Scott. A. Wood 3-3-2019

SERIES: DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

PART 8: I AM AFFLICTED

Zayan comes from a long and important line of Muslims. His family moved to Palestine around AD 700, and in the 1100s, King Saladin gifted the only house on the compound of the Dome of the Rock to his distant grandfather. His ancestors continued to serve as muftis and imams of Jerusalem until his grandfather broke the legacy, starting the first local travel agency in Israel. Zayan’s father married an American and moved to the United States, where Zayan was born. Though living in America, Zayan’s family remained Muslim. But as Zayan was exposed to Christianity, the Holy Spirit began to work in his life. “I was born here in the States, where the idea of converting religiously is common and okay culturally, though it was not for my family,” he says. “Jesus saved me after showing me the true depravity (moral corruption and degradation) of the world, which is quite evident in American culture.” Converting to Christianity has strong and painful implications for Zayan, having come from a deeply connected and powerful Islamic family. “I knew that converting would get me in a good amount of trouble with the family,” says Zayan, “but I also knew that I would be in worse trouble if I didn’t. God quickly taught me how to depend on Him and act out of a love for Him.

“My dad disowned me and did not communicate with me for a while. But the Spirit pushed me to seek after my dad and show him the love that Allah or any Muslim had never shown him.” Today, while Zayan’s father isn’t a Christian, there has been some reconciliation. His father no longer holds to Muslim religious beliefs and is talking with Zayan again. In the process, God has used Zayan’s suffering to grow him for the good of others: “The Holy Spirit also has shown me how to share the Good News of the Gospel with Muslims and be bold for the mission and glory of God. I’ve learned that there really aren’t intimidating people—only lost people.”

I want to look at today from Ephesians 3:1-13:

**How to understand suffering and grow through it**

**“When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles . . . 2assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending His grace to you Gentiles. 3As I briefly wrote earlier, God Himself revealed His mysterious plan to me. 4As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. 5God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by His Spirit He has revealed it to His holy apostles and prophets. 6And this is God’s plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. 7By God’s grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving Him by spreading this Good News. 8Though I am the least deserving of all God’s people, He graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. 9I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. 10God’s purpose in all this was to use the church to display His wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11This was His eternal plan, which He carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. 12Because of Christ and our faith in Him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence. 13So please don’t lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.”** Ephesians 3:1-13

**Embrace the fact that you will experience suffering in this life**

**I. Suffering from sin**

Romans 5:12 says, **“When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.”** 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 says, **“So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the ressurection from the dead has begun through another man. 22Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.”** Based on the truths from these scriptures, when Adam sinned we were all implicated, because we inherited the sin nature of our earthly father Adam, and we’re all born into a fallen world. As a result, some of our suffering, sickness, maladies, and malformation of our bodies and minds are simply a result of being a part of Adam’s race. All of humans’ sufferings, to some degree, are related to Adam’s sin, our sin and the sin of others and the curse that was released into our planet by Adam’s rebellion. Sin’s curse will remain until Jesus returns for a 2nd time, and He removes sin and all its destructive power, and resurrects all Christians from the dead and ushers in the eternal new creation. Until then we must embrace the fact that suffering is part of life on this side of the Kingdom. But sin’s curse has been broken and satan has been defeated.

**II. Suffering from punishment**

There is judgment that comes to those who reject God. Biblical examples include God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and on Pharaoh and Egypt. This kind of punishment demonstrates God’s justice. It brings the work of horrendous sin to an end, so that those suffering at the hands of evildoers are given a reprieve, it reveals to unbelievers the urgent need to repent of sin and place their faith in God in order to avoid eternal punishment, and it encourages believers that God will not be mocked and that faith in Him is not in vain. God does not punish believers, because when they confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior, Jesus took the punishment and judgment for our sins on Himself. 1 Peter 2:22-24, **“He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. 23He did not retaliate when He was insulted, nor threaten revenge when He suffered. He left His case in the hands of God, Who always judges fairly. 24He personally carried our sins in His body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By His wounds you are healed.”**

