

Why We Suffer

Acts 27:27-28:6

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I gave a title to tonight's teaching. The title is, "Why We Suffer." I'm going to share five reasons from the Bible why God allows suffering in our lives. We really pick up the story in Acts 27:27 with the shipwreck, which runs down to verse 44. Paul has been put on the ship and has been sent to Rome. They've been out at sea for several weeks being tossed around, and they're going to be shipwrecked on this island of Malta. We'll look at the map in just a moment, and I'll give you an idea from the geography of where they were, where they ended up, and how they got into Rome.

Follow with me beginning in Acts 27:27. It says, "But when the fourteenth night was come," it's kind of, Meanwhile, back at the ranch...Paul's on this ship. He's a prisoner. The storm has come. They're being blown across the Mediterranean toward Rome. "...as we were driven up and down in Adria," which is the name for the sea of that area of the Mediterranean. It's also known as the Ionian Sea. He says, "about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country," or that they were aware of the fact that they're getting close to land. It doesn't say how at this point, but the most likely guess is they were hearing the waves crashing upon the shore. You gotta try to imagine this. They had been at sea for many days, and it's been storming. It's nighttime, they can't see, and they feel the ship is being driven upon this island. "And," they, "sounded, and found it twenty fathoms."

What does it mean they "sounded"? What they would do is take a long rope that would have markings on the it, so they would know the depth; and they would have a weight (very simple, very primitive but very effective) and would throw the rope off the boat and let it down. When they felt the bottom, they would mark where it's at on the rope. They would pull it back up and see the depth. When they first checked the depth, it was 20 fathoms or about 120 feet deep. "...and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms," which is about 90 feet deep, so obviously the water is getting more shallow indicating that they're approaching land.

"Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day." Can you imagine how frightening that would be? I'm kind of an ocean guy, and I'm not that afraid of the ocean. I love the ocean, but to be on a boat with no ability to control it. You're being driven by the wind and the storm. It's pitched black, and you can't see where you're going with waves crashing. You're coming into the shore, and you're going to crash on the shore. That's a pretty frightening experience, but the Lord was with Paul and took care of him; as God actually had spoken to him and said that no one would be lost, the ship would be destroyed, but they would all be saved. They were wishing for the day.

Verse 30, "And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship," basically, Luke is with Paul on the ship, and he's describing in great detail everything that's

going on. Basically, what's happening is they're being driven toward this island. They didn't know what island it was. We're going to find out it's the island of Malta off the coast of Italy, and they basically are checking and find out that the land is getting closer to them. These soldiers were making as though they were dropping some anchors again off the back of the boat, but what they were doing was lowering a little dingy boat or smaller boat to try to get into it and try to escape. "...they would have cast anchors out of the foreship," so they were feigning as though or making, pretending as though they're casting anchors, but they were actually going to get into this small boat and flee.

Verse 31, "Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers," take note of what Paul says (verse 31), "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." In light of that, "Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat," we would call it a dingy or a small boat, "and let her fall off." Now, whether that was advisable or the smart thing to do, I don't know; but they cut the ropes and let this little boat fall off. "And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. 35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. 36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat." Again, Paul the prisoner is now becoming Paul the captain. He is kind of taking charge. They're all freaking out. They're all going to pieces. They don't know what's happening, and Paul the man of God, Paul with the Spirit of God, Paul with the wisdom of God comes to the forefront and kind of takes command.

I want to go back for just a moment to verse 31 in the situation of these shipmen who were going to try to escape out of the boat. Paul makes this statement. He says, "Except these abide in the ship," notice what it says, "ye cannot be saved." Now, there's an interesting picture in this story. Earlier in the story, in verse 22 (turn back with me if you will to verse 22) it says, "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer," Paul speaking to the men on the ship, "for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship." Notice that. No one is going to die, we're just going to lose the ship. Now, jump down to verse 23. "For there stood by me," He sent an angel, "whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." In verses 22 and 24, (going back with me now to verse 31) Paul had heard from God and had affirmed that no one on the ship would be lost, right? You got that? But I want you to notice what Paul said. He said, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."

I'm sure that many of you have no idea where I'm going with this, but hang tight. There is this tension that Bible students kind of try to deal with between what we call the sovereignty of God on one hand and the free will of man on the other hand. Now, this is an historical narrative, and I don't want to try to read something into the text that's not there, but I think it illustrates from this real-life story, this real-life situation that there is a balance of both taught in the Bible. There are those that go to extreme—all they think about, all they see, all they focus on is the sovereignty of God. Now, I believe in the sovereignty of God. I believe God sits in the heavens and rules the universe—no one can tell Him what to do, that He is the Sovereign of the world.

