

Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer

1 Peter 2:1-3

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, July 30, 2017

All right, well this morning we're continuing a series called, "The Suffering Church" where we're talking about how the church should handle pain and suffering. And we're in the book of 1 Peter, so if you want to go ahead and turn there, to the book of 1 Peter. And as you're doing that, it has been said that the church that suffers together, stays together. I don't know if you've ever heard that before, but the church that suffers together, stays together. Suffering unites us. It brings us closer together. When it's cold outside, you huddle together for warmth. When it's hot, you huddle together for shade. And in a similar way, when you suffer, you huddle together for support.

Say this another way, nothing brings people closer together like war. Winston Churchill said, "There's nothing as exciting as being shot at and missed." And I would say, there's nothing as exciting as being shot at together and missed. Being shot at unites us, that experience connects us with each other. Some of you have seen that with the history of our church. Some of you were shot at, metaphorically speaking, to get our church off the ground. You took a hit, paid a price, but that experience united you, it brought you closer together. And that's why we're talking about the suffering church on Sunday mornings, because you need to be able to process things like that. You need to be able to process pain and suffering, and you need to understand why God lets you get shot at, why He leaves you out in the cold. And you need to understand why this world is not as it should be.

I remember sitting in my apartment in University, this is years ago, when a friend called to tell me that some terrorists had flown planes into the World Trade Center in New York City. I didn't have a TV and my friend knew that, so he called me to tell me what happened and then he asked me the question that everyone was asking on that day, "Why?" Why would someone do a thing like that? Why would God allow such evil to occur? I remember going to the World Trade Center 20 years ago and seeing just the crowds of people pouring into the subway under the Trade Center and thinking, "Dear Lord, please tell me that the planes did not hit those towers during that rush hour." Now why would God allow that to happen? You need to have an answer for that. I remember another time I was in school and one of my teammates lost his mother. She was very sick. She had an incurable disease. And he was from Brazil playing tennis in the States, and she died. He couldn't make it home to the funeral and everyone asked the same question, "Why?" My teammates actually came up to me and said, "Jeremy, you're a Christian, can you tell us why did Danny's mom have to die?" So you need to have an answer for that. You need to have something to tell people when they ask you why.

And here's why you need to have an answer, because we live in a bad, bad world, amen? We live in a world where things go wrong. Sometimes they go very wrong. And if you can't tell people why, if you can't give them answers to the deeper problems of life, then why should they listen to you? I mean, seriously. If your God can't help them process this, then what good is He?

John Piper says that, "Wimpy world views make wimpy Christians, and wimpy Christians are not going to survive the days ahead." I think he's right. You guys heard several of our men this morning pray about the direction of our country, the direction of our world. It's not going in a good direction, and therefore, if you're a wimpy Christian, you're probably not going to survive the days ahead, they're just going to be too evil. I read recently of a pastor's daughter who said that, she said, "I was never taught that the Christian life was going to be so hard and when I found out that it was, I wasn't ready. I didn't know what to do. I spiritually collapsed." Another believer said, "I was surprised when I got sick that I couldn't find anything good or redeeming about my sickness. I never expected that a Christian could feel so empty and alone." Maybe some of you can relate to that this morning. You never knew that a Christian could feel so empty and alone. You never knew that the Christian life was going to be hard, nobody told you that. You had no idea and when you found out that it was, you were shocked.

Could I just take a wild guess that this is the reason so many young people leave the church right around high school, college years and they never come back? It's because we don't tell them life is going to be this difficult. And when they find out it is, they think we lied to them. Can I remind you this morning that the Bible says life is going to be hard for the Christian? Can I remind you that the Bible says if you're a believer, you will suffer? It's inevitable. It's what you signed up for. Just a couple of passages on this. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12 that, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." If you notice the word, "all" there, it means all, refers to everyone. You, me, everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted. There's no exceptions to that. There's no special cases. I heard one author say, "No one struts in heaven, and no one who is truly following Christ struts on earth. We all bow." Philippians 1:29 says, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." The word, "you" in that passage is plural. It refers to everybody, everyone will suffer for His sake. All who are in Christ will experience pain. Romans 8:16-17 says, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we will suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him." Acts 14:22 says, "Through many tribulations, we will enter the kingdom of God." But you get the idea, you will suffer if you follow Christ. You will have tribulations. You will groan with the rest of creation and you need to know why.

