

CALL to PRAYER - Thank God for your pain ^(1 Thess 5:18) and pray we He would use it for good.

Ephesian 3:1-2 - Being Useful in a Painful Place

Intro – The problem of human suffering has perplexed people for as long as there has been people who have felt pain. Different faiths & philosophies tackle this issue with some denying its reality (Christian Science). The Christian faith acknowledges the reality of suffering and the origin of suffering (sin & The Fall). But the Christian religion is a religion of redemption. Sinners are redeemed, life & death are redeemed and even suffering is redeemed. Our faith says that pain is pain but that there is a plan and a purpose even to our pain. The painful things in our life can be redeemed for a glorious purpose within our life. The way of the cross is hard, but it is the way of redemption which leads towards a resurrection. Our text today mentions a painful situation in the life of the Apostle Paul, but Paul offers a perspective on his pain that gave purpose to the pain. The Pain ... The Perspective ... The Purpose ... of Paul's Suffering.

THE PAIN OF PAUL'S SUFFERING

1. Ephesians is one of the "Prison Epistles." letters from a Roman jail.
 - a. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were all written from jail.
 - b. Eph. 3:1
 - c. 4 years in a Roman jail (2 yrs., in Caesarea...ship...2 yrs. in Rome - Acts 21-28)
 - i. False charges / Unjust / Chains Not fun
2. Apostolic resume of suffering
 - a. 2 Cor. 11:23-28
 - b. *"fought with wild beasts in Ephesus"* - 1 Cor. 15:32 Philippian jail – Acts 16:22-23
 - c. *"bear in my body the marks"* - Gal. 6:17
 - d. *"Filling up...afflictions"* - Col. 1:24 Paul did his share of suffering as part of the Body of Christ
 - i. Christ suffered in the body and those part of His Body will also suffer.
 - e. *"Despaired of life"* - 2 Cor. 1:8-9
3. The Bible does not sugar coat pain & suffering.
 - a. The pain is real, and it hurts. Suffering is burdensome and seems unbearable
 - b. Paul doesn't whitewash his suffering or redefine his pain. (C.S. or Scientology)
 - i. We shouldn't either...Christianity deals with truth and reality
 - c. Being beaten, unjustly jailed and living in chains is not fun. (no smiley face on sorrow)

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PAUL'S SUFFERING

- Notice how Paul classified his imprisonment and Who he said imprisoned him.
- Eph. 3:1 - *"prisoner of Christ Jesus"*
 - Eph. 4:1 - *"prisoner of the Lord"* Eph. 6:20 - *"ambassador in chains"*
 - Paul's perspective was that **Jesus was his jailer.**
 - Paul didn't focus on the Jews (who handed him over) or the Romans (jailed him)
 - Paul's perspective was that it was Jesus who jailed him.
 - The Hand of Providence was behind his pain.

- See God's sovereignty in your suffering and His plan in your pain.
 - Joseph - Gen. 45:5-8 (God sent me - 3 x's) I'm sure Joseph didn't know the plan at first...13 yrs.
 - Gen. 50:20
 - God sent the suffering and meant the suffering...
 - *"God does not use anyone greatly unless He hurts him deeply."*
- Pain was part of the plan for the Apostle Paul
 - Acts 9:15-16
 - Some try to erase God from having any part in our pain. WRONG!
 - Pain is part of God's plan for us.
 - Philippians 1:29 1 Peter 3:17 1 Peter 4:1 1 Peter 4:12-13 1 Peter 4:19
 - What is your perspective on your pain? How do you classify your suffering?
 - Think of that most painful thing and ask, "Did Jesus send it?"
 - Is Jesus your "jailer"?

THE PURPOSE OF PAUL'S SUFFERING

- ❖ Since pain was part of the plan...Paul's pain had purpose. Rom. 8:28
 - Paul's pain was sent to him to help others. (just like Jesus' pain was the plan of redemption)
 - 3:1 *"...for the sake of you Gentiles"*
- ❖ Paul was in jail because of his preaching to the Gentiles
 - Acts 21:27-28
 - Gave his personal testimony as a defense...Damascus Road experience....
 - Acts 22:14-15, 21-22
 - Paul was in jail because of the Gentiles and FOR the Gentiles.
- ❖ Paul made his pain very productive and he was useful in a hurtful place.
 - The place of his pain gave him an opportunity.
 - He preached to Gov. Felix, Gov. Festus, King Agrippa, shipmates, Malta
 - Philippians 1:12-14 - the whole praetorian guard
 - Imagine being the soldier chained to / guarding Paul - Acts 28:16
 - Philippians 4:22 - some of Caesars household became believers
 - Philemon 10-11 The slave Onesimus was saved in prison
 - He wrote letters to churches (we are still reading them today)
 - Paul made himself very useful in a very hurtful place
 - He saw his pain as part of God's plan that had a good purpose to help others. His pain was redeemed for the good of others.
 - Paul was a good steward of his suffering Eph. 3:2
- ❖ How can we be good stewards of our pain and suffering?
 - Don't deny the reality of pain of suffering.
 - Embrace the redemption of pain and suffering
 - See Jesus as your "jailer." (have the perspective that God sent it and meant it)
 - Share in His sufferings for the good the others - Philippians 3:10
 - Be useful in your hurtful place. (Why has God sent you this suffering?)
 - Pain in this life is..... inevitable....painful...but useful
 - Jesus is our "jailer" but also our Redeemer. Redeems sin/sinners, life/death, pain & suffering
 - Rom. 8:16-18