That doesn't do away with the fact that God hasn't made us free to choose, that we have free will, that we can choose to love, to serve, and to obey God. We can choose to repent and believe in Jesus Christ and be saved, or we can choose to reject Him and be lost.

There are those that camp on one side. A lot of times they're known as Calvinists or reformed theologians and the focus is the sovereign elective purposes of God. Again, I believe God does choose us by His grace. I'm fine with that, but they neglect this other side that we must believe. All through the gospel of John it's "...these are written, that ye might believe...and that believing ye might have life through his name." You have to believe in Jesus. John 3:16, "...whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." So, the sovereign kind of folks over here say, "Well, you can't believe unless God gives you the ability to believe, and He has to quicken you by His Holy Spirit. You have to be born again or regenerated, and then you can believe." They teach many times in the extreme form that regeneration has to happen before you can even trust or believe in Jesus. I don't think that's what the Bible teaches.

There are those on the other side of the coin where they neglect the idea that God is sovereign, that God does choose us (we didn't choose Him) and it's all based on us—that I can choose Him and reject Him, and it's all man's part. I believe that both are taught in the Scriptures, that there's a balance of both. When I come to the verses that focus on God's sovereignty, I teach that. When I come to the verses that focus on man's responsibility, I teach that. Now, I realize that we can't reconcile that, you know, did God choose me or did I choose Him? We're trying to figure it out, but I believe that it reconciles in a higher unity, that there are things that we can't understand but when they're taught in the Bible we simply accept and believe them by faith because they're basically biblical—they're taught in the Scriptures.

Now, going back to the story, let me point out how that works. God told Paul that no one would be lost; so my question to you is, is anyone going to be lost? The answer is no. "Well, then why did Paul say, 'Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved?'" Because if you don't abide in the ship, you will be lost. "Wait a minute. Didn't God say they wouldn't be lost?" Yeah, but they have to stay in the ship, so both there are actually taught. Now, we know that no one was lost, that God sovereignly kept His promise; but it's kind of a picture there of man's responsibility. Man has free will. "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Unless you believe in Jesus Christ and trust Him as Savior, you cannot be forgiven or saved. So, just a kind of an illustration of that tension between God's preordained sovereign purpose and grace and man's free will and responsibility, we don't want to go to an extreme of neglecting and denying either one.

Paul, the practical man that he was, the man of God, says, "Look, it's been fourteen days since you have eaten. You need something to eat." It's nighttime. The waves are crashing over. The land's approaching, and they're going to crash. They're freaking out and Paul says, "We need to eat something." You know, it's interesting that sometimes people say that Christians are so heavenly-minded, they're no earthly good. Do you know the opposite is true? The more heavenly minded you are, the more practical you are. There's nothing wrong with being practical—you maybe need a nap, you maybe need to eat, you maybe need to get some

exercise. Sometimes we're all into the spiritual things and maybe sometimes you just need a nap or something to eat. Some of you can go home tonight encouraged and say, "Man, I went to church and the pastor says I need to take a nap and get something to eat." There are times when my wife will look at me and say, "You need to take a nap right now." "Yes, dear." She knows that I need a nap right then, you know, or you need to get something to eat or you need to take a nap. I think it's interesting when Elijah was discouraged and dealing with the prophets of Baal the Lord actually had him lie down and take a nap. He woke up and there was a cake that was baked there. It was certain it was angel food cake. He ate it and got strength and ran in the strength that the Lord had given him.

Paul was a man of God, yet he was practical. I like the fact that he prayed on the ship in front of all these heathen sailors. Sometimes people ask me, "Pastor Miller, when we go to a restaurant out in a public place, should we pray over our food before eating?" Why not? Now, you don't have to stand on top of the table and speak in tongues, okay? You might get thrown out, but there's nothing wrong with bowing your head. My wife and I prayed one night over dinner we were having and it just so happened that our waiter was a Christian. He saw us praying and was so touched and moved that he paid for our dinner that night. I thought, Wow! Prayer does really work! It's awesome! He actually said, "I saw you guys praying, the meal's on me. I covered your meal." It's like, "Praise the Lord! We'll be back tomorrow night."

