

The Problem Of Suffering:

John's Attempt At A Radically Honest,
Biblical and Christ-Centered Answer

The Nail In The Chair

- The nail is an illusion and is not real
- The nail is your fate or your karma
- The pain from the nail is a sensation caused by attachment to the idea of comfort
- The nail is there to teach you patience
- God has some deep theological lesson that he cannot teach in straightforward terms so He put a nail in your chair so you can spend ten years trying to figure out why He did that!
- Enduring the pain means you are spiritual – more nails please!
- Blessed are those who sit on nails for they shall be comforted!
- Please bring the claw hammer, this thing is dangerous and needs to be pulled out!



There Are No Reasons

- We live in the “present evil age” subject to the fall and demonic powers and vast amounts on injustice and madness and irrationality and suffering is just part of life.
- Suffering can rarely if ever be explained, it can simply be endured and sometimes redeemed and rewarded
- God rarely fixes things with a magic wand of “divine justice”. Terrible injustice can continue for thousands and thousands of years (Hindu caste system)
- Some people live their whole life in terrible injustice (e.g. human trafficking) or poverty (2 billion people living on less than \$2 day)

Christians Are Not Exempt

- We are sheep to be slaughtered (Romans 8)
- Over 150,000 Christian martyrs every year
- Many of the world's official slaves are Christians in Muslim nations e.g. Pakistan's brick-kiln workers
- Many early Christians were slaves and the female slaves were frequently raped on a daily basis.
- Early Christians were thrown to lions, tortured and used as human torches.
- God did not magically remove them from their sufferings
- Many Christians are still trapped in abusive cults, violent marriages and soul-shattering life situations even here in America.

Under The Sun

Ecclesiastes 9:1-3

For all this I took to heart, even to make all this clear, that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. No man knows either love or hatred by all that is before them. (2) All happens alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him who sacrifices, and to him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner. He who swears is as he who fears an oath. (3) This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event to all. Yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Time and Chance

• **Ecclesiastes 9:11-12**

I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all. (12) For man also does not know his time; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly on them.

God Seems Not To Care

- Abraham's descendants were appointed to 400 years of unremitting slavery and male genocide in Egypt
- God allowed the destruction and siege of Jerusalem by the Romans and the Babylonians where the city starved to death
- God has a "partial hardening of the heart" to Israel meaning that millions of Jews have gone to a lost eternity because of a divine decree.
- God allowed the Jewish pogroms and the Holocaust
- God will let the world be totally ruled by the Devil / Anti-Christ for at least seven years.

Luke 16: Lazarus and the Rich Man

- Luke 16:19-31
- Lazarus suffers poverty, indignity, cruelty, neglect and disease and dies without any relief. God seems not to care / help at all. The rich man flaunts his selfishness and cruises on by.
- In an "under the sun" observation the rich man is clearly blessed by God and the poor man is clearly cursed by God.
- Substitute any chronic life-long suffering for Lazarus at the gate (schizophrenia, emotional pain, HIV/AIDs from birth)
- However in Heaven the poor man is comforted and the rich man is tormented eternally
- We only see a small fraction of the story!
- Those who suffer (e.g. the disabled) are often our "judges" in eternity! How we treat those who suffer shows who we are!

Suffering vs. Discipline

- Discipline is for a short while and has an obvious “lesson” attached e.g. “do your homework!”
- Discipline results in wisdom and healing in the end!
- Discipline is “curable” (e.g. a spanking) and not lethal or incurable
- God disciplines Christians but never “judges” them with utter condemnation
- Suffering has no obvious lesson attached
- Suffering just keeps on going until it is stopped by some force
- No good father gives their children incurable herpes in order to teach them a “life lesson”!
- Fear, torment and unjust condemnation are from the Devil.

The Devil & Suffering

- The Devil puts disease and suffering on people to shame them, blame them and destroy them and to embitter them against God e.g. Job’s boils, the woman bound in infirmity etc
- Suffering is most often the Devil’s work and that is why Jesus healed ALL who came to Him.
- The Devil particularly attacks women as a result of Genesis 3:15 and particularly their bodies / reproduction.
- Jesus has come to “undo the works of the Devil” and is a Savior and Redeemer

Psalm 107: Even If We Are Stupid...

