

# GREATER

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JOHN

## GREATER: the book of John

SCRIPTURE: John 18:15-27: JESUS > DENIAL

A.W. Tozer...

**"It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply."**

"it is doubtful whether man can fully understand God's blessing until he has been through suffering."

God does not cause suffering, He allows it, so that we can receive the blessing.

The example of Job. God did not cause Job's suffering. He simply allowed it.

### **Job 1:20-21**

**20**At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship **21**and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

Through all that Job went through, he continued to honor God. He never blamed God. And at the end of his life the bible says he received a blessing...

## **Job 42:12a**

**12**The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part.

Let's look today at how Jesus endured suffering...

## **John 19:16b-18**

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. **17**Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). **18**There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

Jesus is handed over by Pilate to the execution squad which normally consisted of one centurion and four legionnaires. They put Jesus' clothes back on him before they parade him through the streets of Jerusalem. This is perhaps the only kind thing they did to Jesus all day.

Normally a victim of crucifixion was marched naked to the place of execution, being scourged along the way. But Jesus has already been beaten, so there was no need for that. He is spared this particularly humiliating experience.

The place of execution is called "Golgotha" in Hebrew. From the Latin translation we get the name "Calvary." Both mean "The Place of the Skull." We don't know how it got its name... most likely from its appearance. There are some places around Jerusalem even today where the rock formations look like a skull. But we cannot know for sure.

It's interesting how little is said about the crucifixion in all four gospels. John simply says, "There they crucified him." (vs. 18) Maybe it's because the first century Christians were very aware of what crucifixion looked like, for they were all too familiar with the details. Or maybe it was because they were more interested in the resurrection than they were the crucifixion.

### **John 19:19-22**

**19**Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. **20**Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. **21**The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."

**22**Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

The Romans used four "styles" of crosses. The least common was the *crux decussata* which was shaped like an X. The simplest was the *crux simplex*, which was nothing more than a large stake in the ground. More common was the *crux commissa*, in the shape of a capital "T." But likely the cross that Jesus died on was the traditional image, the *crux immissa*. This type of cross would allow room for the title to be nailed above his head.

Notice the arrogance of Pilate. The Jews are upset that he has put the title "King of the Jews" above Jesus' head. Pilate is flippant and gives little notice to their objection. He simply says, "What I have written, I have written." This was his defiance in the face of an angry mob. He doesn't change his mind or stop the crucifixion, he simply exerts his authority and sticks it to the Jewish leaders.

The sign is both his official sentence and also true. He is the King of the Jews.

All the while the soldiers divvy up Jesus clothes...

### **John 19:23-24**

**23**When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

**24**"Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

"They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."

So this is what the soldiers did.

It would have been common for the executioners to confiscate the clothes of their victims for personal profit. They divide up Jesus' sandals, head-gear, sash and cloak between the four of them. But that leaves the valuable seamless tunic.

If they cut it into pieces, it loses its value. So they decide to gamble for it. Winner take the whole thing.

Psalm 22 reminds us that God knew and was in control from the very beginning.

## **Psalm 22:18**

**18**They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

Then the scene takes a personal turn...

## **John 19:25-27**

**25**Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

**26**When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," **27**and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

There is a glaring absence of Jesus' men at the cross. To our knowledge, John was the only one who showed up. He stands in the midst of a group of women. Jesus commits his mother into the care of John, his beloved friend.

## **John 19:28-30**

**28**Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." **29**A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. **30**When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Jesus asks for a drink and one of the men standing there responds immediately. His is likely a soldier who dips a sponge into his own stash. This wine vinegar is a poor man's brew. It is a bit sour, but a great thirst quencher.

As soon as Jesus receives the drink he said, "It is finished." And John records that with that he takes his last breath and dies.

### **John 19:31-42**

**31** Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. **32** The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. **33** But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. **34** Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. **35** The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. **36** These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," **37** and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

**38** Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. **39** He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who

earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. **40** Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. **41** At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. **42** Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

## JESUS > SUFFERING

C.S. Lewis was raised in a religious family, became an atheist at fifteen, then slowly returned to Christianity under the influence of his friend and Oxford colleague J.R.R. Tolkien. (*Lord of the Rings*)

But whatever his religious bent, Lewis possessed the rare gift of being able to examine his own beliefs critically and, in the process, to offer layered, timeless insight on eternal inquiries into spirituality and the material universe.