Here's Paul on this ship with all these wild individuals and he goes, "Look, we're going to pray, and we're going to give thanks." I like the fact that in verse 35 that he actually "gave thanks to God in the presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat," and when they had eaten, "were they all of good cheer." Here again, they were giving thanks in the storm, they were bringing glory to God, and Paul was a blessing to others. Take note of those three things: They gave thanks in the storm, so should we; he was bringing glory to God in the storm, so should we; and he was blessing others in the storm, so should we. He was a blessing to others that were on that ship.

Verse 37, Dr. Luke is there, "And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls." This is 276 people on this large ship from Alexandria, Egypt, taking grain to Rome. It says, "And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. 39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. 40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea," and also to the Lord, "and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore," all these graphic descriptions of this ancient sailing that are unparalleled in the other ancient literature.

It says, "And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. 42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. 43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get

to land,” and this is one of my favorite verses in the Bible, verse 44, it says, “And the rest, some on boards,” someone said this is the first time surfing is mentioned in the Bible—sorry, I couldn’t resist it. I do wonder if they stood up and rode the waves in on these boards. “...and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.”

Now, 276 people on board and Paul was an encouragement to all of them. Let me make a point. The world doesn’t realize what it owes to the man and the woman of God. The Christian today is the salt of the earth, the light of the world. So many of the blessings that we experience in America are because of Christianity, Christians, and Christians’ influence; so if you’re going to be on a ship that’s going to be in a storm, guess who you want on your ship? Paul the Apostle, right? Guess who you want on your ship? Christians—Christians that believe God, Christians who trust God, Christians who put their faith in God, Christians who look to and hope in God. So, he was encouraging others. It’s interesting that Jonah, the opposite, had run from God. He wasn’t walking with God, he wasn’t serving God, and he brought the storm on those that were on the ship. He certainly wasn’t a blessing or help. They had to take Jonah and throw him overboard to get the sea to calm. It’s interesting that Paul here though became a real blessing to those that were on that ship.

I love God’s protection in verse 43, “But the centurion,” when he saw that the prisoners could escape, under Roman law the soldiers would actually be executed if they lost their prisoners. Many of these prisoners, no doubt, were murderers. Think about that. Paul’s on ship with murderers, but instead of executing them all, the centurion, “...willing to save Paul,” no doubt, he remembered how Paul had saved and helped them on this voyage in the storm and saw that he was a man of God. No doubt, I believe, that he realized that he was probably innocent and in order to save his life he “kept them from their purpose.”

Isn’t it awesome to see in a very practical way how God watches over, takes care of, and protects us? Maybe you’re going into the hospital to get some tests run or have surgery and you’re worried and stressing, and the Lord provides a nurse that’s a Christian and she prays with you or a doctor that prays with you or maybe Christian staff to help you. Maybe your car is broken and you’re taking it to a mechanic and you’re freaking out. You go to the mechanic and find out that he’s actually a Christian—which is pretty amazing, too! I used to have a friend that was a mechanic. He said, “There won’t be any mechanics in heaven because they’re so wild, you know.” But the Lord provides for you; the Lord protects you. When you’re broken down on a highway and someone comes to help you and you’re afraid they’re going to rob you, and instead they’re a Christian, and they’re there to be a blessing to you. I love the way the Lord watched out and protected Paul, and God gave him favor. The Lord does take care of His servants.

Three times Paul was shipwrecked, and this is an interesting time in Paul’s case. In 2 Corinthians 11:25 it says, “...thrice I suffered shipwreck,” and this is one of them. They grabbed the boards and pieces of the broken ship and make their way to land, and God kept His promises—they all arrived safely. Even in the worst storms, they cannot hide the face of God or hinder the purposes of God. The worst of storms in your life cannot hide the purposes and the

plan of God. Storms can give us opportunities to serve others and to bear witness for Jesus Christ.

In Acts 28, we find in verses 1-10 that they're shipwrecked on an island called Malta, and they're going to be there for three months. (If I can have the map real quick and then we'll come back to the text.) Paul's journey started way down here in the bottom right-hand corner in Caesarea. They went to Sidon, modern Lebanon, went up over the island of Cyprus and sailed along here and stopped at Myra. They went over the island of Rhodes and went down to the island of Crete at Fair Havens. This is where the wind blew them off course, and they went across the Mediterranean. This is the Adriatic Sea, and then this little island right here called Malta, off the coast of Sicily is where they're going to be shipwrecked. I've never been there. I've been in the Mediterranean and visited a lot of these islands. That's a spot I would like to go. They have a spot there they call St. Paul's Bay, and it's a whole other subject, but archeologists believe that they have actually found an anchor off the coast there about where the ship would've dropped anchor that they believe dates back to that time. I don't think there's any way to know for sure, but they did find an anchor that could tie into that shipwreck there. They're going to sail up here to Sicily, Syracuse, Rhegium up to Puteoli and then on into Rome, and we're going to get that in the text. Go back with me to Acts 28.

