The School of Suffering

Introduction

In the Muslim World we stand on tip-toe with expectation and excitement as we see what God is doing in many places today. There are so many indications that a major breakthrough is coming. We have prayed so often to the Lord of the Breakthroughs. 2 Sam. 5:18-21

We sense as never before that we will soon be looking at a spiritually very different situation. We are also conscious that this will only come about if we are prepared to suffer. God uses suffering to conform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ – God's school of suffering.

In pottery making a plate, vase etc. is painted with a black substance before being put in the furnace. The more valuable and beautiful, the greater the black areas and the thicker the potter lays it on. But when taken out of the furnace the black has turned to gold. If you and I know little of suffering then in all probability we know little of the likeness of Jesus Christ.

I would like us to look at four aspects of the sufferings of Christ that are emphasized in Scripture.

Thomas said ***"Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails … I will not believe"***. (Jn. 20:25) The world is looking at us, the Christian church, and asking the same question.

Suffering comes in various forms

- Physical suffering – pain comes supremely through our bodies
- Emotional suffering
- Spiritual suffering – a burden for the lost

Suffering was part of the work of the Lord Jesus. So for us too it is 'a school'. It is a pre-requisite of spiritual power and authority. If we would bear the likeness of Christ, we must follow where He has gone before.

Suffering comes from various sources.

(a) **As the discipline of the Father** [Heb. 12:5-11]

"Those He loves He disciplines."

About the only way we learn the truth is through pain! This is not a denial of love – it is an evidence of love.

(b) **From the world**

Peter speaks of suffering for righteousness sake.

The Lord Jesus warned us, ***"The world will hate you, as it hated Me – if you were of the world you would be loved by the world – but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you."*** (Jn. 15:19)

(c) From ourselves

Jesus said, ***"If your eye offends you – pluck it out."*** (Mk. 9:47) This speaks of desirable self-imposed discipline that is hurtful.

(d) From Satan

He is the destroyer. He hates all people since they are made in the image of God. He especially hates all believers born again by the Spirit of God.

Suffering is the common lot of humanity. As believers we are not exempt. We are not trumphalists, but we should not hesitate to accept suffering.

What is achieved through suffering?

Jesus learned in the "school of suffering". What can we learn that will turn the black into gold in the furnace of suffering? Paul wanted to know the ***"fellowship of His sufferings"***.

- ***"I bear in my body the works of the sufferings of Christ."*** (Phil. 3:10)
- ***"Filling up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ."*** (Col. 1:24)

1 Pet. 1:6-7 ***"You may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine."***

The Suffering of Jesus

1. Heb. 5:8, ***"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered."***

J.B. Phillips ***"He had to prove the meaning of obedience."***

N.E.B. ***"He learned obedience in the school of suffering."***

Principle One: Obedience that Costs Nothing – Proves nothing"

To prove your obedience Our Father may ask of you something costly beyond all telling – the school of suffering tests and proves our obedience.

Jesus: ***"He was obedient into death – even the death on the Cross – therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name."*** (Phil. 2:9)

Why? Because He was obedient. A classic illustration of this is the testing of the obedience of Abraham. God's revelation to Abraham was clear, ***"Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."*** (Gen. 22:2) The will of God was crystal clear. God's revelation to Abraham was costly – his only son!

Abraham's response to the will of God was:

- Swift – ***"So Abraham rose early in the morning"***
- Sustained – three days – building the altar – laying the wood on it, tying up his son – raising the knife.

It was enough! God knew and intervened. ***"Now I know you fear God."*** v. 12 ***"Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed."*** v. 16

This demonstrates a loyalty that can only be proved through suffering. It was a profound lesson learned only in the school of suffering.

Remember Mary's words, ***"Whatever He says to you – do it."*** (Jn. 2:5)

Don't be surprised when the will of God for you is costly. God wants you to show your love and obedience.

2. Heb. 2:10, ***"It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."***

"He was made complete (perfect) ***through suffering."*** Complete = maturity

Principle Two: There is a maturity – a completeness – that can only be gained through suffering.

The author of Hebrews is not implying that there is anything imperfect about the Lord Jesus. There is no imperfection that needs to be rectified, but there was a need for completeness. The Lord Jesus was lacking in experience as a man. This could only be remedied if He suffered as ordinary human beings suffer. God learned to suffer. There can only come an understanding of the compassion and love in the heart of God for us if we suffer as God suffers.