You need to be able to process pain and suffering. You need to have answers for the deeper questions of life and that brings us to the book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter says that God uses our suffering to draw us to Christ. That's the point of it. This is why He gives it to us, to draw us close to Him. Now, that doesn't answer every question about suffering. We can't answer every question about suffering. There are mysteries here. We cannot crawl into the mind of God and know everything, but this does answer some questions. The church that suffers together, stays together. God uses our suffering to draw us, all of us, closer to Himself. I'm so encouraged, please don't take this the wrong way, but I'm encouraged when I hear that some of you are having a bad time, because there's times when I have bad days, too. When I hear some of your stories, I think, "My life isn't that bad." I had a flat tire yesterday, but then I hear what you guys have going on and I'm like, "I'll take my flat tire." That's the reason God gives this to us, He gives suffering to us.

We won't go into all of this for the sake of time, but the word, "suffering" occurs 16 times in the Book of 1 Peter. And the word, "Christ," appears 20 times, because those are the themes of the

book, Christ and suffering. This is what the book is about. Jesus helps us through our pain. He uses it for our good. If you want to see this for yourselves, he starts off the letter in the first couple verses this way. It says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood." "That's the point of your suffering," Peter says, "to obey Jesus Christ, and be sprinkled with His blood," that's why God gives it to you, to help you follow Him and grow in sanctification.

Verse 3 says it another way. It says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His great mercy, has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." As you're reading that, it may sound kind of funny, to start off a letter on suffering with the word, "blessed." I don't know if you've ever written an email to someone who is suffering or in pain, but I'm guessing in the first paragraph or two you didn't put the word, "blessed" in there. Because when people are suffering, they oftentimes, they don't want to bless God, they want to curse Him, right? They want to swear at Him, but Peter says, "Blessed be God," because He gives us a living hope. Not a dead one, a living hope. Blessed be God, because He causes us to be born again. Blessed be God, who does all these wonderful things for us. He is so kind, He is so amazing.

Verse 7 says it this way, "So that the proof of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Verse 13, you see Christ again, "Prepare your minds for action, fix your hope on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Christ." Verse 19 mentions His precious blood. Verse 20 says, "He was foreknown and through Him you are believers in God." And all this brings us to chapter 2.

Starting in 1 Peter 1:22 and going down to the chapter 2 Peter says, "This is how you are to respond to your suffering." He kind of shifts gears a little bit, and says, "Here's what you need to do when you're in pain." If you're reading verse 22, he says, "Since you have an obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart." Remember the church that suffers together stays together.

For you have been born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

If you notice, there are several action verbs in this passage. As you look back over this, you can see the words "love" and "putting aside" and "long for" and "grow," those are all action verbs, because suffering should lead you to action, that's the point of it. God wants you to act. He wants you to do something when you suffer. He doesn't want you to just let go and let God. He doesn't want you to sit on the couch and just wait for some feeling from heaven. He wants you to respond.