Now, in the first six verses there's this fascinating story. There are only two stories...they're there three months on this little island that I just pointed out, the little island of Malta. They are three months there because it's wintertime now. They have just a short distance to sail to Sicily and on into Italy but because of the winter storms, they have to kind of stay there until the storms are passed, so they're going to have three months there. There's only two events that happened. The first is Paul being bitten by the snake or the viper. The second is the healing of Publius' father, and we'll get to that.

Beginning in verse 1, we find, "And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita," and on this island of Malta, there was this harbor. It was at a different spot, but they crashed on the east side on the southeast corner of the island of Malta. It says, "And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. 3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand," and when I read that I think, Ouch! That hurts! It doesn't say that in the text, I just threw that in. Again, "And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves," notice this, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. 5 And he shook off the beast," or the snake, "into the fire, and felt no harm. 6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god."

Now, are these people fickle or confused or what? Again, can you imagine? Another ho-hum day in the life of Paul the Apostle. The dude's in chains...I mean, remember he's Paul the Apostle, this great man of God. He's a prisoner. He's on a ship, he goes through a storm, and

he's shipwrecked. He lands on this little island. By the way, this phrase "barbarous people," all it's saying is the people, the natives, the Maltese who lived on this little island of Malta, didn't speak Greek. They had their own native tongue or dialect. In the ancient world, if you didn't speak Greek, they called you a "barbar." It's basically a word that's unintelligible. It just sounds like gibberish. It means, "blah, blah." We would say, "Blah, blah." "What did he say?" "I don't know, 'Blah, blah, blah, blah.'" That's what it is, "Bar bar bar bar," so they became known as barbarians because they didn't speak the beautiful Greek language. They were, no doubt, somewhat cultured and weren't that barbarous. They didn't have bones through their nose, playing drums, and they're going to cannibalize them or put them in a pot and roast the missionaries, you know, on the island of Malta.

They crash on this island and even though they seemingly weren't believers or Christians, they did show kindness. You know the Bible says that man is made in the image of God. Even unregenerate man, unsaved man, unsaved people are made in God's image. The image is marred but isn't completely done away with. That's why even non-Christians can be kind, generous, polite, and loving. Now, they don't have the Holy Spirit, so they are going to come short; and they don't have the power of God in them, but they still have, to some degree, that imprint or thumbprint of God upon their lives, that conscience. These barbarous people show them no little kindness, and they had a fire for them on the beach—they started a fire. They saw the shipwreck and went down to help them get upon the land. It was raining and cold, but I love the fact (verse 3) that Paul was a servant. Now, if I was in chains and shipwrecked and I was crawling up on the beach, the last thing I would do is say, "I'll help you with the fire." I would say, "Put a little more wood on, I'm cold," you know, "come on, help me." Paul rolls up his sleeves. He had a servant's heart. He's not going to sit around and let other people serve him, he's practical and gets busy. He starts gathering these sticks, but lo and behold, inside of the sticks was a poisonous snake. The Scripture calls it a viper.

Some critics of the Bible point out that on the island of...I don't even need to mention this. In the island of Malta today there are no snakes, but it's not a problem that a couple thousand years ago there were snakes. It's no big deal that over that period of time that they become extinct and there's no snakes there at this time. Obviously, there was a venomous snake in the sticks. He picks up the sticks, and you can't see it—maybe it was cold and kind of rigid. You know, a snake can look like a stick. Can you imagine picking up sticks and you've got a snake in there. He goes over to throw it on the fire, and maybe he set it down in the fire, he didn't want to throw it in. When he sets it on the warmth of the fire, it kind of revived the snake and it jumps out BOOM! and attaches to his hand! It's at that very moment that I'd be like, "God, what did I do to deserve this? Where are You, God? Why me? What's the deal here, Lord," or I would be saying, "That's the last sermon I ever preach for You. I'm not going to go to church this Sunday. I don't believe in You anymore." We would most likely get all freaked out and rebellious toward God, "Why, God, have You allowed this? What's going on in my life?"

