

Title: "How could a loving God allow so much suffering?"

Text: John 11:1-44

Worship: Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life!

Preaching date: July 25th, 2021

Key Sentence: "Hopefully we will see today that God is good and that God is the only hope for this suffering world."

Outline:

- I. Jesus knows about our sufferings (John 11:1-7)
- II. Jesus is Life in the midst of our pain and sufferings (John 11:21-26)
- III. Jesus deeply cares about our sufferings (John 11:32-35)
- IV. Jesus can help us in our sufferings (John 11:36-44)
- IV. Jesus is glorified in our sufferings (John 11:4)

Notes:

1. Worship: (worship time should be just songs that exalt Jesus). Worship the One who suffered for us, who knows our sufferings, who can help us in our sufferings, and who is glorified in our sufferings.
2. Scripture for bulletin: Philippians 1: 29, Romans 8:18, John 16:33, John 11:25-26, and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Paul writes, "For it has been given to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us." And Jesus said, "I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. ²⁶Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?" Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our

inner person is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. ¹⁸ So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

3. Children's Corner: "Why does God let bad things happen?" Douglas Talks

4. Visuals: Desert sun, desert and water, desert and a tree.

5. Prayer week: David plays guitar in the background.

6. Sign: Jesus is life

John 11

7. Bulletin: Stack 3, 19C3, "Trust in the Lord"

"How Could A Loving God Allow So Much Suffering?"

Book

— Well, this morning we are continuing our series, "Confronting Christianity," and for the past 7-8 weeks we have been trying to answer hard questions that people so often ask or wonder about God, about Christianity, or about His Word. And today we will try to dive into another hard question--how could a loving God allow so much suffering? I'm sure at some point all of us have asked this question. And I'm sure many of us today are right in the middle of some type of suffering. Every day we hear the news of war, murder, divorce, hatred, persecution, abortion, physical pain, abuse, cancer, violence, death, and on and on it goes of the suffering and pain that is in this world and in our own lives. And it just doesn't feel right, does it? It just doesn't make sense. So, we ask God, "Why?" Why all of this suffering and pain; why don't You just end it? Why don't You just fix everything? And the reason it doesn't feel right is because God has put eternity into our hearts. We long for heaven. We long for being in a place where there's no more pain, no more suffering, and no more death. But, we're not there yet, we're still here, on earth, where there is pain, suffering, and death all around us. So, what do we do? Often, we blame God, get mad at God, and turn away from God because of our sufferings; but hopefully we will see today that God is good and that God is the only hope for this suffering world.

gas

— Years ago, I pulled up to a gas station and the Lord led me to walk up to this guy while he was pumping gas. I walked up to him and handed him a tract. And as I handed it to him, I said, "I just wanted to give this to you, it's a tract that talks about God, Jesus, and heaven and hell; I think you will be blessed if you read it." Well, immediately he took it from my hand and threw to the ground and raised his voice and said, "If God is real, and if God is loving and kind like everyone says, why is my dad dying of cancer right now?" "He's a good man, he's done nothing wrong, he doesn't deserve this." "Why doesn't God just heal him?" He was just getting back from visiting his dad in the hospital. Well, we talked for about an hour. I listened a lot, then I shared with him the story of how my dad had passed away. And through our conversation I was able to share with him that God is good, He is at work in all situations, that we can trust Him, and was able to share the gospel with him. At the end of the conversation, he picked up the tract, and said that he would read it. So often suffering, gives us an opportunity to witness. But, did you notice his first response? He was mad at God, he blamed God for what was going on with his dad.

WOODS

- But, the first thing that we need to remember is that God didn't create this mess, we did. We all know the story, in the beginning God created beauty and perfection. In the beginning there was no pain, no suffering, and no death; everything was perfect. But, man rebelled and sinned against God. And because of sin, suffering came into the perfect world that God had created. And after Adam and Eve sinned, Adam experienced pain in working the land. Eve experienced pain in giving birth. And they both experienced pain in sinning against God and experienced pain in watching one of their son's murder the other. But, in all of this, God was good and it wasn't His fault; it was man's fault for disobeying God.

GOD IS
GOOD

- And it's interesting, in the beginning, starting in Genesis 3:21 we see a theme that runs throughout the Bible of God's goodness. After they sinned what did God do? Did He turn away from them, did He reject them? No, He loved them. After Adam and Eve sinned, (Genesis 3:21)

GEN
3:21

- "The Lord God made clothing out of skins for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them." After sinning Adam and Eve realized they were naked and felt ashamed. So, what does God do, He clothes them with animal skins. And by doing this, this is so important- we see three things about God in our sufferings. He knows what's going on, He cares about our situation, and He can help us in our time of need. These are huge truths about God that we have to believe. He knows exactly what's going on in our lives, He deeply cares about our struggles, and He has all of the power to help us in our time of suffering and pain. And believing these truths about God should give all of us today, a tremendous hope in the midst of our sufferings. Sufferings are going to come because we are in a fallen world, but God is with us!

