

Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

Faith Through Suffering

Pete Burak

Hi, I'm Pete Burak. Let's begin with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus, heal any blindness in us, heal any places in us where we don't see You, or don't believe, or don't have faith. Lord, increase our capacity to know You, increase our capacity to follow You, increase our heart and our longing to be filled with Your love. Lord, send out Your spirit upon us right now, fill us with the power of Your Holy Spirit, that we may be fully the disciples that You've called us to be. And Lord, give us a supernatural infusion of grace right now to increase our faith that You are Lord, You are king, and You are healer. Amen. Amen.

Alright. So the title of this session is called "Faith through Suffering," which, if you're like me, the first part of that sounds pretty good, the faith part. The suffering part, eh, maybe not so much. And yet it is a universal human condition. We all suffer. We have all been the recipient of somebody else kind of inflicting damage on us, and we've all been the one participating in the damage done to someone else. And we've all stubbed our toe, and we've all had illness, and we've all done those things that make us cry out to God at some point and be like "Why God? Why is this happening to me?" And maybe even more heart-wrenching is "Why is this happening to somebody I love?"

And the verse that I want to kind of lead us into this is kind of an interesting verse to talk about suffering, but there's a key that I want to pull out. And so this is from Matthew chapter 9, verse 27 through 31. ***And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying aloud "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When He entered the house, the blind man came to Him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes Lord." Then He touched their eyes saying, "According to your faith, be it done to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly charged them, "See that no one knows it." But they went away and spread His fame throughout all that district.*** The part I want to focus on is when Jesus says "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" And they say "Yes Lord." Then He touched their eyes. "According to your faith, be it done to you."

So, what seems to be the situation here is that these 2 blind men are following Jesus, they want to receive their sight. But they begin by saying "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us." Which, I mean, it certainly applies to their physical

Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

suffering, but there's also a way that Jesus is asking them, when He says "Do you believe I'm able to do this" is, you know, Jesus is always about a heart transformation. Jesus is always about the healing of our souls in relation to His Father. That, because of sin, we have separated ourselves from God. And He came to deal with sin and suffering, He came to deal with the separation, He came to be the bridge and actually unite us with Him, so that He could present us wholly and blameless to the Father, and without blemish. The spotless lamb comes and sacrifices Himself on the cross for us, so that His blood would wash over us and transform us not only into just little pieces of Himself, but to be fully incorporated into His body, so that His body may enter into glory with Him. That we may, you know, God became man so we could become God.

And so healing is at the root and is one of the core principles of what Jesus' earthly ministry is all about. But what He's always most concerned about is the healing of our souls, and then He's also very concerned with the healing of our bodies - and there's no question that part of His earthly ministry was the physical healing of those around Him - but there's often, throughout the scriptures, that evidence that yes, He's concerned with physical healing, but He's most concerned with spiritual healing. And often, the physical healing follows kind of a spiritual healing. That when someone expresses faith in Him, decides to give their life to Him, physical healings accompany that to support it, to confirm it, and to kind of bear witness to the power of the gospel. That when Jesus says "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," what happens in the kingdom? Well, there's healing, there's power, there's freedom, there's joy, there's peace. So wherever Jesus goes, and wherever we go as His extension to build His kingdom, it only makes sense that those kingdom values, those kingdom realities, the kingdom culture would be with us.

So, from an operating principle standpoint, from a kind of a fundamental reality, Jesus is about healing. And often, very often, healing is linked to faith. To belief. It bears the question though: Could Jesus have healed them had they not believed? Well, of course He could, right. I mean, He's God. He's the God man. He has all the power, and all authority on heaven and earth has been given to Him. So He absolutely has the ability, the power to heal. But what is clear is that what's better, what's best in His mind is when healing goes hand-in-hand with faith. Another way to put it is healing goes hand-in-hand with conversion. As we begin to convert, He heals.

Another way to think about it is sometimes we see healings in the physical world, even today, that go before conversion in order to prepare us for conversion. So someone may be healed of a physical illness or some sort of suffering in order... because their hearts are primed, and the Holy Spirit knows that through this

Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

healing, the gospel will come through, and real, authentic healing of the heart and conversion will happen.

