

Redemptive Suffering & Answering the Question

Bart Schuchts

Hello, friends, I'm Bart Schuchts and I'm excited to be back with you. I want to share in this third talk about suffering. What is suffering, what is not suffering? What's Jesus' view on suffering? And where is God in the midst of our suffering? As we get started, let's pray.

Opening Prayer

And if you been with me in the other two sessions, I like to start every session with two Catechism quotes and a Saint quote. 2670, the Catechism says this that, "The Church invites us to call upon the Holy Spirit every day before and after every important action from the moment we wake up to the time we go to bed." It's just like breathing. 2671 tells us how, it says, "The simplest and most direct prayer is come Holy Spirit, fill the heart of your faithful and enkindle on us the fire of your love." Saint Bonaventure says, "The Holy Spirit comes where He is loved, where He is invited, and where He is expected."

Will you join me and let's invite the Holy Spirit to be present with us. If you will just place your hand upon your heart and let's just pray together. You can pray after me if you desire. Say with me, come Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, I love you. And Holy Spirit, I invite you. Come Holy Spirit, fill the heart of your faithful and kindle within me the fire of your love. May the fire of the Holy Spirit touch me, transform me. Lord Jesus, I ask that you would do as you do, and meet us all where we are and take us closer into intimacy with you and the Father, sending forth your Spirit to teach us all things. Come Holy Spirit, lead us in this time. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What Is Suffering?

So let's talk about suffering. Suffering's one of those things that, I don't know about you, I've struggled with. I've struggled with the concept, I've struggled with the reality. What is suffering? I'm not going to pretend to be a theologian and talk about what it is and what it's not at that kind of depth, but just from my own lens, my own experience, my own journey, and things I've observed, as well as some things that John Paul II has said related to suffering. Suffering from my observation is one of those things we either run from, we worship, or we embrace.

Not many of us like to suffer, not many of us enjoy pain. Not many of us enjoy feeling pain or going through hardships or difficulties. But there's some of us that it's almost like we worship suffering. I don't mean that to sound too strong, it's just sometimes we wear it as like a badge of honor. Oh yeah, I'm suffering, I'm offering it up as intercession and prayer, and there's a reality to that. But what is suffering? What does Jesus mean by suffering? And where is God in the midst of our suffering?

St. John Paul II said this as he was Pope, "Suffering is in itself an expression of evil, suffering entered the world through sin, which is evil." Now, he's not saying if you suffer, you're in sin. He's not saying because of sin we suffer, like personally. But what I believe he is saying is

that, at its foundation, suffering is rooted in evil. In other words, there was no suffering before Adam and Eve chose to eat of the wrong tree, chose to rebel of God, that's what brought sin and suffering. It's a byproduct of sin. Again, that doesn't mean if we're suffering, we're in sin. No, that's not what he's saying at all. He's just saying it's rooted, suffering is rooted in evil. But yet we all know that there is suffering. That we endure suffering. And yes, there's a reality of offering up our suffering to Christ.

But what does Jesus mean about suffering? Or put it another way, what is redemptive suffering? You see, suffering in and of itself is evil, but Jesus came to redeem suffering. He came to heal and to restore and redeem that which is broken and that which is lost. So all of our sufferings, all of our pain, all of our sin, Jesus took upon the cross, and He was crucified, paying the price as the spotless lamb. And that through His death and His resurrection, He purchased, the scripture say, the church teaches, "He purchased through His death and resurrection, you're in my salvation."