- In Psalm 107 various categories of people who make serious mistakes in life are redeemed out of their afflictions:
- Those who lost the battle and got into the hands of the Enemy (v2)
- Those who got lost and went astray in the wilderness (v. 4-7)
- The hungry and thirsty and needy (V. 8&9)
- Rebels against God (v. 10-16)
- Fools (v. 17-22)
- Risk-takers (v. 23-32)
- Even if you think you “deserve to suffer” god wants you to cry out to Him and to receive mercy

Jesus & Suffering

- **1. Human suffering such as illness or demon possession which is always regarded as negative and is often healed by Jesus**
- 1 John 3:8, John 10:10, Matthew 4:23-24, 8:16,17; 9:20,21,22,35; 12:15, 17:14-17, Mark 3:10,11; Luke 4:40, 5:15, 6:17-19, 13:1-5, James 5:13-18
- Jesus never told someone to be patient with their illness and never prayed “Father, if it be Thy will heal such-and-so”. Jesus healed all who came to Him - of all their diseases (Matthew 4:23, 8:16). Neither does Jesus leave anyone demon-possessed. Jesus came to reverse the Fall and to undo the works of the Devil (1 John3:8) and to bring life abundantly where it has been stolen from people by Satan (John 10:10). Jesus is filled with compassion and like any compassionate person He longs to alleviate the common burdens and sufferings of mankind in response to faith.

Sin & Suffering

- 2. Suffering as a result of sinful behavior Romans 1:21-32, 2:8,9; 1 Corinthians 10:6-10,11-28-30, James 5:13-16, 1 Peter 4:15
- Some suffering is a direct result of sinful behavior. The drunken and disorderly behavior of the Corinthians during Communion meant that many were sick and some even died as a result of their sin (1 Corinthians 11:28-30). The apostle Peter tells us that Christians are to suffer righteously not as murderers or thieves. Jesus calls us to repent and be healed.

Persecution

- 3. Suffering as a result of persecution, which is to be avoided or endured, even rejoiced in! Jesus warns his disciples about it but promises reward for, not relief from such suffering. Matthew 5:10-12,44; 10:21-23, 23:34, Mark 10:30, John 5:16, 15:20, Acts 8:1, 9:4, 16 Romans 8:35-39, 1 Corinthians 4:12, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Galatians 4:29, 2 Thessalonians 1:4,5; 2 Timothy 3:11,12; Hebrews 10:32-35, 13:12, James 5:10, 1 Peter 3:14-17, 1 Peter 4:12-19, Revelation 2:10
- This is just a small sample of the NT verses about persecution and suffering! Persecution is seen as inevitable in a world governed by hostile powers and principalities (2 Timothy 3:11,12) until Satan is defeated by Christ's return. At that point believers will be rewarded a hundred –fold and reign with Christ during the Millennium. Christ promises us reward for such endurance, but not relief from such suffering. But if we can avoid it we should do so e.g. 'flee to the mountains'. Jesus often avoided confrontation (Matthew 12:14,15; John 11:53,54) and it is wise for us to do so also. However when it cannot be avoided such suffering, for righteousness sake, is our glory. Jesus strengthens, consoles and rewards.

Redemptive Suffering

- Redemptive suffering such as the Cross which is gone through on behalf of others. This is done by Jesus alone on the Cross. To some (much lesser) extent we suffer with Christ when we proclaim Him and are persecuted.
- Matthew 16:21, 17:12, Mark 8:31, Luke 17:25, 24:26; Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 2:9,10,18; Hebrews 12:3 1 Peter 3:18, 2 Timothy 2:10
- Jesus suffered and died for our salvation. This was 'once for all time' suffering and since then there has no longer been any sacrifice for sin. This suffering was totally unique and deeply spiritual in nature and was confined to Christ. Jesus suffered on the cross so that we might not suffer in Hell. However we suffer like this to a limited extent in ministry when we consciously endure suffering for those who are yet to be saved - as Paul said: "I endure all things for the sake of the elect". (2 Timothy 2:10)