Lewis said this about suffering...

**"Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself."**

Lewis makes the case that suffering and free will, go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other. When you give man a choice, you open the door to bad decisions and the inevitable result that suffering will occur.

On the other hand, if man has no choice, then suffering would all be the result of God's choices for us.

God allows suffering, but He does not cause it.

So, in this world where we have a free will, there will be trouble. I also believe that God can work through suffering to bring about good.

## JESUS...

## IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING.

### IN THE MIDDLE OF SUFFERING JESUS... WAS CONCERNED FOR OTHERS

**John 19:25-27**

**25**Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

**26**When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," **27**and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Everyone in scripture whom God used in a significant way endured significant pain and trials.

**Noah** endured the ridicule of all of his neighbors.

**Abraham** walked the road to sacrificing his one and only son.

**Joseph** was sold into slavery by his own brothers and imprisoned by Potiphar after being wrongly accused.

**Moses** endured complaints, distrust, coups, and disobedience from the Israelites.

**David** spent much of his life running from his mentor who turned on him to kill him.

**Ruth** lost her entire family except for her Mother-In-Law.

**Paul** faced shipwreck, persecution, flogging, prison, and dangers we could never fathom.

**Mary** watched her firstborn son brutally executed.

God worked through all of these bible heroes to accomplish His purposes. And Jesus is greater than them all.

In the face of suffering, Jesus was concerned with those around him.

Paul describes Jesus character in his letter to Philippi...

### **Philippians 2:1-4**

**1**Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2**then make my joy complete by being like-

minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. **3**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4**not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In humility, Jesus was more concerned with others than he was himself.

Also, one of the cures for dealing with suffering, is to continue to be outwardly focused. Our tendency is to look only at our own trouble, but if we can lift our heads and serve others, we may find the way to endure even our own hardships.

## IN THE MIDDLE OF SUFFERING JESUS... WAS HUMAN

For the second time, Peter denies he knows Jesus.

### **John 19:28-29**

**28**Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, *"I am thirsty."* **29**A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

Don't think for one second that Jesus escaped the suffering of the cross because he was God in the flesh.

One of Jesus' greatest gifts to us was the fact that he endured this world fully human.

Tempted in every way, but was without sin. Human. Relatable.

Even though He was fully human, Jesus responded to his trial with grace and love.

## IN THE MIDDLE OF SUFFERING JESUS... KNEW WHEN THE END HAD COME

### **John 18:26-27**

**30**When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Every trial has a beginning, a middle and an end. In the middle of suffering, Jesus knew that there would be an end.

The way to endure suffering is to know that there will be an end.

### **Psalms 30:4-5**

**4**Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. **5**For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

And even if the suffering lasts our whole lives, there is peace for all of us in the next life. I think that's what Jesus knew. He only had to endure for a few hours because he knew that there peace coming.

**John 16:33**

**33** "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

# Small Group Questions.

1. Do you have a veteran in your family? Would you like to share something about them? Maybe a story or a memory you have of them while they served?
2. What are some things in your life that you have endured, that have caused you to be closer to God?
3. Have you ever looked to God in the midst of suffering and thought, "Why are You doing this to me?" Why do you think we react in this way? Can you think of a scripture reference that refutes this idea?
4. Read John 19:31-42 - What things in John's account do you find interesting or meaningful?
5. Have you ever thought, or had a discussion with someone about the idea, "How can there be a God that is 'Good' with so much suffering in the world?" What was the outcome of the discussion?
6. When you are in the midst of suffering, what is your tendency to do? Do you think about others or how you can serve them?
7. What is your thought on David's saying this week, "sometimes life hands you your engine in boxes"? What does this mean to you?

8. Read Psalm 30:4-5 - There will come a time when suffering will end. How do you find comfort in knowing there is an end? What things do you do to help you get to that point?
9. Pray for one another, and if there is someone in your group that is going through a difficult time, take a little extra time to pray for them and their situation.