NO
HOPE
BOOK

- But, so many live a life full of pain, struggles, and sufferings with no God, and no hope. In Rebecca McLaughlin's book, "Confronting Christianity," Richard Dawkins says this about suffering, violence, and death; "our universe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." In other words, it is what it is. Don't care about suffering or pain, it doesn't matter anyway. There is no God, no purpose, no plan, no afterlife.

MAN

- Stephen Hawking, who lived with a debilitating motor neuron disease for his whole adult life believed the brain was a computer that stops working when its components fail. He said,

"There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers, that is a fairy tale for people afraid of the dark." And I would say, suffering minus God, equals more suffering, total despair, and total hopelessness.

John — So, as we are trying to answer this question, "How could a loving God allow so much suffering?" If we open our Bibles to John chapter 11, we see the story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And in this story, we see that there is a plan, a purpose, and a hope in our sufferings. John 11: 1-7, — "Now a man was sick, Lazarus, from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, and it was her brother Lazarus who was sick. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Him: "Lord, the one You love is sick." ⁴ When Jesus heard it, He said, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶ So when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. ⁷ Then after that, He said to the disciples, "Let's go to Judea again."

tears — Because suffering hurts, we just want it to stop. And in this story, we see a man named Lazarus who is sick. So, Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus immediately call their close friend, the miracle-working healer Jesus. They want Jesus to help; they want Jesus to heal their brother. Jesus was close to these three and cared deeply about them; He loved them very much. So, you would think He would have left immediately to help, but He doesn't. Rebecca says this in her **Book** — book, "Jesus frequently healed strangers. He even healed long-distance. But this time, when his closest friends cry out, He waits. This is the first reality with which Christians must grapple. Sometimes, we call for Jesus through our tears, and He does not come."

MAN Praying — This is hard for us to get. How could a loving, powerful God, just do nothing? Why doesn't He do something? But often, waiting or not getting what we want, is part of His plan. Jesus, if we remember pleaded with God, "Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me." But, God didn't take it away and Jesus suffered and died on the cross. The apostle Paul was tormented by a thorn in his flesh. He prayed three times for the Lord to take it away. But God answered, "My grace is sufficient for you." Jesus heard the cry for help from Mary and Martha, but He decided

to wait two more days until He decided to go. God often wants us to wait in our sufferings. He's working His will out in our sufferings. He knows what is going on, He cares, but we must be patient as we wait and continue to trust that God is in control and knows what is best in these moments.

Jesus/
Martha

So, Jesus waits. Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days by the time Jesus arrives. (John 11:21-22) "Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. ²² Yet even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You." Martha has faith. She believes that Jesus is the Messiah. That He is the King of kings. That He is the way, the truth, and the life. So, even though Lazarus is dead, she still believes that Jesus can help her. She is still trusting in the midst of her pain. This is key for us today. For so many, when hard times come, they get mad at God, turn away from Him, and even blame Him. So, it's so important that we continue to trust Him in these moments. Even though it's hard, God is always at work in our sufferings.

John
11:23-24

Jesus responds to Martha, "Your brother will rise again," Jesus told her. ²⁴ Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Again, Martha believes in Jesus, she believes that he will be resurrected in the end, but you can almost hear what she is really saying, "But what about now, Jesus? Why don't you do something now? Why won't you help me now? I need you now!" Rebecca says this, "In this moment, Martha stands where many Christians stand when faced with suffering. We have ultimate promises: one day Jesus will return and put the world to rights. But we are much more like children than philosophers. Our pain is real and urgent. It refuses to be soothed by faraway hope. Neat theological answers will not do." We want Jesus to help us right now; don't we?

I Am

So, Jesus shows up, He is with her in her sufferings, but He doesn't fix her problems when she wants Him to, but Jesus gives her something even better. Jesus looks into this grieving women's eyes and says, (John 11:25-26) "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?" I think there's two things here, Jesus is the only way for salvation. Jesus

offers eternal life through Himself by believing. Jesus suffered and died for our sins on the cross. Second, as Martha longs to have her brother back, Jesus looks into her tearing eyes, and says, "I am the resurrection and the life." In other words, Rebecca says, "As you stand here in your desperate grief, your greatest need is not to have your brother back again. It's to have me." Jesus "is life: life in the face of suffering, life in the face of death." This is so key, so important for us to understand when it comes to our sufferings. So, in these moments, if we turn to Jesus, we can find hope, healing, help, comfort, peace, joy, and a closeness with Jesus. He is the life that we need in our sufferings; He is life! So often He allows us to suffer so that we can find Him. So that we can draw closer to what we really desperately need---Jesus!

