

Christian Suffering

By Mike Taylor

“If the world hates you, you should realize that it hated me before you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you do not belong to the world and I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you” (John 15.18-19).

In the opening verses, Jesus was speaking to His disciples that the world would hate them and persecute them for His name’s sake. We are His modern day disciples, meaning all who follow after Jesus Christ and keep His Word and believe on Him by faith, will be hated by the world also.

Down through the last 2000 years, men have had terrible things done to them by other men, for believing in the Son of God. In the early church, men were thrown to the lions, women and children slain with the sword, and Christians crucified on crosses to light the gardens of despotic emperors and rulers of the Roman Empire. In any terrible way that you can think to torture a person, Christians have been slain as martyrs for the sake of Jesus Christ who would not deny His name or their belief in a risen Christ. This was the beginning of “antichrist” types that gloried in the butchering of innocent men, women, and children—to solidify their power.

It continued down through the: Middle Ages, when the “Holy Roman Empire” killed millions of people due to their beliefs that conflicted with the powers of the Roman Church. Evil deeds were done to their fellow man because of this church’s sinful nature and not being converted to the mind of Jesus Christ.

We could list many areas of human depravity of the evil that men inflict on other men because of being a Christian:

1. Jews hating Christians.
2. Muslims hating Jews and Christians.
3. Conflicts over worship of pagan gods instead of the true God of heaven.
4. Evil men lusting for power and worship for themselves and killing anyone who would not bend.
5. Antichrist wannabes who killed anyone who would not bow to their authority in ancient times down through our modern era.
6. Christians killed today, because of their belief in Jesus Christ in every corner of the world even into our modern era. All you have to do is pick up a paper, or read the story on the Internet.

And the list could go on and on but for brevity, you get the idea. Suffering does continue and will not stop until the kingdom of God is established on earth: by a triumphant Jesus Christ.

Peter, wrote in 1 Peter 4.16-17:

“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?”

THEODICY?

You ask, “Why would a loving God allow such barbarism of men against other men creating such suffering?” The answer is freedom. God gave men a choice between good and evil, right or

wrong, and God or Satan. It is defined with the word “theodicy”. It explains a loving, righteous God amongst a world of evil.

Wikipedia defines “theodicy” as:

A theodicy (from Greek *theos* “god” + *dike* “justice”) is an attempt to resolve the evidential problem of evil by reconciling the traditional divine characteristics of omni-benevolence, omnipotence, and omniscience with the occurrence of evil or suffering in the world. Unlike a defense, which tries to demonstrate that God's existence is logically possible in the light of evil, a theodicy provides a framework, which claims to make God's existence probable... American philosopher Alvin Planting presented a version of the free will defense, which argued that the coexistence of God and evil is not logically impossible, and that free will further explains the existence of evil without threatening the existence of God.

God did not want robots that He controlled, but a family of children that loved Him of their own free will. So He gave men freedom to choose.

IN THE BEGINNING...

It all began in the Garden of Eden. You remember? Those are our common parents to all humanity. We all know the story (or should), how Eve was tempted of the wily old serpent to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Her eyes were opened, as was Adam's eyes upon disobeying God's command and they knew they were naked. They were naked all along, but they had no concern about this as is revealed in Genesis 2:25:

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

The Hebrew word for ashamed, in the preceding verse is: “*buwsh*” (*boosh*) meaning “to pale, not being disappointed, embarrassed” or loosely defined as “not concerned.” But when they sinned against God, things changed. They knew they were naked and they were embarrassed. Oh, they were the still the same flesh and bone mortals but what changed was the environment. Our parents were now vulnerable to the environment. God cursed the ground where Adam would have to toil to make his food, and cursed Eve and her child bearing to endure great pain. He pronounced that they would eventually die and return to the dust.

What changed is the world became a dangerous place to live. No longer would they have the comforts of a perfect garden that God planted east of Eden, but they would be subjected to the briar, the brambles, and the sin nature of future off-spring that were no longer immune from suffering and barred from eternal life, as an angel guarded the gate to the Garden of Eden with a flaming sword. He essentially cut them off from the Tree of Life.

So it began and the world has been a most dangerous place to live from that point on. Satan has tempted men and women throughout time of our existence on this earth to thwart God's plan of redemption of His creation lost to Satan, because of sin. You may be asking within yourself right now, “Why did not God make His creation with the inability to sin?” If God is so powerful, then why are we having so much trouble in the world, why did God not create a creature that would not sin? Of course, God did make creatures that cannot sin. They are called “cows.” Any animal creature made apart from the image of God, which He made man, has the inability to sin. Why do we have the ability to sin? Again, the word is: freedom.

JESUS FOILED SATAN'S PLANS

But let us go to the Church Age for a moment, and the beginning of the redemption of mankind through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. In reading the four gospel accounts of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you read the beginning of reclaiming what was lost in the Garden of Eden. Jesus has paid the ultimate price for the salvation of all who call upon His name in true repentance and turn to follow Him, in faith and actions. But why all the suffering while we are on our way to the kingdom of God, and the coming of our Lord and Savior to reign and rule on this earth?

There is a story in Luke chapter 13 of Jesus explaining this to His disciples:

Vs.13.1: "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices."

And again:

Vs.13.4: "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?"

What did He tell them?

Vs.13.5: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Each disciple was wondering if those who perished as such were greater sinners, but Jesus enforced the concept that this world is a dangerous place, and unless we repent we shall all likewise perish, physically and spiritually.

TORNADO DISASTERS IN OKLAHOMA

People try to explain what has happened to those poor people in Oklahoma, as twister after twister has ruined many lives and destroyed many peoples homes and businesses, killing adults and children alike. Were they deserving of this kind of destruction? Were they all more sinners than what each of us are? I tell you, "No!" We are all sinners, and without Jesus Christ in our lives, we will all likewise perish. Maybe not in the same fashion that these people did but this world grows more dangerous as time moves along.