So faith in healing are themes of this verse. That they say “Yes Lord, we believe.” He heals their sight, He gives them sight, and sight is such a powerful image in the bible. The bible’s full of... Jesus loves to grant, and God loves to grant new vision, and the new vision is always about kind of a new way of life that corresponds to His design for the person’s life. And so what’s interesting about this particular passage is that the new vision they were granted, the first... they’re given new vision, and the first command they receive from Him they disobey, you know. He sternly charges them not to tell anyone, and the scripture says they run off and they tell everybody. So maybe the conversion they experienced wasn’t as deep as we might have hoped.

So, I say all of that to say... to pivot slightly, to say: What happens when we pray for healing? When we have faith that it’s possible, and it doesn’t happen? What happens when you’re before the Lord and you’re saying “Son of David, have mercy on us.” And He says “Do you believe that I can do this?” And you say “Yes Lord, I believe. I believe.” And then it doesn’t happen, kind of in the time or the place or the way that we’re anticipating. And maybe it doesn’t happen at all that we can see.

I just went through this a few years ago with my dad. So I got a phone call, one of those phone calls that nobody ever wants to get, right, where he says “Pete, I don’t know how to tell you this, but I’ve just been diagnosed with an extremely rare form of cancer.” Only 50 people in the country got diagnosed with it every year. There’s like 8 words in it, they can’t figure out what it is, so they just keep adding adjectives to it. And, basically, he went from a healthy 63-year-old, didn’t smoke, didn’t drink, worked out every day, small business owner. And in the course of about a year, I was sitting at his bedside, holding his hand, as the cancer had totally riddled his body - he was covered in all of these grotesque sores and spots all over himself, he had lost, I don’t know, tons of weight - and I’m watching him as he was breathing his last. And I can tell you that many, many, many, many, many, probably thousands of faithful people all over the world had been praying for his healing. They were praying that he would be healed.

And I’ve reflected on this often, because I believe he has been, and I believe he was. I believe he was healed here on earth, and I absolutely believe he was healed as soon as the moment of his death. That the Lord brought him into His presence very, very quickly, because my dad was a disciple. My dad knew and loved and served Jesus. When he died, I can honestly tell you that my overwhelming emotion - I was crying, and I was sad - but something welled up within me as I was holding

Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

his hand as he breathed his last, and it was joy. It was joy, because this guy was going to be with the one he loved the most. He was going to be with Jesus.

And something profound had been released in him, and released in our family, and released in the people around him through this suffering. The suffering that nobody wanted, that everyone would have signed off on saying “Goodbye suffering,” but there was something healing that happened through our faith in the midst of a suffering that we didn’t see healed immediately. And this is a really hard and radical concept, but one that a disciple embraces: that suffering can produce endurance, endurance produces greater faith, and faith is the thing that helps us enter into the Kingdom of God. Jesus, even with my dad, was about his heart transformation, the healing of his soul to prepare him for the eternal life that He had in store for him. Because Jesus sees these things from an eternal perspective, not just the temporal perspective that we see. We see death as kind of the worst possible thing. Jesus sees death as the entry into new life in Him.

And very often, He begins the purification process in order to get us ready to enter into that new life, the life that will last forever here on earth. But it doesn’t make it easy, it doesn’t make it something we kind of wish for. But if you read the lives of the saints, and you read the scriptures, there’s something about embracing suffering, accepting suffering, and dare I say even desiring suffering because of the faith that it produces, because of the faith that is necessary in order to operate in it and produce all sorts of unbelievable fruit at the other side.

I think my favorite section of scripture to help us understand suffering is from Job. So at the beginning of Job there’s this really bizarre and kind of fun dialog between God and Satan, and God’s, like, bragging. He’s like “Hey, look Satan. Have you see My servant Job? Look how holy he is, and how faithful he is, and look how much, you know, I’ve blessed him.” Satan’s like “Yeah, of course he loves You, because You’ve given him everything. He’s got everything he ever needs.” So Satan’s basically like “If you allow me to take what he has, he will curse Your name.” So there’s a little clue. Right from the beginning, Job is showing us that suffering is not God’s idea. It was not part of His original plan, okay. So it was the devil’s idea to do this to Job.