John
11:32

— After this, Martha went to get Mary, Mary rushes out to find Jesus and then falls at His feet, (John 11:32) "...Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died!" And just like her sister, Mary believes Jesus can help in her time of need. And in this moment when Jesus saw Mary crying and all the other people crying, He was deeply moved and troubled; (John 11:35)

Jesus
wept

— "Jesus wept." The shortest verse in the Bible, but it says so much about Him. He wept, He looked around and saw all the tears, all the pain, all the suffering, and He cried. And in that moment, He probably wept because of the bigger picture also; the perfect world that He had created was now all messed up; sin, hurt, death, pain, and suffering, was everywhere, so He wept. Jesus felt the pain that we all feel in times of suffering, pain, and loss.

— Rebecca says, "Jesus is no remote deity, watching suffering from a safe distance. He is the God who inhabits our suffering." He joins us in our pain, He is with us in our suffering, and He understands our sufferings. Isaiah 53:3 says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was..." Hebrews tells us (Hebrews 4:15), "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin." Jesus understands our pain, He understands what we are going through. Rebecca says, "he also bears the heartbreak of our suffering. Jesus holds us close as we lament. He weeps with us as we weep. He knows the end of the story, when he will wipe every tear from our eyes. But this does not stop him from cleaving to us in our pain." He understands what pain and heartache is; He was "Left by those closest to him, beaten by

strangers, stripped and abused and hung up on a cross to die—there is no wound of ours he cannot touch. He has even experienced abandonment by his Father.” He totally understands our hurt and pain. Jesus knew the end of the story for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They would all be in heaven one day where there is no suffering, but in this moment Jesus wept. For you and me today, He knows the end of our story, but today, in the midst our pain and sufferings, He is with us, and He is weeping with us. He hurts as we hurt. He deeply cares about our situation. And we get to experience Him in our sufferings.

NEE — I ran across a story about Watchman Nee. Nee was born in 1903 in southern China. He was raised in a godless home, but when he was 17 his mom went to an evangelistic meeting and received Jesus as her Savior. Nee saw such a big change in her mom that he wanted to find out about this Jesus. Then, after he went to one of these evangelistic meetings, he trusted Christ for salvation. He then vowed to “give Christ all my life, my loyalty, and my love.” He became a preacher, and his life motto was, “I want nothing for myself; I want everything for the Lord.”

In the 1930’s there was a transportation boom in China. With this, Nee and his co-workers were able to go all over China sharing the gospel. He relentlessly encouraged the Christians in China to share their faith, his words were hard to ignore, he would say, “Because you are not witnessing, many have not heard the gospel. They will be eternally separated from God. What a consequence of our apathy! ...This is my challenge to you. Witness to at least one person a day. Witness to whomever you meet...It is time for us to put feet to our faith.” He was bold for Jesus.

Eventually sharing the gospel became very dangerous in China. The communist party in China outlawed Christianity and expelled foreign missionaries. On Black Saturday, April 27th 1951, thousands of people were arrested, but Watchman Nee kept working and started many underground churches during this time. But, on April 10th 1952, Watchman Nee was arrested and charged as a lawless capitalist. He received a 15-year sentence but was not released at the end of the term. His days were divided into 8-hour segments: hard labor, “reeducation,” and solitary confinement. During his first 20 years in prison, he was allowed no communication with

the outside world. And during his 20th year he became sick; then on June 1st 1972, he died in prison after spending 20 years in chains for Jesus.

That's hard stuff. That's suffering for Jesus. Twenty years of suffering! But, I share that story because Nee is in heaven with Jesus right now and I'm sure he would say, "it was all worth it. I gave my all for Jesus." So often we just want our sufferings to end, but often God has a plan for our sufferings. Sometimes Jesus heals and fixes our problems immediately, sometimes he wants us to wait a while, and sometimes he wants us to live in our sufferings. In our sufferings, we need to be able to say, "God, may Your will be done." Because, His will is always the best. That's hard, but those 20 years that Nee was in prison, Jesus knew exactly what was going on, He was helping him in his sufferings every day, helping him to be a light in that prison, and He was weeping with him daily. We are never promised that life will be perfect or pain free, but we are promised that He will always be with us, helping us, and that He will never leave us nor forsake us. God is always at work in our sufferings, and we know that our sufferings are short, and we get to spend eternity with Jesus in paradise very soon.