It was this that lay behind the suffering of the Old Testament prophet Hosea.

- Note the tragedy that marred his family – Gomer his wife was unfaithful to him – this shattered the home and the heart of the prophet.
- There is no pain as intense as that of one's own family – the suffering of children – we would rather bear the pain ten times than that they should suffer.
- But the suffering Hosea experienced was in the closest relationship of all – a man and his wife – the relationship that God means to be the richest blessing becomes a relationship of unmitigated pain.
- Hosea was a man with a broken heart – because his home was broken.

What emerged out of Hosea's pain and suffering?

- ✓ A tenderness that transformed his ministry
- ✓ More demonstration of the tenderness, compassion and love of God then anywhere else in O.T.
- ✓ He entered into the pain and hurt of the heart of God who grieved over the infidelity of His people and the purpose of God to win back the wayward nation at any cost.
- ✓ So Hosea was told to go to the brothel where his wife worked – a wife he had loved and lost – and to buy her back and bring her home again.

"The gospel of the broken heart demands the ministry of the bleeding heart"

When we cease to bleed we cease to bless. You can't be an ambassador representing the Suffering Servant to the world unless you know what it is to suffer as He suffered.

The school of suffering brings a maturity of character. It is easy to preach with zeal, earnestness and passion, but unless you have learned to suffer you won't know what it means to preach with grace, gentleness, kindness, love and insight. There is a maturity that can only be gained through suffering.

Our Heavenly Father gave His only Son to a depth of agony and suffering that no child of earthly parents will ever undergo.

Principle Three: ***"Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted."*** (Heb. 2:18)

"For we don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb. 4: 15-16)

- A loyalty that can be proved only through suffering
- A maturity that can be gained only through suffering
- An empathy that can be born only through suffering.

Martin Luther said: "Three things go into the making of a minister, the Word of God, prayer and temptation."

Have you ever thought through the suffering of Christ? All through His life He suffered the agony of being tempted. What a battle He fought! If we think we have a rough ride it is nothing like His!

The climax came in Gethsemane and when He faced the temptation to bypass the Cross He sweat great drops of blood. It was agony! But what an asset it is! Now we have one who understands us.

"For we don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb. 4:15-16)

- ✓ We come boldly because we know He understands.
- ✓ Do you understand and do people come to you because they know you understand?
- ✓ Do you see why we sometimes suffer?
- ✓ We live in a world of grief, suffering, horror and pain.
- ✓ We must have an empathy that can only be born in suffering.
- ✓ Suffering is a key that opens doors of ministry into hearts of others who are shocked and hurting.

There is an empathy that can only be born through suffering.
We must be conformed to the image of His Son.

- ➢ a loyalty that can only be proved through suffering
- ➢ a maturity that can only be gained through suffering
- ➢ an empathy that can only be born through suffering
- ➢ a destiny reached only through suffering

"Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood. Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore." (Heb. 13:12-13)

Christ's sufferings were bound up with the whole redemptive purpose of God and so are ours. If you and I are going to be true Christians – part of the living body of Christ then we have to be identified with this purpose.

What does this mean?

a. We will be rejected by the world. Our Lord was rejected. We will be rejected too.

b. If we bear rejection by the world then we also share in the redemption of the world.

c. In suffering we are being conformed to the image of His Son.

d. As partakers of His suffering we will become more Christ-like.

e. We will bear the marks of the suffering of Christ.

f. We will be made perfect through suffering – the black turned to gold.

Jesus suffered to redeem the world.

World evangelism is moved forward by suffering! On the cutting edge of evangelism we find "crucified lives". Our destiny is world evangelisation **then** the Lord can come back. How will it be done? Only through suffering!

The school of suffering

"That I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings."
(Phil. 3:10)

Perhaps you are discouraged – almost despairing. Remember you are in the classroom of suffering. You are sitting where Jesus sat when He passed through that classroom. Learn what He learned. Become what He became. One day when you meet your Lord you will understand all about it and will praise Him for it all.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that is all-sufficient in every fiery trial and the love of God the Father that never changes and from which no trial can ever separate us and the abiding ministry of the Holy Spirit who never forsakes us and always sustains us, rest upon you and remain with you this day and forever.