Jesus Is Here To Redeem Suffering

The word salvation at its root is the word "sozo", which means saved, healed, delivered, set free. So Jesus, through His death and resurrection, took our sin and our suffering and crucified it, and rose from the grave. So Jesus didn't come to bring suffering, Jesus came to redeem suffering. There is suffering. You and I know there is suffering. And yes, we can offer that up to Christ, but what we're offering is we're offering into His redemption so that He can take our sin, and our brokenness and our suffering, and He can heal it, and restore it, and redeem it. Jesus came to redeem suffering. So where is God in the midst of our suffering? Right there. How do I know that? Because God says, "I am with you always, always." If you look up that word always, what you'll find is it means always. God is with us always. He's with us right now. He's with us in the midst of our sufferings. I don't know about you, I've had my share of sufferings, and there's a grace, there's a peace when we embrace it, when we join it with Christ. He is there in the midst. God says, "I am with you always. I will never leave you, I will never forsake you."

But if your journey's anything like me, there are times when it feels like God is a million miles away. It feels like, where are you Lord? Why am I going through this? Where are you? And then there are times when He's so present, or let me correct that, where we're aware of Him being so present, He's always present, but there are times when we feel His grace and He's so near and dear. So I believe as we embrace the joys, the hardships, the resurrection, the sufferings, and we join it with Him, that we find Him in the very midst. It's like the story in the Old Testament of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they were thrown into the fiery furnace, the onlooker said, "There is a fourth man in the fire." Who is that fourth man? It was God, it was Jesus. In the midst of the fire, there is Jesus. In the midst of your and my hardships, trials, sufferings, Jesus is there.

Mark 4:35

Another scripture we're all familiar with, it's when Jesus and the disciples went across the lake, across the water, and they were confronted with a storm. I want to emphasize a part of this here. It's in Mark 4. 4:35 in the book of Mark. "On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, His disciples, 'Let us go across to the other side.'" Let us go across to the

other side. "And as they got out in the middle of the water, a storm came, a severe storm." You know, I used to read that story and go, what were these guys afraid of, man, it's just a little storm. If Jesus is sleeping, Jesus was sleeping in the bow of the boat. If Jesus was sleeping in the bow of the boat, it couldn't have been that bad.

But then I got lost at sea one time. At the Bahamas. We're in a 20-foot boat and the seas were 20 to 25 feet high. It's like looking up at a steep wall. Water. We couldn't see land, lightning hitting the water, I could feel it in the railing of the boat. It knocked over our little tarp. Lost at sea, lost our compass reading, had a quarter over tank of gas. The sky was pitch black. Severe, severe storm. I knew we were going to die, I was in college. I knew we were going to die. But guess what, we didn't, here I am, but it felt like it. I was so afraid in the midst of the storm.

Now as I read the story about Jesus and the disciples being lost at sea in a severe storm, and I put together that these guys were fishermen. Fishermen have endured many storms. Fishermen are not typically afraid of a little storm. So if these fishermen were afraid in the midst of the storm, it must've been a massive storm. It must've been similar to what I experienced when I was lost at sea. And these guys were probably bailing water, hoisting the sails, I don't know what their boat was like, probably struggling to stay alive, and there was Jesus asleep in the midst of the storm.

Now, I don't know what those guys experienced, but I imagine if I was there, I would be waking Jesus up and going, Hey man, aren't you going to help us, we're dying. You're the only one who can help us here. And Jesus is sleeping. But when they woke Jesus up, it was very interesting how Jesus responded. When they woke Jesus up, it said, "Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith." What? Come on, man, this had to be a severe storm. He's rebuking them for their lack of faith? Because they had experienced so much while journeying with Him, and they still didn't understand who He was.

So it says then, "Jesus stood up on the bow of the boat." Now I imagine the boat just going all over the place, big massive winds and waves, and Jesus stands up on the bow of the boat, He looks at the wind in the waves and the scripture says, "He said, 'Peace be still.'" Said, "The wind and the waves calm down. And the disciples looked at one another and said, 'Who is this?'" They still didn't understand who He was. I wonder how much do you and I understand who Jesus really is. I ask myself that often. They said, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him." Think about that. Who is this man? Who is this Jesus that He has authority over the wind and the waves? How is He asleep in the midst of a severe storm? I heard someone say this and it resonated with me, I'll pass it on. "But that Jesus knew of a peace that they knew not of."