To say this another way, He wants you to wake up. God uses suffering to wake us up. C. S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, He speaks to us in our conscience, but He shouts in our pain." Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf and dying world. I think we can all relate to this. We all need a wakeup call from time to time spiritually. You guys know what I'm talking about? We all need a little shaking every now and again. Pain is God's way of giving that to us. It's His way of shaking us up. Joni Erickson Tada, who's experienced a lot of pain, says, "Suffering is the icy cold splash that wakes us up from our complacency. We never truly see God until we suffer because we're just far too comfortable. Suffering jars us and takes us out of our comfort zone." Richard Baxter says, "Suffering unbolts the door of the heart so the word of God has easier entrance." Martin Luther says, "Affliction is the best book in my library. I never knew the meaning of God's word until I was afflicted." You guys get the idea? How many of you have ever gone through life coasting, taking it easy and then, wham, tragedy strikes and it wakes you up? Anybody know what I'm talking about? Something bad happens and it immediately improves your prayer life. Your quiet times in the morning just stunk it up to high heaven until that tragedy happened. And now all of a sudden you are a prayer warrior sent from on high. Now let me ask you, would you have prayed like that if tragedy didn't strike? Would you have woken up if God didn't do that to you? See that's God's way of jarring us. It's His way of helping us in our spiritual lives.

How many of you thought you were something special? You sat on the throne of pride. You had a big head, you were haughty and proud, you were pharisaic to the core. If it rained, you would drown because your nose was stuck up in the air all the time, right? And then tragedy struck and all of the sudden you're off the throne, right? Now let me ask you, would you have put your nose down if God didn't bring a tragedy into your life? Would you have been humbled if He didn't afflict you? See, this is God's way of helping you. It's His way of doing you good. This is why He brings pain into the world. This is why He lets us suffer so that we will respond. Now again this doesn't answer every question about pain and suffering, but it does answer some of them.

And let's dive into this this morning. In 1 Peter 2, Peter says we should respond to suffering in three ways. So if you're taking notes let's just dive on into this chapter and see what he says. We should respond to suffering in three ways, and the first way is this, you should respond to suffering by putting aside your sin. When tragedy strikes, when you get shaken up, you should respond to suffering by putting aside your sin. If you find yourself sick and in the hospital the first thing you should do is sit in a hospital bed and repent. It's God's way of helping you do that. If you notice, Peter starts off chapter 2 with the word "therefore" which points back to all he's said so far. "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls," in verse 22. "Since you have been born again through the living and enduring word of God" in verse 23. "Since Jesus has saved you and redeemed you and bought you with His precious blood," and all this wonderful stuff, "therefore putting aside all sin."

That word "put aside" could be translated "separate". Refers to the act of separating from your clothes. Some of you have dirty jobs and you can't wait to come home at the end of the day and separate from your clothes. They stink, they itch, they're ugly to you. See suffering makes sin ugly to you. It makes it stink. Now some of you were tempted to sin until you ended up in a hospital bed. That hospital bed made sin stink to you, that's why God put it there. All of the sudden you weren't tempted anymore. All of the sudden those things were not important to you. I

think one author said, "It's the gift of God to make men grow old because then they become too tired to sin in the ways they used to." See, that old age changes your priorities. Sometimes you're tempted to sin until tragedy strikes, until your child gets sick or you lose your job. See that's God's way of making sin ugly to you.

And here Peter mentions several sins that he wants to root out of your life, in verse 1 (they're all connected to the issue of loving the brethren in verse 22) the first sin is malice. "Therefore, putting aside all malice..." That refers to the act of hurting someone or wanting to hurt them. Suffering does away with that it makes you stop wanting to hurt people. When you're hurting, you're a little more compassionate towards others who are hurting right? That's the idea. I was sitting in a plane last week in front of a child who screamed her head off the entire flight and it didn't bother me because my child had just finished screaming his head off the entire flight. See, suffering did away with my malice. It took away that sin. Another time when I was at the airport ... I think Donald Trump called LAX Airport one of the third-world airports in the United States. That was supposed to be a joke. I guess you're not supposed to quote Donald Trump, gets you in trouble. So erase that from the CD whoever is doing that, but... When I was in the airport a mom with three kids just ran into me and didn't apologize. She didn't even stop, and I was okay with that 'cause I'd been running into people all day long. My kids had been running into people all day long. See suffering does that, it takes away your malice. It takes away your anger and hostility towards other people. It makes you more compassionate.