The Disciple's Cross

- 5. Suffering as a result of the disciple's cross, death to sin & the world. This kind of suffering tests our obedience and renunciation and disciplines us to righteousness and is to be accepted. We don't have any choice about it, we are 'appointed' to such suffering (1 Thessalonians 3:3)
- Matthew 10:32-42, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Luke 9:22-26, Acts 14:22, Romans 5:3-5, 8:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:17,18, 1 Thessalonians 3:3,4; Philippians 1:29-30, 1 Timothy 4:10, 2 Timothy 1:8, 3;10-12, 4:5; Hebrews 5:8,9; 11:25, 12:3-13, 1 Peter 2:18-23; 1 Peter 4:1-2, 5:8-10,
- We may have to renounce the world, and break some inappropriate associations with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). While we are in the flesh and in need of sanctification such suffering is inevitable and we are appointed to it (1 Thessalonians 3:3). It results in the perfection of our character (Romans 5:3-5) and it is through many tribulations that we enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22) and get to share Christ's glory (Romans 8:17-18). We are to take up the cross of the disciple daily (Matthew 10:32-42, Mark 8:34-37, Luke 9:23-25) and to accept self-denial as normal for the Christian life. Jesus is our sanctifier and High Priest who has been tempted in every way as we have and who understands our infirmities and who gives us grace and help in time of need (Hebrews 4:12-16).

Compassion

- Empathetic suffering as part of Christ's body the Church. As Christ's body suffers we suffer. Romans 12:15, 1 Corinthians 12:26, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24, Hebrews 13:3, James 2:16, 1 Peter 3:8, 1 John 3:16-18
- We are not to be self-centered, but rather we are to have generous practical compassion toward each other (1 John 3:16-18, James 2:16) which means that as one part of the body suffers, all suffer with it and when one part of the body rejoices all rejoice with it (Romans 12:15, 1 Corinthians 12:26). We are to have a special burden for our brothers and sisters who are enduring persecution (Hebrews 13:3). Christ suffers as His body suffers ("Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?").

End-Time Suffering

- End-Time suffering of (some?) Christians – accompanying the Great Tribulation. Matthew 24:9,10,14-22,29-31 Mark 13:9,10,13-20,24-27; Luke 21:12-19, Revelation 7:14-17, 12:12,13, 13:10, 14:12,13, 17:14
- This is the wrath of Satan who has been cast down to earth who attacks the Church especially Christian Jews (Revelation 12:12,13), and is not the wrath of God. The gospel verses above tell us that they will be betrayed and killed during a time of great apostasy and persecution. Revelation tells us that the end-time saints will need great patience during the time of the Anti-Christ as they refuse to accept the mark of the Beast (Revelation 14:12,13) and that many will be killed (Revelation 13:10) by beheading (Revelation 20:4). Those who refuse the mark are considered victorious (Revelation 15:2) and are greatly rewarded (Revelation 14:13) and will reign and rule with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). Jesus greatly rewards those who endure this Tribulation.

God's Wrath

- End-Time suffering of non-Christians due to the final Wrath of God. The wrath of the Lamb. Revelation 6:16,17, 8:1-13, 9:1-21, 16:1-21
- Revelation tells a story of terrible plagues, and judgments ending at the final battle of Armageddon. These final plagues are the poured out wrath of God on those who worship the Beast and his image and who take the mark of the Beast. These are agonizing judgments and are the 'wrath of the Lamb' (Revelation 6:16,17). Here Jesus is the punisher of the defiantly and brazenly wicked and leads His army to defeat them.

Hell

- The final existential suffering of the Lost in Hell – those who reject Christ
- Isaiah 66:24, Matthew 3:12, 25:41,46; Mark 9:42-48, Luke 16:22-26, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Revelation 14:9-11, 20:10,15; 21:8
- Those who totally reject Christ are in turn rejected by the Father and cast out from the presence of God (2 Thessalonians 1:9) into a place of everlasting punishment (Revelation 14:9-11, 20:10,15, 21:8) where their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched (Matthew 3:12, Mark 9:42-48, Luke 16:22-26) and where they are an everlasting disgrace (Isaiah 66:24). However the righteous will go into everlasting life (Matthew 25:41, 46). Jesus did not come into the world to judge the world but to save it, but those who refused to believe Him, and who despised Him and His words, will be judged by His words on the Last Day (John 12:44-50). The best way to avoid this suffering is to believe in Him and find everlasting life (John 3:16-18).