I want to use this opportunity, and it's interesting that whenever we suffer or others suffer, people have their opinions as to why. "Well, he's a criminal. He's a bad person and, no doubt, God suffered him not to live. He survived the storm and the shipwreck, but vengeance is

coming upon him and the gods are getting him.” You know, “It’s his karma,” some people would say. And then, when he doesn’t die, they reverse their opinion, “Oh, maybe he’s a god. Maybe we should worship him.” It’s funny that basically in the world today people have all their views, opinions, and ideas about why you’re suffering or they’re suffering or other people suffering or why does God allow suffering in this world?

Well, the Bible makes it very clear giving several reasons why we suffer, and I wanted to take a moment and share five of them with you. First of all the Bible tells us that we often have what I would call common suffering. They thought, Well, he’s a bad person, that’s why he’s suffering. Do you know you don’t have to be a bad person to suffer? Do you know the Bible says God makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust? You know, when there’s a fire, Christians homes burn just like heathens. Sometimes the heathen home will be standing and the Christian home gets burned—why is that? You know, why do we suffer? The first reason is that it’s just we live in a fallen world. We live in a sinful world, and the suffering of this world—earthquakes...did you feel the earthquake last night? It was a good little shake, and the problems that we face in this world are just part of the fact that man rebelled and sin and the curse is upon the earth, so we live in a fallen world. In Job 5:6-7, Job says, (I’m paraphrasing) that man is born for trouble or adversity. Just as sure as sparks fly upward, man is born for trouble. What do you have to do to have trouble? Just be a human being in the world, that’s all you have to do. You just have to be alive and you’ll suffer.

The second kind of suffering we have in the world is corrective suffering, and this involves the Christian, the child of God. Read Hebrews 12:5-11, corrective suffering. There’s common suffering—we all suffer because we’re in a fallen world and no one is excluded—and then there’s corrective suffering. If you’re a Christian, many times God does, can, and will allow suffering to come into your life to get your attention. This is why when you suffer, it is a healthy thing to actually look up and say, “God, what are You trying to teach me? What do You want to show me? What do You want me to learn? What is it You’re trying to convey to me?” It may be that God hasn’t got any particular lesson for you and a lot of times you’re suffering and people will say, “Well, what’s God showing you?” “I don’t know what He’s showing me, but I’m just trusting and waiting.” If God is actually trying to do something corrective, and you pray and seek Him, I believe that God will speak to you. It may be there is sin in your life or maybe you’ve gotten off His path. Maybe you’re not in His will and He wants to redirect your life, so God will chasten you. In Hebrews 12 it says, “...My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord...For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

Let me give you the third kind of suffering, that is, corrective suffering, then there is constructive suffering. That’s number 3. Romans 5:3-4. Let me read it for you. Paul says, “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience,” or proven character, “and experience, hope.” In other words, God is working for our good. God has actually allowed that suffering in your life for His purposes to accomplish something good. Do you know that God wants you to become more like Jesus Christ? Do you know that that’s what God is doing? I can tell you all right now what God’s will is for your lives. I don’t have to read your palm. I don’t have to look into a magic ball. I can tell you from God’s

Word. God's will for your life is that you become more like Jesus Christ. One of the ways, not exclusively, but one of the most effective ways that God has to doing that is suffering, is trials.

Do you know that if you've never have had anything go wrong you'd be a shallow Christian? You'd be like a spiritual pygmy. You wouldn't grow. You wouldn't mature. You wouldn't get strong. Someone said that when the wind hits an oak tree, it drives its roots deeper into the soil and becomes stronger. Do you know that trials make you stronger? They either make you or break you. It all depends upon how you respond to them. As the old saying goes: The same sun that melts wax, hardens clay. So, the same experience can harden someone or melt or soften someone. It all depends upon how you respond to that. There's constructive suffering, God is trying to make you more like Jesus Christ, so surrender and let Him work.

Fourthly, there is Christ-glorifying suffering. You say, "Well, what do you mean by that, Pastor John?" What I mean by that is that God allows suffering in your life for you to glorify and honor Him. You say, "Well, can't I glorify or honor Him without suffering, which I would prefer?" Yes, but I believe God is more greatly glorified in our affliction and our suffering. Anyone can sing when it's daytime. Anyone can sing when the wind's at your back, everything's happy, and there's no pain, adversity, or difficulty—"I'm a happy Christian!" But when you lose your job and you lose your health and things go haywire and crazy in your life and everything's going wrong, can you still sing? Can you still praise the Lord? Can you still rejoice in Jesus? I believe that in that dark time, that difficult time in that storm, God wants to glorify Himself.