It also takes away deceit and hypocrisy which are the next sins on the list. Suffering removes your desire to lie to people which is what these sins are referring to. It takes away your mask. They say, "There's no atheists on a battlefield." Why? Because battlefields show you what you really think about God ... Right before he died, Joseph Stalin, the famous atheist, shook his fist at the ceiling and kind of mouthed the words, "I hate you" to God. See, he wasn't an atheist. He believed in God. He just hated Him. Suffering takes away the deceit. It takes away the hypocrisy.

It takes away envy which is the next sin mentioned in the list here. Finally, it takes away slander. Peter says, "Therefore putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander ..." That word is an interesting one in Greek. It's *katalalia* which sounds like you're slandering someone. *Katalalia. Katalalia. Katalalia.* That's the idea of the word. You're whispering behind someone's back. Peter says, "It does away with that too." But the point is that suffering puts away your sin. That's why God gives it to you in His grace and His mercy. God knows that we're prone to wander. He knows that we're prone to evil, to go off to eternal destruction. And in love He draws us back through suffering. He takes horrible things like car accidents and children getting sick and He uses those horrible things and He wakes us up with them in His mercy and His love.

This story is told of a little boy who swallowed poison and his father called the hospital to see what he should do and they told him to "Get over here immediately, but whatever you do don't let the boy fall asleep. Keep him awake." So they drove to the hospital together and every time the boy fell asleep his father slapped him across the face. Every time he dosed off, the dad hit him. You see the boy thought he did it because he hated him. He thought his father did that because he was angry with him, but on the contrary he did it because he loved him. Peter says, "God does the same thing with us." He slaps us to keep us alive. He hits us to keep us awake.

When we're being tempted to sin. When we want to show malice, He puts us in the hospital so sin will be ugly to us, you see? When we're tempted to lie and deceive and slander someone, He lets us lose our job so our sin will stink to us. He doesn't do it to hurt us. He does it to help us. He doesn't do it 'cause He's angry. He does it in love. If we were honest about it this morning, we take sin far too lightly. We're far too easy going about it like it's no big deal. We would rather sin than suffer, amen? We would rather die spiritually than die physically, but God has the opposite approach. He'd rather us experience pain in this life and joy in the next.

Another story is told of a family who got involved in a horrible car accident and started coming back to church. They weren't going for a long time. They had this horrible thing happen. They started coming back to church and while they were there a church member said, "Isn't it awful that God let that accident happen?" And another one said, "Yeah, but isn't it terrible that that's what it took to get them to come back to God?" You see, sometimes God puts us through terrible things to bring us back to Him. Sometimes He puts us through tragedy to keep us alive.

And that leads us to another way we should respond to our suffering. You need to long for the word of God. You need to put aside your sin, and another way we need to respond to suffering is to long for the word of God. Sometimes God allows us to suffer so we will long for His Word. You can tell a child is healthy by how much he longs for milk, right? That's a sign of a healthy baby. They cry all day, but that's not neither here nor there. What's important is that they're eating. It's the same way with Christians and the Word of God. The healthier we are the more we long for the Bible, and the older we get in Christ the more we have to have it. And suffering draws this out of us too. Peter writes in verses 1 through 2 he says, "Therefore putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word."

The word "pure" here could be translated "unadulterated". Milk that's not contaminated with anything else. It's pure, it's whole. See babies want that. I have a baby at home and I will tell you if you ever drink his milk it's disgusting. Because there's no sugar in it. Right? There's no chocolate mix in there or little sprinkles or whatever. No it's just uncontaminated, straight up. You know babies want that. Peter says, Christians are like that with the Bible, we don't want sugar in it. We don't want artificial flavouring. We don't want fun and games. We don't want entertainment and diversions, we just want the Word of God. I remember when I first went to seminary I was blown away by how boring my professors were and how much they changed my life because they taught me the Word of God. They were monotone, they didn't tell any funny jokes or stories. They wore the thickest glasses I had ever seen I think you could see the moon in those things in vivid detail. But what they said changed my life because it was the pure milk of the Word. I remember the first time I heard John MacArthur preach I thought "That's it? I came to Los Angeles for this? He's just standing there. He's just talking, he's not moving around, he doesn't have a Hawaiian T-shirt on. He doesn't have a smoke machine. He didn't even have a PowerPoint." But what he did have was the Word of God. That meant everything to me. I remember going on a Friday night to preach on the tabernacle to our singles ministry, singles in their twenties, and thinking it has to be a supernatural work of God that a group of singles in their twenties would want to listen to a sermon on the tabernacle on a Friday night in Los Angeles. This is what I was told you cannot do in ministry growing up. I was told you have to put fun and games in there, you have to put skits. They didn't want that, they just wanted the