So the Lord says “Okay, you can do that to him. Just don’t touch him. You can do anything else, but don’t touch him.” So God reveals something there to us as well: He allows suffering, but limits it. He allows it, but limits it. So the devil goes out and, you know, all sorts of horrible things happen to all of Job’s things: his children die in the midst of kind of like a crazy... the building falls on them. And Job, when he hears this, rents his garments, cries out to God “Oh, why Lord?” and

Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

kind of responds like any normal human being would. But he doesn't curse the name of God.

And so then God says "Look Satan, he didn't curse Me." And then Satan says "Yeah, because You didn't let me touch him. He would definitely curse You if his health was gone." And God - again, not His idea - allows it, but limits it. He says "Fine. You can produce suffering in the body of Job. But you can't kill him." So the devil gives him boils and all of these different things. And then what happens throughout the rest of the book of Job basically is his friends come to convince him to curse God and die, and kind of just, like, give up and to let it be. And he argues with them, and there's all of this back and forth.

But then the climactic moment is when God actually talks to Job, and Job is crying out to God saying "Love, seeking understanding." And all of us who have been in the midst of suffering want to know why. "Lord why? Why? Why? Why?" And he's crying out to God, and God's response is fascinating, and challenging, and a little bit maddening. But God goes "Job, were you there when I created the world? Were you there when I put the monsters into the sea? Were you there when I put the birds in the air? Basically, Job, I'm God, you're not. You don't need to know why. Just trust Me." Job repents for his lack of faith, he begins to pray for his friends, and all of a sudden everything changes again. All of this fruit is born from his faithfulness and his perseverance through the midst of suffering.

One of the hard truths about suffering is do we have the faith to ask the question "why?" recognize the answer to our "why" question is probably going to be a big question mark as the Lord just pauses and lets us work through our concerns, work through it, but it's actually beautiful that the Lord doesn't answer our "why" in the here and now. He allows us to live the why. He allows us to then look back on our life and see why the suffering was allowed, and yet limited. Because the Lord never allows us to be tempted beyond our strength, He says that. And the Lord always, when the devil comes up with new sufferings for us, when new suffering comes our way, it's just enough to challenge us, to help us grow, to purify us. But the Lord always provides the grace necessary to persevere through it, and actually end up spitting in the face of the devil. Because the devil always bites his own tongue, he always tries to take a step too far, and the Lord knows it, so He permits it but limits the suffering, and then gives us the grace in order to persevere through it.

But He doesn't really answer the "why" question, other than what's in scripture and through kind of looking back on our life and seeing "Oh, that's what became of that. Oh, that's what became of that." And I've seen that with my dad's death: I've seen the number of conversions that have come in our family, who were so

Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

impacted by his funeral and so impacted by the way he finished his life. I've seen it in the grace of being able to raise my own kids and having a heavenly advocate who's there to pray for me.

And so suffering is a challenging, profoundly frustrating, and something we would just rather do without. But when you combine faith with suffering, that formula, that mixture produces saints. That formula produces eternal life. Faith, suffering, when you combine those, when you can enter into suffering with faith, and you can ask for more faith in the midst of it, sometimes that faith will be rewarded with healing that we rejoice in - and sometimes that's physical healing, sometimes that's emotional healing, sometimes that's a spiritual healing right here on earth - and sometimes we have to persevere through the suffering in order to receive the healing on the other side whether, again, further down the road in our own temporal life, or definitely the healing that comes from being with Jesus in heaven.

So let's approach the Lord today with whatever our ailment is - Depression, anxiety, fear, anger, sin, physical healing. Let's come to Him with "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us. Forgive us." And when He asks the question "Do you believe I can do it?" Let's say yes. And then let us receive whatever healing He has for us. Not the healing we think we need, but the healing He wants to give us. And then let's trust, and let's have the faith that, through that process, He will continue to heal us, He will transform from one degree of glory to the next, and at the end of this we will be His forever. Amen. Amen.