

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

11- Pete Burak Redemptive Suffering

Hi, I'm Pete Burak. Let's begin with prayer. *In the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit Amen. Lord Jesus, walk with us today. Lord, help us to pick up our cross and follow you. Help us to believe that you are Lord, that you are the master. Lord, help us to model our lives after you. Lord, we give you all of our pain, all of our anxiety, all of our fear, we give it all to you and we put it at the foot of your cross and we just ask that you would redeem it. That you would purify it, that you transform it. That we would become more united to you, both in your resurrection, but also in your cross. Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.*

All right! Topic: redemptive suffering. How do we take suffering and turn it into prayer? In other words, how do we talk to God about suffering? And what role does suffering play in our lives as disciples, as we go through this journey towards heaven that will absolutely necessarily include suffering? -That whether we like it or not, suffering is going to happen. You know, the scripture says, life is a passing shadow here today, gone tomorrow. We're all going to die, you know, it is going to happen and along the way, none of us are naive enough to think that it will just be roses and butterflies, that there's any sort of technology or philosophy or job or amount of money or nothing that can keep us from experiencing some level of suffering. Whether that be physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, familial.

Suffering is unfortunately all around us and really since the beginning of philosophy, man has wrestled with that very tangible experience of pain, of sorrow, of death, of the age-old question of, you know, -why do bad things happen to good people? And is it about my moral progress that determines how much I suffer, how little I suffer? And what you see in the lives of the saints is this very radical and often confusing in the eyes of the world response to suffering. And I'll get to that in a second.

But it's really important right out of the shoot to identify suffering as, it's not God's idea. In the sense that the way he created things, Adam and Eve before the fall didn't suffer. That the idea of pain, of sorrow, of anxiety, of fear, of strife, enmity, destruction. That's all the work of the evil one and our cooperation with that work and our saying no to his design.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

One of the books in the Bible that is best for helping us understand suffering is at the book of Job. Which starts in a very interesting way, right? So God and the devil are having a conversation. And God is kind of like bragging about Job. He's like, look at my servant Job, isn't he amazing? Like he loves me and, looks at all everything he's doing. And the devil's like, well, yeah, of course he loves you because he has everything. He's got his health, he's got wealth and what more could he need? And the devil's like, if I was able to strip all that from him, if I took all those things from him, he would curse your name, God. And God's like, well, again, not God's idea. He says, no, okay, you can take his physical possessions, but do not harm him. And so the devil goes and he loses all of, you know, of all of his land and then he ends up losing his family even. And Job doesn't curse the name of God. And then it gets progressively worse for Job because the devil's like, well, yeah, because you wouldn't let me take his physical health away from him. Then of course he's not going to curse you and God he says, all right, well you can inflict him with physical ailments, but you cannot kill him.

And so what you see there is a couple things. One is that suffering is not God's idea, but the evil ones. And secondly, the Lord permits suffering, but he always limits it. And then as we see throughout the rest of the story of Job is that the suffering when united to God and when we properly assent to it, where we still worship, where we still trust, where we still lean into the promises of God, that suffering ends up actually, producing in us a greater work, a greater freedom, a greater joy than we even had previously. In a mysterious way, the devil, whenever the devil tries to distract us from suffering, whenever the devil's idea of separating us from God comes through physical torment or emotional torment or whatever, that he always ends up biting his own tail. He always goes too far and when we are faithful and connected to the Lord, it actually leads to our redemption. And what you see in Job is this incredible arc of remaining faithful and in to the end and the Lord blessing him in a new and more abundant way. It doesn't mean the suffering wasn't real, it doesn't mean it wasn't hard and it doesn't mean that the Lord ignored Job in that time. But it means that the Lord in his wisdom, often allows or permits in his permissive will, the, you know, the differences between the permissive will of God and the perfect will of God, that the Lord permits certain things to happen as often as products or byproducts of our action.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

But there's always a way out; there's always another angle that when we unite our suffering, when we bring our struggles to the Lord, he's able to bring about a greater work in us throughout. So that suffering can actually be a cause of great redemption. Which if you think about the cross is the quintessential example of this. The most unjust, evil thing that has ever happened: The incarnate son of God, the spotless lamb, the truly pure person murdered for crimes he didn't commit. That God became man, and we killed him. That at the cross, Jesus took the full blame and the punishment of sin on himself for all of us- and in the most grotesque, painful, humiliating fashion. The greatest of suffering, not just physical, but the spiritual suffering of bringing all that sin on himself. And at the end of the day, we know that the Lord in his wisdom and in his cleverness, takes that cross, and we actually now hold it up as the standard of who we are as Christians because it points to the resurrection. So we can embrace our own cross because we see Jesus embrace his, and that's the foundational point of talking about redemptive suffering, is that this is not our idea, it's God's idea in the sense of he is able to transform this evil thing, this painful thing into something good.