Word of God. That's what Peter is saying here. And this is what you need to get you through suffering. You don't need fun and games, you don't need sugar, you don't need artificial flavours, you just need milk. Fun and games are no good to you on a hospital bed, amen? That they are not gonna help you when your mother dies or terrorists fly planes into the World Trade Center. They're not created for that. The Canucks or the Vancouver sports, they are all great, they are good, they may give you a diversion from your pain for a minute, they may get your mind off of it and that's fine. But they can't help you process it, they weren't created for that. You need the Word of God. You need the Bible.

As he was lying in bed, Sir Walter Scott, the author of "Ivanhoe," told his servants to "bring me the book." And the servant ran to his library and looked through the thousands of volumes in there and he came back and said, "Which one?" He says, "Sir Walter you've got thousands of books in your library, which one do you want me to get?" And Walter Scott said, "The book, the Bible, it's the only book for a dying man." Friends, this is the only book for a dying man. This is the only book for those who are suffering. If you're sick and dying, I am not going to bring you a copy of the latest huntsman magazine or fishing magazine, I'm gonna bring you the Bible. If I'm dying, don't come in and tell me about the score of the latest basketball game, I don't care, bring me the Bible.

And I'm afraid some believers struggle so horribly with deeper issues like pain and suffering because they are not going back to the Bible anymore, they're going to the other things. We're becoming wimpy and anaemic in our faith because we're feeding on a constant diet of sugar. Several years ago, I got to have lunch with the head of the Voice of the Martyrs in Africa and he was telling me ... It was South Africa. And he was telling me that the prosperity gospel was failing there, because the people aren't prosperous. Imagine that. He said they're still poor. He says they don't have any money and these preachers are coming in and saying believe in God and you will have money and they're believing in God and they are not having any wealth. He said so they don't want that anymore, these people want the Bible. Friends, this is why God allows suffering in our lives so we would just want the Bible. This is why He allows us to stay poor so we'll change our diet and spit out the sugar. Can I give you a very simple solution? If you want to have more love for the Word of God, I don't know how many will take me up on this, but pray for suffering. It will totally rearrange your diet. It will totally rearrange your priorities. If you want to grow in your love for Christ, pray for some pain to come into your life. It will reevaluate it. It will reorient everything for you. Another way to say this is, you don't respond to suffering by just reading your Bibles or memorizing your Bibles or studying your Bibles. As important as that is, you respond to suffering by longing for your Bible.

The word "long for" is *epipotheo* in Greek which refers to an extreme longing or craving like the kind you get through starvation. This is how you are supposed to approach the Word of God, like a starving man, like a dying man. You have to have it. You can go through your day and maybe you don't have to get Tim Horton's coffee and maybe you don't have to get a shower, but you have to get the Bible. You have to have the Word of God. Going back to the illustration of childhood for a moment, babies don't crave a fancy room or nice curtains, they don't want brand new carpet or bright shiny lights. They just want milk. All that other stuff is for the mom and dad. The baby just wants milk. The baby doesn't sit in the crib and say, "Man, this colour arrangement stinks." Or, "Can you change that air freshener? I don't like lemon. I want the new

car smell in here." They just want to eat. Christians are the same way. Listen, you don't come in here to church to have a fun time. I had a Hebrew professor say, "I know you guys come in here every week with a sense of victory and you leave with a sense of defeat." There're times you come in church that way, don't you? You feel victorious, you leave defeated, 'cause your sin's pointed out. But that's not the issue. That's not why you come. You don't come here for the music, as great as the music is. Our worship team is doing a fantastic job, but that's not why you come initially. You come to understand Scripture. You come to sing it, you come to learn it. And this is why God allows us to suffer.

