

The Sovereignty of God - Pt.4 - Sovereign over Suffering

The Job question: What is ultimately revealed in the story of Job?

Towards a theology of suffering

1. Everything that happens to Job is at least permitted/allowed by God (Job 1:6-12)
2. God doesn't owe us any explanations or justification (Job 38)
 - a. He is sovereign, and His wisdom does not answer to us.
 - b. There is no higher court, no Truth or fairness doctrine above Him, He defines Truth
 - c. Doesn't sound like it answers questions about God's love (or answer why God allows suffering), but does give us an insight into God's redemptive *character* through suffering
 - d. Suffering is Satan's work – BUT GOD ALLOWS IT. While there might be divine reasons, God certainly didn't feel the need to explain them.
3. What occurs will always be aligned with *purposed* will of God (while we can exist outside His decreed will, we can never thwart his purposes). And this sovereignty is the key to salvation – (Job 40:1-14, 42:2)
 - a. Remember: **Romans 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
4. God's sovereignty over suffering also ensures His power to overcome it. Only one who is sovereign can ensure redemption. His sovereignty speaks to His power to redeem suffering, and His love for us, speaks to His ultimate will for us to be redeemed. (Job 42:10-17)
 - a. Note that God's redemption does not negate His sovereignty ("evil the Lord brought upon Him...")
 - b. Review the "all knowing, all powerful, and all good" theological conundrum. (Child headed for accident in road = if I knew it was coming, had the ability to stop it, but allowed it...could I still be all good?)
 - i. Remember from previous lecture: 1) God defines the term good, and 2) unlike us in the analogy above, God has the power to redeem it.
 - c. **John 16:33** I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Note: Could Job have ever imagined that this suffering would 1) be a small speck in eternity, 2) would inspire countless generations for thousands of years to love God in all times. God's ways, and His redemptive hand, are beyond anything we can imagine. And its all the more powerful knowing He didn't have to do any of it!

What is our response?

1. Faith is not something that spares us suffering. Rather it is the confidence to hold fast in suffering, trusting God for the outcome.
2. Faith then speaks more to redemption, not initial prosperity or removal of suffering.

Does God want us to suffer? What about miracles that do spare suffering?

The Sovereignty of God - Pt.4 - Sovereign over Suffering

- His desire for wholeness in His children does not mean that He longs for us to suffer, and many times He will miraculously intervene, but He does allow it at times...and uses it to grow the divine spark within us.
- Miracles testify to the Kingdom. And the Kingdom is the ultimate state of redemption.
 - So where suffering exists, redemption is revealed. Where redemption exists, sovereignty over suffering is revealed. Where sovereignty of suffering exists, God's revealed redemptive love is revealed. And where God's revealed love exists, the glory of God is revealed. (Remember Glory = The revealed nature of who He is as the God who IS sacrificial redemptive love.
 - If love is sacrificial, then suffering is an implicit precursor to knowing that type of love. (There must be something to sacrifice for...something to redeem. Not because God had to...but because He desires to redeem!)

Summary:

- God must be sovereign suffering (meaning He allows it), if we are to be sure of His power to redeem and overcome it.
- We actually come to know God deeper through suffering. (Experience has seen this to be true)

Note: Job is never given a reason as to "why". There are complexities God sees that we can't, and redemptive threads that are brought to fullness, nevertheless God still starts with the premise that He needs no justification before men. We must start at this place too! Otherwise, we create a power, law, or code above Him (that He must fit into and conform to). Only from the starting point of, "Because I am God and you are not" can we begin to then look through the eyes of the New Testament/Christ to find divine purposes.

- What does holding onto faith in times of suffering result in? Practical outcomes?
 1. It grows us as it tests our relationship of mutual love with God in good times and bad (it informs our response to suffering). Would we love God if we knew of no heavenly reward? Love Him just for Him? Remember: early Hebrews were uncertain of afterlife. Everything was here and now.
 2. It grows us as it reminds us that God doesn't owe us anything, even though He lovingly brings reconciliation (a humility in suffering). This is the truth of the Glory revealed in Job. A holy God doesn't have to do anything post-fall. BUT...this makes His redemptive hand all the more powerful a demonstration of love! Cannot understand His love unless you understand He isn't bound to any of it!
 3. It grows us as we begin to trust God in hard times for redemption. Is our hope ultimately in this world or the next? (a theology of suffering) Through the lens of Christ (crucifixion - resurrection) is the fullness of the character and nature of God in suffering. There is no mercy without sin, redemption without brokenness, resurrection without the cross of suffering.
 4. It grows us in our sense of compassion (an ethic in suffering). A chance to be Christ's hands and feet. We can sit and be upset about suffering, or do something!

How do you minister to someone who is suffering?

The Sovereignty of God - Pt.4 - Sovereign over Suffering

- Use Romans 8:28 - give hope
- People don't always *really* want to know why. Like a kid who first falls off his bike and hurts himself - he want to know it will be ok!
- Use God's Sovereignty towards Redemptive themes (expand on practical ministry in light of our theology of suffering)

GREAT SUMMARY VERSE: John 11:4-44 (note verses 4 & 35) - suffering used for God's glory (theology), Jesus still wept (practical compassion), redemption of Lazarus testifies to redemption for us (eternal life)

Assignments:

- Write an essay on a time you experienced suffering & how God brought you through it. What did you learn from it? How did God grow you? In what ways did you see His glory (truth of who He is and how He loves you) through it all?
- Read Lamentations & Habakkuk