**III. Suffering from consequences**

Often, we suffer because of foolish decisions we make. We see examples like this throughout the book of Proverbs, which is part of the Wisdom literature in the O.T. The lazy who won’t work become hungry. Adulterers reap what they sow. Proverbs 6:26-29, “**For a prostitute will bring you to poverty, but sleeping with another man’s wife will cost you your life. 27Can a man scoop a flame into his lap and not have his clothes catch on fire? 28Can he walk on hot coals and not blister his feet? 29So it is with the man who sleeps with another man’s wife. He who embraces her will not go unpunished.”** Fools suffer harm and poor financial stewards are impoverished. Church, practically speaking, much of what you and I suffer is consequential, which is a result from our decisions. If you’re honest, you can learn from your poor decisions and make better decisions. If you look to blame others or God, you won’t learn, and you will repeat the cycle. Proverbs 19:3 says, “**People ruin their lives by their own foolishness and then are angry at the Lord.”**

**IV. Suffering from demonic influence**

As we have seen earlier in this series, Paul writes in Ephesians 2:2, **“You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.”** Demonic suffering is real. The Bible gives us examples that include torment, physical injury, deception that arises from false miracles, accusations, and even death. It is unfortunate, but demonic suffering can be very hard to discern. Way too often Christians, especially, blame the devil for what is happening to them, when in reality they are experiencing suffering from the consequences of their own decisions. In a matter of fact many people open the door to demonic influence because of the decisions they make sexually, with alcohol, drugs, and their involvement with the occult. Things like reading astrological charts, attending séances, going to psychics, tarot cards, and being under the influence of authors and people who are influenced by what is called their spirit guide. There is an author that boldly declares that his homeopathic remedies are revealed to him by his spirit guide. I would stay away from that material. From my perspective biblically those are foolish decisions, and I have dealt with far too many people who have come to me, and I have to lead them through a process in which they confess their involvement in the occult, repent, renounce the demons involved and then ask for a new filling of the Holy Spirit to fill the areas where the demonic influence held sway. Demonic suffering is a real source of suffering.

**V. Suffering from victimhood**

Victims can experience untold suffering by being sinned against. This is a constant and heavy part of pastoral ministry. Throughout my 32 years of being a lead pastor, I can’t tell you how many hundreds, and, by now, it is well over a thousand, where I have listened to the devastating stories of precious people who have been beaten, raped, molested, stolen from, cheated on, and the like. I have heard stories that you would think the person was making it up. I only wish that was true, but the story was real. This is why, CVCHURCH, we must continue to be a faith community that continues to grow in our ability to be a place for people to feel they can belong, and they will be accepted, and that we’re a safe group of people that—when a precious person gets to a place where they have found the courage to tell us what happened—that we with grace, love, acceptance, and care can listen to their story and enter into their lives to partner with them and communicate the love and healing of Jesus Christ.

**VI. Suffering from being a part of a group that is victimized**

Sometimes we suffer simply as a result of being part of a people who are suffering. One of the leading examples of this kind of suffering is the prophets of the O.T. who frequently would repent of their own sins and for the sins of the nation of Israel and their forefathers, and they experienced the suffering God has permitted to come upon them as a consequence of their own rebellion and disobedience. As much as some identify themselves as loners, the truth is we are not isolated islands and autonomous individuals. We’re all members of families, nations, and culture—all of whom suffer. We can also suffer simple because of family ties or our nationality. And there are those who are born into poverty, famine, hardship, and war and experience suffering simply because of where and when they were born. The common examples are the Jewish holocaust, the Armenian holocaust and the profound suffering that is happening to Christians and nation groups all over the world.