And so as He is our model and our master, we can enter into our life saying, oh, this is the way He approaches it, so this is the way that I can approach it. Now that doesn't make it easy, right? And it doesn't make it fun, and it doesn't make it something that we necessarily long for but what you see in the lives of the saints is this unbelievable detachment from comfort, an unbelievable desire to be purified through whatever it will take to purify them. I mean, St. Francis would literally, as he was walking down the street, if he had an impure thought or a sinful inclination, he would like jump on a rosebush just to kind of get it out of him. And that's intense and that's probably beyond what any of us are called to but the saints understood that the suffering, the purifying fire of suffering leads us to greater holiness if united with the Lord.

One of the reasons this happens is because suffering in the life of a Christian should drive us to communicate with God. And whenever we're communicating with God, prayer, that's a good thing. -even when our communication with Him, even when our prayer is kind of base or not that faith-filled or when it's just kind of brutally honest with, Lord, what are you doing? Why is this happening? Why is my son or daughter suffering in this way? Blah, blah. That's still beautiful moments of grace where the Lord can hear us and can respond to us.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

So there's two ways that suffering when it leads to communication with God, two ways I think that we should think about that prayer. The first is the appropriate praying that the Lord would alleviate the suffering. So as redemptive as suffering is the Lord also commands us to heal the sick and to open the eyes of the blind and to raise the dead. He tells his disciples to do these things. So there's a certain way that the Lord wants his glory to be manifested. Not just in those moments where we are able to be peaceful and joyful in the midst of suffering, but to demonstrate his power by taking away the suffering. It's actually a very strong part of the Catholic tradition that God still heals people so God still moves in miraculous ways. And so we as disciples should be anticipating that and seeking that in a way that doesn't say I don't believe that this can still be redemptive. But in the flip side of that is, Lord, let your kingdom come, let your will be done, let your glory be manifested, let us praise you in the healing of this brother and sister who is suffering. So we should seek healing. We should seek to be healed mentally and our memories to be forgiven, we should seek when we have a physical ailment to be healed of those things because God does those things out of love for us. And it's not a lack of trust or faith to ask for healing. In fact, again, it's one of the things Jesus commands us to do. So that's one thing.

The second thing is, when the healing doesn't come, there's a purification that happens when suffering persists, that strips us of attachments and perspectives other than the Lord's. Because what happens in the midst of suffering is things that seem really important, become less important, then things that are really important or seem not that important can become very important. The trappings of the world, the comforts of the world, the distractions in the world start to fall away as suffering emerges and we realize what is most important? And what ends up being most important is, do I know the Lord? Do I know Jesus? Is his life my life? Do I know where I'm going to end up at the end of my life? When I stand before him and there's a judgment am I going to end up on the right side and the sheep and the goats? What's my relationship like with the people around me? Do I love well? Do I serve well? Do I have an internal peace that cannot be shaken? Those are the things that end up becoming the sharp focus often through suffering. Both forms of these communications though both of the healing part and the purification part are not about answering the question: Why? And this is one of the mysteries and one of the hard parts about being a disciple is that very rarely when we approach the Lord to ask, why am I suffering? Why is this happening? Does he give us an answer? It's not because there isn't an answer necessarily, but because "why?" is

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

really not the important part - is how are we going to deal with it, how we're going to move in it.

When Job approaches God and says, why is this happening to me? His response is, were you there when I created the heavens and the earth? Were you there when I put the monsters in the sea? And he's just basically like, I'm God, you're not, just trust me. And that can be really hard for us. And so there's a certain way where there's a normal human, why is this happening? That is very real, but we should be trying to purify ourselves, it's not so much why, but yes, yes. Not why, but yes, Lord, I do not understand, I may not even like, but I say yes to you. And in saying yes to Him, often the why comes into clarity in hindsight. Very often when we look back on our suffering or life, we see why it exists. We see the fruit of it that in the moment we couldn't have understood and we could not have appreciated.

When I was getting injured all the time when I was a young man playing sports, I could not understand why it was happening to me, but what the Lord kept revealing to me and what He kept doing throughout all these injuries was just drawing me a little closer to Him, a little closer to Him. Because every time I said yes to the broken thumb or the broken ankle, the broken nose or the concussion that would happen to me, every time I got hurt it was a moment of saying, do I trust the Lord? Is He my portion and cup? And every time, even at nine, 10 years old, to just keep saying yes to Him yes to Him. When I look back on it and I say, wow, those injuries, those sufferings, were utilized by the Lord to keep me humble, to keep me grounded and to keep me close to Him. At the time, I maybe could in some ways understand what was happening, but most of the time it was just kind of frustrating and I just kept having to say yes. I just kept having to trust. And when I kept trusting, when I kept saying thankful for what I, being thankful for what I had a deep peace was with me and allowed me to journey with the Lord and be closer to Him.

So if you're going through suffering and chances are many of you are, I just encourage you to spend more time communicating with Jesus around two things, asking to be healed, but then saying yes. Cooperating with it, transforming that suffering into something that can purify us to be more loving and more peaceful. I'll be praying for all of you because suffering is hard, it's real, but it's also very beautiful for us Christians. It's confusing to the world, but a joyous thing for those who know Jesus.