John 11:43

- So, after Jesus wept, He came to Lazarus's tomb and is deeply moved again. He commands that the stone be removed, and with a loud voice He says, (John 11:43) "...Lazarus, come out!" The man who was dead, came out alive. There is nothing too hard for our God. God can work miracles in our sufferings. But, why not do this in the beginning and spare Mary and Martha all the suffering. Rebecca says, "Jesus's power over death is absolute. I believe it is the only hope we have in the face of our inevitable end. But what fascinates me about this story is how little focus there is on Lazarus himself. Rather, the narrative draws our gaze to profound questions: Why, if Jesus planned to heal Lazarus, did he not just do so in the first place? Why did he let Lazarus die, and leave Mary and Martha mourning for days? Why not tell Martha what he was planning to do right away? In this strange stretching of the story, we get a glimpse of the whole biblical framework for suffering. The space between Lazarus's death and Jesus's calling of him out of the tomb is the space in which Martha sees Jesus for who he really is: her very life."

John 11:4

— Often Jesus allows sufferings in our lives to draw us closer to Himself. He knows what is best for us, and seeking Him, crying out to Him, depending on Him, and drawing close to Him, is the best thing for us! And, in doing this miracle, God is glorified. And that was the whole point from the very beginning; at the beginning of this story, after Jesus heard about Lazarus being sick, He said, "...This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." God was glorified in this miracle, and many believed in Jesus after this. Through suffering, many there looked up, and were in awe of God.

And just think, even though Mary and Martha grieved, and Lazarus died, this event had to have brought all of them closer to Jesus and how through all of this, had to have helped them to trust Him even more. So, through our sufferings today, God is at work, there is a plan and a purpose and through it all we get to know God better and God is glorified.

Desert

— But, from an atheist perspective, Richard Dawkins and Stephen Hawking would say, "not only is there no hope of a better end to the story; there is no ultimate story. There is nothing but blind, pitiless indifference." Rebecca says, "From a Christian perspective, there is not only hope for a better end; there is intimacy now with the One whose resurrected hands still bear the scars of the nails that pinned him to his cross. Suffering is not an embarrassment to the Christian faith. It is the thread with which Christ's name is stitched into our lives." We have a tremendous hope now, and forever. And through our sufferings we get to know Jesus better. Rebecca says, "In the early Genesis narrative, Adam and Eve knew God as Creator and Lord—perhaps, even, as friend. But Christians know Jesus far more intimately: as Savior, Lover, Husband, Head, Brother, Fellow Sufferer, and their Resurrection and their life. The first humans could not have dreamed of this earth-shattering intimacy with God." And this intimacy only comes through sufferings. What a blessing, through our sufferings, that we get to know Jesus more.

hands

— So, the question that so many struggle with is, "How could a loving God allow so much suffering?" There is so much more that can be said about this topic, but what have we seen so far: God knows about our sufferings, He deeply cares about our pain, and He can raise the dead—He has all the power to help us in our time of suffering! God shows up in our pain, He is

with us always. He is at work in our situation, He is working all things out for His glory. He is using our pain and suffering to draw us closer to Himself. In sufferings we find more intimacy with God. Jesus is "life." He provides life now and provides eternal life forever with Him in heaven. He is the resurrection and the life. And because He is the resurrection and the life, we know that our sufferings today will not last forever. All of this, should bring all of us today, a tremendous hope and peace in the midst of our pain and sufferings.

Spafford's

In 1871 Horatio Spafford was a happy Christian man. He was married, had four young daughters, and had a successful real estate business in downtown Chicago. But, in April of that year the Great Chicago fire consumed almost all of his real estate. But, with this great loss, he took great comfort in the fact that his family had escaped the fire and were all alive. During this time, they became friends with D. L Moody and gave financially to his ministry. Then, shortly after this they had the opportunity to go to Europe to assist Moody on a mission trip. Their destination was Jerusalem.

Right before Thanksgiving Horatio put his wife and four daughters on a ship bound for Europe. Horatio was not able to join them because of some business he had to attend to but planned to meet up with them in about a week. A few days later Horatio woke up to a horrible headline in the papers. The ship that his family was on struck another ship in the mid-Atlantic and had sunk. There was no initial word of any survivors. Then on December 1, 1873, Horatio received a telegram from his wife: "Saved. Alone."

MAN

Horatio boarded the next ship out for Europe. And as he passed over the watery grave of his four daughters, these words came into his heart which he wrote down later:

When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll,

Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,

"It is well, it is well with my soul."

Though Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come...

Let this blessed assurance control,

That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,

And has shed His own blood for my soul.

And, Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight,

The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,

The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,

*IT IS WELL WITH
MY SOUL*

— Even so, it is well with my soul.

“Even so”-it is well with my soul.

skip — We may not understand why these things happen, but we can trust that God is in control, that God is with us, and that His will for our lives is always the best. And knowing this should give us tremendous hope and peace; peace like a river in our sufferings. So today, whatever your trial is, whatever your pain is, whatever your suffering is, trust Jesus and turn to Him. Jesus “is life: life in the face of suffering, and life in the face of death.” So, turn to Him and experience Him today, in your sufferings! He is the resurrection and the life!