**VII. Suffering from discipline**

God disciplines, chastens, rebukes and corrects us because He loves us, and He wants us to grow and mature in our understanding of who He is and His purposes and plans for our lives and our roles and function in His Kingdom. Examples of suffering from discipline can be found in the book of Proverbs, the Prophets and the New Testament. The Scriptures are very clear that Father God is our perfect Father and He corrects us to mature and save us from the destructive harm that sin causes. It is true that this kind of suffering is painful, but the Bible tells us that we will see the effectiveness of God’s loving discipline that continually works for our growth in holiness and fruitfulness. Hebrews 12:5-11, **“And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as His children? He said, ‘My child,don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline, and don’t give up when He corrects you. 6For the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes each one He accepts as His child.’ 7As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as His own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? 8If God doesn’t discipline you as He does all His children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really His children at all. 9Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn’t we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? 10For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in His holiness. 11No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.”**

**VIII. Suffering that comes from the ungodly**

There is a suffering that can come with the ungodly, those who are committed to rebel against God to those who represent Him. The examples include the O.T. prophets and the N.T. apostles as well as those who believe and live their lives for Jesus Christ. The diversity of suffering ranges from opposition to persecution. It can be seen in physical persecution that can cause some to die for Jesus. There are those who can experience verbal opposition by being maligned, lied about, falsely accused, mocked and harassed. This is what happened to Zayan who was born into a culture hostile to the gospel and suffered by virtue of his devotion to Jesus in a family that opposed him and disowned him.

**IX. Suffering that comes when someone we love suffers**

The Bible tells us this will be common in the church, because when people we love suffer, we will suffer as well. This last Thursday during the celebration of Ken Voelker’s life and at the reception, I saw one of the most powerful testimonies to the power of how God’s love can impact those who don’t even know Jesus by the way Ken’s CVCHURCH family came around his family by sharing just how much every one of us here loved him and expressed their care and support of him and his precious family.

**X. Suffering that is meant to be preventative**

There are times when suffering warns us of a greater tragedy and pain that will happen if we don’t heed God’s warnings. This type of suffering demonstrates the loving nature of our God. Often you might experience a pain in your body, and if you pay attention to it and investigate it, you can stave off something worse. We have had many people go to the doctor for their regular check-ups, or they went in because something wasn’t quite right, and they found a cancer or some other kind of symptom that could lead to a devastating end. I know people have come to me, and I have warned them that if they continue down the path that they are going it is not going to be good. What I said hurt them, but they didn’t listen to me and to what God was trying to say to them to prevent where they were headed, and negative things happened. This preventative type of suffering ties in with suffering that can occur from discipline.

**XI. Suffering that is part of the end times before Jesus comes back**

The Bible declares that there will be increased suffering that will signal the end of this age, as seen in the prophecies of the Old Testament and in Jesus’ teaching. It is true we don’t know when the end of this age will be or when Jesus will return, we do know that Christians living in the final chapter of human history will suffer greatly because of being followers of Jesus Christ. As I close this morning (afternoon) I would like you to think about how you have experienced suffering in your life. Taking these 11 categories I have presented to you today, what do you believe is the cause of your suffering, what could God be teaching you through it? How are the people around you experiencing suffering, and in what ways could you comfort and give them guidance if they ask for it? In what ways have you wrongly understood your difficulties and misunderstood God in the midst of your suffering? For some of us, being honest about what I have taught this morning (afternoon) could very easily cause some spiritual, emotional, relational and intellectual pain. I ask that you prayerfully study the Scriptures I have shared today and that those who facilitate our small groups will prayerfully discuss what I have taught today for the promotion of all of our ability to embrace the fact that you will experience suffering in life and how we can best submit to the truth that says that God’s discipline is always good for us, that we might share in His holiness. Let’s pray.

**COMMUNION**

**“17Then He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then He said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves. 18For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.’ 19He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’ 20After supper He took another cup of wine and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant between God and His people—an agreement confirmed with My blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.’”** Luke 22:17-20