness, defeat, death, darkness pain, suffering and tragedy. It is all the work of Satan. But that is not the whole of the story. God takes those very things and uses them to strengthen us, bless us, to teach us and enlarge us and fulfill us – if we stand. This is the whole of the story.” Ray Stedman