

Lamentations 3:22-32

²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." ²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. ²⁷ It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. ²⁹ Let him bury his face in the dust — there may yet be hope. ³⁰ Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. ³¹ For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. ³² Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.

Dear children of God who once were lost and now are found,

Why is there so much suffering in our world? Who or what is responsible for it? Is there any rhyme or reason to it? Will suffering ever end? These are important and valid questions to ask, and thankfully important and valid answers can be found as we search the inspired Word of God. The tendency of man from the fall into sin is to question and blame God when he is facing suffering, but God is not the source of suffering. Rather man is himself. Our sin introduced suffering to this world! Not that all forms of suffering are directly related to specific sins, although much suffering is. Rather, sin destroyed the original perfection in which man and our universe were created. Man's rebellion introduced the physical, mental, and emotional decline which leads ultimately and inevitably to death. Sin leaves men morally bankrupt and prone to wickedness. I don't think anyone would argue that sin is all around us and the answer to the why will serve as our theme for today:

Theme: Suffering Exists Because of Sin!

- 1. But God mercifully limits our suffering**
- 2. But God wisely uses our suffering.**
- 3. But God compassionately ends our suffering**

But what then is God's role and relationship to suffering? The Bible tells us that God, who is holy, is not the source of suffering. It also tells us that while God, who is all-powerful, does not create suffering, He does have complete control over it. Also the Bible informs us that because God is good and gracious, He can and will use suffering to accomplish His purpose within our lives as we love and serve Him.

1. But God mercifully limits our suffering

Within that biblical context, therefore, let us consider our text for today. We see, first of all, that God mercifully limits our suffering! Jeremiah writes: **"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."**

Jeremiah wrote these words in 586 B.C. as he sat in the midst of the rubble of what had been the great city of Jerusalem. God had permitted judgment to fall upon His people in view of their unfaithfulness in the form of the destruction of that city and its temple by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The opening verse of Lamentations reveals Jeremiah's state of mind: **"How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces has become a slave!" (1:1)** Jeremiah, who had prophesied of coming destruction, could hardly believe the utter devastation that surrounded him—a devastation that Jeremiah recognized was wholly deserved. Yet, in the midst of that devastation Jeremiah also recognized that God had mercifully limited their suffering: **"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.** God's people, in view of their sinful rebellion, deserved much worse than they got. They deserved total, temporal annihilation and ultimately everlasting damnation, but God had spared them on both counts. In spite of their sins God had spared many and would now call them back to Himself through repentance. In spite of their unworthiness, He still loved them, provided for their temporal, daily needs, and offered them the hope of a blessed eternity through His promised Messiah.

Many people in the midst of suffering think, "I don't deserve this," but the truth of the matter is that we all deserve much worse! As we all must acknowledge: **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)**; and as the Bible testifies: **"The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a)**. But the story does not end there! Yes, it is true that **"the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23)**. God has not chosen to destroy us, but has mercifully limited our suffering. It is limited in scope — He will not give us more than we can bear. It is limited in time — He has promised us life everlasting in heaven where there will be no suffering.

2. But God wisely uses our suffering.

God also wisely uses our suffering! Jeremiah writes: **"The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. ²⁷ It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. ²⁹ Let him bury his face in the dust — there may yet be hope. ³⁰ Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace.**

Suffering originated when man chose to turn away from God and plot his own course being deceived into believing that he could be his own god. Much of the suffering experienced in the world today is the result of the same human choice. God permits suffering to result from such choices as a means of both chastening and punishing mankind with the object of leading them ultimately to salvation. For us—believing children of God — suffering can and will result ultimately in our blessing, for it will serve God's good and gracious purpose. Of that we have His promise. He promises that **"for we know that in all things God works for the good of those who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28)**. He also assures us that in view of the fact that **"we have been justified through faith...Not only so, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us" (Romans 5:1, 3-5a)**.

Recently, I was reading parts of a wonderful article by Joni Eareckson Tada entitled, *"Why Do God's Children Suffer?"* If you have an opportunity to read it, I would encourage you to do so. Here are just a few of the words that she wrote in this article:

“Years ago, when I snapped my neck during a dive into shallow water, permanent and total paralysis smashed me up against the study of God. Up until then, I was content to wade ankle-deep in the things of God, but when a severed spinal cord left my body limp and useless, I was hoisted into a dark, bottomless ocean. In the sleepless hours of my early injury I wrestled with the question, ‘I’m a Christian; why would God allow such severe suffering in my life? God, why are you being so mean?’ ‘That was over 40 years ago. Not once in those years has God been mean. What’s more, He has satisfied my questions with an intimacy, softness, and sweetness of fellowship with the Savior which I wouldn’t trade for anything.... Years of study have convinced me that God knows what He’s doing.”

“But the Bible insists on another truth. When all these things happen—famine, crib death, snake bites, gas station robberies, pistol-whippings—God has not taken His hands off the wheel for a nanosecond. When suffering sandblasts us to the core, the true stuff of which we are made is revealed. Suffering lobbs a hand-grenade into our self-centeredness, blasting our soul bare—but then, we can be better bonded to the Savior.”

God can and does use the suffering in our lives to accomplish those same goals. His desire is to separate us from our sin and draw us ever closer to Himself, so that we might accomplish His chosen purposes in this life and then enjoy everlasting life free of suffering throughout eternity.

3. But God compassionately ends our suffering

God finally compassionately ends our suffering! Jeremiah writes: **“For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. ³² Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.**

God did not cast off forever Jeremiah and his fellow believers so many years ago. He went with them into captivity and ultimately brought them back to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. God continued to demonstrate His compassion upon His people ultimately sending His Son, Jesus, to bear their sins upon Calvary’s cross and to bring to them the gospel message of salvation. God’s purpose is never to harm, but always to save. Even the suffering caused by sin is used by God to accomplish that great purpose!

We will conclude this sermon with another brief quote from the article by Joni Eareckson Tada:

“...the core of God’s plan is to rescue me from sin, even up to my dying breath. My pain and discomfort are not His ultimate focus — He cares about these things, but they are merely symptoms of the real problem. God cares most not about making my life happy, healthy, and free of trouble, but about teaching me to hate my transgressions and to keep growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. One day God will close the curtain on evil and, with it, all suffering and sorrow.”

May God grant us all such insight into the nature and purpose of suffering. **SUFFERING EXISTS BECAUSE OF SIN**, but rest assured God is using suffering for our eternal good and his eternal good. May we trust in God’s promises that he is working all things for our eternal good – even when earthly suffering is all around us. Amen.