Let me give you a reference for this. It's John 9. I love that story where Jesus is walking along with His disciples and there's a man who the Bible says was born blind. He was older, but he was born blind. He'd been blind for like 40 years. Do you know what the disciples asked Him? A similar kind of scenario of this story—Paul was bitten by a snake because he's a bad person. Sometimes when you suffer people say, "You must've done something wrong and God is punishing you." The disciples asked Jesus in John 9, "...who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Do you know the Jews had an idea that all suffering was the direct result of sin, that if you had a physical ailment, you had sinned and God brought suffering thus into your life. The Jews also believed that you could sin in the prenatal stage before you were born. I don't know what you're doing in there—punching your mom or something like that being an ornery little guy—then you're born blind because you sinned in your mother's womb. They asked Jesus the question, "...who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Either his parents sinned or he sinned, they did something wrong. Do you know what Jesus' answer was? Neither one of them—neither his parents nor he has sinned. Do you know what Jesus said? He said, "...but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Wow, that's heavy!

Now, this is contrary to a lot of popular teaching in the church today—that God cannot be glorified in your body if it's sick, that God cannot be glorified in weakness, that God cannot be glorified in your infirmity, that God is glorified when you're healthy and you're wealthy and you're prospering and you're the president of the bank and you drive a nice car and wear nice clothes, then God will be glorified. That's not what the Bible says. Now, we shouldn't cater to suffering.

We shouldn't go out and just live on the street so we can glorify God, but if God chooses to allow it in His sovereign purposes—there we go with the sovereignty of God—if God allows it in my life, and He wants me to be an instrument to glorify Him, so be it. Paul said whether it be by life or by death, I want to glorify God. Whether I live or whether I die, in whatever state I'm in—whether I'm with plenty or with little—I want to glorify God.

This is illustrated in the life of Paul the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 12 where he had a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of satan to buffet me. Three times he asked God to take it away. I could be wrong, but I believe that there was something physically going on in Paul's body and Paul said, "Would You please take it away, Lord?" Guess what the Lord said? He said no. "Now, that's cruel. I thought God loved us?" He does. He said, "I won't take that thorn away because I allowed that thorn to keep you humble and dependent on Me that you can glorify Me; but I'm going to give you My grace, and My grace is going to be made perfect in your weakness. When Paul heard that he said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my weaknesses because it's then," he said, "the power of God can rest upon me." Then, he said, "For when I am weak, it's then I become strong." I believe that God can be most glorified not in our strengths but actually in our weakness.

Let me give you the fifth and last way that God allows suffering or purposes for God in suffering, and then we're going to wrap it up right here tonight. We'll finish it next week. I wanted to get to verse 16, but we're going to stop right here, that is, cosmic suffering. First, we have common suffering—we live in a fallen world. Second, we have corrective suffering—God's trying to get us back on the right path, Hebrews 12. Thirdly, we have constructive suffering (Romans 5:3-4)—He's trying to teach us patience and Christ-like character. Fourthly, we have Christ glorifying suffering. We haven't done anything wrong. We're in the will of God; we're serving God—everything's right but God wants to use our weakness to glorify Him.

Fifthly, cosmic suffering. You say, "What is cosmic suffering?" Cosmic suffering is seen in the book of Job where God is bragging about Job and satan says, "The only reason why Job serves You is because You blessed him." God allows satan—He puts a hedge around Job but pulls it down—and lets satan attack Job so that He can prove to satan that He is worthy to be worshipped and praised and served apart from the gifts that He gives. This is kind of a cosmic purpose of God, and we wouldn't know this if we didn't have the book of Job. Do you know Job had to suffer without reading the book of Job? Job didn't get to open his Bible and say, "I gotta find out what's going on here. This is insane. Whew! Oh, it's going to be okay. I need to trust the Lord. Yeah, there's gonna be a book about me in the Bible. Everything's cool!" He didn't have that, and we don't have that. We don't understand the purposes of God, but in some sovereign cosmic so-to-speak concept, God is allowing us to vindicate Him, that God is worthy to be worshipped apart from the gifts that He gives; and Job did this when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," and "...the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD," amen?

Now, you say, "You got all that out of Paul getting bit by a snake?" Yes. It took a little more time than I planned, but I wanted to share those five reasons that we do suffer. Let's pray.