What can we do when this kind of danger is all around and we see the suffering of Christian people right along with unbelievers? We pray God's protection on our family and ourselves believing the Bible's promises and claiming them in faith. As it was in times past with Christians that held onto Jesus Christ and Him risen, to their death, so we must hold to the promises of eternal life no matter what comes our way. We pray God's mercy, God's favor, but in the end, we are mortal and prone to death at any time. This is physical suffering that each of us must endure at the hand of nature and protect ourselves with precautions to limit the danger.

THE COMING CHRISTIAN SUFFERING?

I have had many people email me asking what will it be like in the coming Tribulation. They ask, what can the world expect? As you may know, I have been warning that the time of Jacob's troubles or as we know it, the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation enveloping 7-years of this time when men's hearts will grow exponentially more evil than even what we see today could be right around the proverbial corner of our time.

Human beings have endured untold amounts of death and destruction at the hands of other men. It's been with us since the beginning when Cain slew Abel, his brother. There are those who believe that all men, including those of the church present will endure the whole 7 years of carnage that will come upon the

earth. I would like to comfort you with an exclamation and a firm belief: **“We won’t!”** That is, Christians who are truly born of water and the Spirit as Jesus proclaimed while talking to Nicodemus in John chapter 3.5:

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” It is an exclusive elect group of people who have put their trust in Jesus Christ in true repentance and have become what no other people in all of history since His resurrection have been able to proclaim, being His bride. That group of people will be a minority population of all who have ever lived.

But you say, “People have been dying all down through the ages. Why are the people killed during the Tribulation any different than those who died before them?” I would like to mention a phrase that explains it all that the coming Tribulation is different than all the evil that has been forced on God-fearing men and women down through the ages. The phrase is **“GODS WRATH.”**

You would be correct to say that millions of men and women have died for the testimony of Jesus Christ for the last 2000 years, but here is the rub. These people died at the hands of other men. Countless lives of Christian people have suffered during those years and still suffer today. But during the time of the Tribulation, not only will men kill other men, as evil men always have, but the majority of the destruction will be by the very hand of God in Divine wrath.

If you read your Bible and believe as I do, that every word is true and God breathed, then you will read that upwards of two-thirds plus of all mankind alive on this earth during those years will not only be killed by evil men...Oh, no, maybe a minority, but the majority will be killed by God purging this earth of the rebellion of sinful men who will NOT repent. He will wipe the surface of the earth clean making it ready for the coming kingdom of God.

That my friend, figures to be roughly five billion people, give or take a million or two, of all forms of humanity dying because of an environment in total chaos, rivers and seas turned to blood, and great earthquakes that flatten every mountain and shake the earth like a drunken sailor. Not forgetting plague after plague that rivals the plagues of Egypt in their fierceness and men dying in countless numbers into the billions.

Why is there a differentiation between men dying during the last 6000 year roughly and the 7 years known as the Tribulation? Again, the phrase...God’s Wrath!

1 Thessalonians 5.9-11:

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

Jesus said in Luke 21:34-36, emphasis added:

“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, **that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.**”

The verse above speaks of being worthy. How do we become worthy? It is not about what we did, but what He did for us that make us worthy to stand before Him. What we did was believe in Him, by faith.

Finally, in Revelation chapter 3, the risen, glorified Lord God speaks to His Church at the end of the age:

Vs.3.10: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

Vs.3.11: “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

EYE HATH NOT SEEN or EAR HEARD

Christians do suffer for their beliefs. People die in a world that is full of danger, non-Christian, and Christian alike. It is the dangerous world environment we live in. But turn with me to what Paul the apostle said concerning the suffering he endured for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Romans chapter 8.16-19, emphasis added:

“The Spirit himself doth testify with our spirit, that we are children of God; and if children, also heirs, heirs, indeed, of God, and heirs together of Christ if, indeed, we suffer together, that we may also be glorified together. **For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time `are' not worthy to be compared with the glory about to be revealed in us;** for the earnest looking out of the creation doth expect the revelation of the sons of God.”

Peter wrote in his letter in 1 Peter 4:13-14:

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”

The level of suffering has not reached to loss of blood here in the USA, YET! But political changes are brewing with our Homeland Security department to criminalize conservatives, patriots, and all Christians as terrorist. Will suffering enter the land of the free and home of the brave as it has in other countries? When the economy fails, and the currency is worthless, all of the people of this country will suffer. Men will turn against other men. Crime will be rampant as people attempt to stay alive by whatever means they can think of...legal or illegal.

What could hasten the total collapse of this countries economy and the suffering to shift into high gear? Wait for it...the Rapture. When a portion of 350 million people including babies, children and born again adults suddenly disappear in this country alone, not counting all other countries of the world, then suffering will be more than most humans can endure as Satan will be loosed in evil unabated in all it's viciousness.

2 Thessalonians 2.7-8:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.”

“He who now letteth,” is rendered as the Restrainer by many translations. The Holy Spirit is the only power that is holding back (restraining) the full-force of all the evil and the suffering that will be brought to bear upon this nation, and this world to a level that has not been seen in all human history recorded. You think suffering in foreign countries and the threat looming in this land of the USA is troubling, wait around my reader. Carnage and suffering is coming on a grand scale, far greater than what has been endured by Christians today or past. Look-up for our redemption draweth nigh.

Won't you join us?

“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

This is Pastor Mike Taylor praying God’s salvation through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, comes into your life. If you have any needs, counseling, prayer, or just a listening ear, then email me at realteam1999@sbcglobal.net, or visit me online for more teachings from the Bible at www.churchofgod-usa.org. God bless you all, till we meet at Jesus’ feet.