What about you and I when we're in the midst of our storms. When we're in the midst of sufferings and hardships, do we panic, do we wonder where God is? Do we wonder why He's sleeping? Or have we found rest right there with Jesus, knowing that God is with me in the midst of this storm? God says, "I am with you, always. I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. I am with you, always." So what do we do in the midst of hardships, in the midst of trial?

A Trial With Hannah

I want to share with you a personal experience that I went through over these last few years. So I have four children. My wife and I, Brooke, have been married for 29 years. We have three girls and a boy, Hannah, Gabrielle, Kailey and Joshua, and they go from 28 to 19. Two years ago, our oldest daughter, Hannah, was struggling to walk. She used to walk every day. She was struggling to walk, which was really unusual because Hannah was a college athlete, she played college basketball. Walking wasn't a problem, but all of a sudden she couldn't walk. She went to a couple specialists to check on her ankles, her feet wondering what's going on. It was getting worse. So she finally went to the emergency room. And then was in the hospital for 39 days.

I don't know if you have children, I don't know if you've had loved ones, I don't know if you yourself have had to watch someone you love go through suffering, or yourself go through suffering where you feel powerless. So my daughter was in California and I'm in Florida, and I was traveling. One of the busiest times. I couldn't go see her. But my wife was by her bed for majority of those 39 days. Both of us feeling powerless, both of us praying daily. She had a rare autoimmune disease, and her lungs at first were failing, but they revived her lungs quickly, thank God. But her kidneys were failing. Her kidneys were functioning below 25% for days, weeks. They had finally shared that if her kidneys don't start to respond, we're going to have to take some pretty drastic measures. They said, "If her kidneys end up functioning above 40%, they would consider that a medical miracle."

We had people all over the world praying for Hannah. Priests, others visiting Hannah. My wife, strong intercessor, prayer warrior, sitting by her bed praying. Me, every day, every moment of every day, praying, walking, praying, praying with my wife, praying with my daughter. People send her holy water, water from Lourdes. She would just put it on her kidneys and she'd just pray. Finally, day 37, 38, all of a sudden, her kidneys start responding. Hannah got out of the hospital after 39 days, came and lived with us for a while.

"I'm With You, Always"

And now two years later, Hannah's kidneys are functioning above 95%. I believe Jesus healed her. There's no other explanation. They're doing a case study on her because they're considering her a medical miracle. They don't understand what happened, I do. You see, Jesus is right there in the midst of our storms. Now, I know not all of our stories turn out that way. I know I've lost loved ones. I understand, and I'm sorry if you've experienced great loss. But Jesus is with us in the midst of our storm. In the midst of the suffering, Jesus is there. God says, "I'm with you, always." Always, always.

May we each find the comfort of the Holy Spirit being so present with us through the love of Jesus, through the goodness and love of the Father. May we experience His love, His presence, His healing in the midst of our storm. Regardless what it looks like, regardless of what we feel or see, Jesus is in the boat. "Peace be still," He says.

When Hannah was in the hospital several times I would share with her, "Hannah, you're going to get to the other side, because Jesus said before they got in that boat, 'Let's go to the other side.'" No matter what the storm looks like, Jesus promises to get you to the other side.

What the other side looks like, it's between you and Him, but He's with us in the midst of our storm. Jesus came to redeem our suffering. He came to heal, to save, to restore, and to redeem.

Closing Prayer

Let's pray, if you will close your eyes. Lord Jesus, I delight in you. I thank you for your love, for your goodness, for your presence. I thank you that you're with us in the midst of our suffering, that you're with us always, that you're with us in the midst of the storm. I ask now, Jesus, that you would send each one of us, the Holy Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to comfort us, to be with us, to help us to be aware of your presence that is with us now.

Father, I thank you for your love and your goodness, and I thank you that you're with us, always, always, always. Bless all that you're doing. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.