J. C. Ryle says,

Sickness helps us to make men think seriously about God, their souls and the world to come. While they are enjoying good health, most people can't find time for such thoughts. They dislike them and ignore them. They regard them as troublesome and unpleasant. Even a wicked king like Ben-Hadad when sick thought of Elisha. Even heathen sailors when death was in sight were afraid and every man cried out to his own God. Surely, anything that makes man think of these things is good.

So this is why God allows us to be sick and to suffer. It's for our good. He wants us to think seriously about our souls and the world to come. I think it's probably true that if God didn't get us sick every once in a while, if we stayed in good health the rest of our lives, we would have no time for such thoughts. And I told our young people this past week at Youth Camp, I said, "A lot of people think, 'If I believe in God, I'll become a better athlete, better businessman.'" You guys understand some of the best athletes and businessman in the world are some of the most godless people in the world? And for a lot of them it's because they haven't suffered enough to think about God. The Lord uses suffering to draw us to Himself. The Bible has a lot to say about this in other passages. We won't look at them for the sake of time.

But let me give you one more way to respond to suffering in your life. You should put aside your sin, that's one way you respond. You respond by longing for the Word of God, by craving it like a starving man. And you respond to suffering finally by growing in respect to salvation, by growing in respect to salvation. If you eat, you're going to grow, right? I have two boys, they get taller every day. I'm gonna stop letting them eat. You guys know what it's like. You buy them new shoes and two weeks later, they've outgrown them, right? Well, the solution to that is to stop feeding them. You eat, you grow. And if you take in the Word of God, Peter says you grow in respect to salvation. That's what he goes on to say. In verses 2-3 he says, "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

It seems kind of strange to talk about kindness after talking about all this pain and suffering. God certainly doesn't seem kind when we suffer. He seems cruel, even a little bit savage at times, but you grow in salvation as a Christian when you see that God is kind in the midst of your pain. "Kind" is another way of saying "good". So you grow as a believer when you see that God is good amidst all the evil around you. We prayed about that this morning. You guys know it. You turn on the news and you see evil, right? It's like a dark cloud is coming over the world. Well,

you grow as a believer when you see God's goodness in the midst of that dark cloud. When you come to grips with it in that way.

It's interesting, if you do a study of atheists and their reasons for denying the faith that they all point to this, they say, "God can't be good and allow people to suffer." You guys ever talked to someone who believes that way? God can't be kind and allow planes to fly into the World Trade Center. That doesn't make sense." They say it's a logical contradiction. After the 2004 tsunami in India, one commentator in the Scotland Herald said,

If there is a God, he should ashamed of himself. The sheer enormity of the Asian tsunami, the disaster, death and destruction, the scale of misery it caused, must surely test the faith of even the firmest believer. I hope I'm right in saying there is no God, for if there were then he'd have to shoulder the blame. In my books, he would be as guilty as sin and I would want nothing to do with him.

Another author in the progressive website around the time of the tsunami said, "What kind of love inspired God to arrest babies from their parents' arms or drown them in the water? If God exists, truly he's not all powerful or if he is all powerful, he's not all good." Those are some serious claims, aren't they? And I think if we were real about it this morning, we would sympathize with what they're saying. The problem of good and evil is a big problem to think through. How can God be sovereign and good?

And again I don't know all the answers. But I do know this, if there is no God, then nothing is good, do you understand that? If there is no God there is no standard for good and evil. It's totally up in the air. What Hitler did in Nazi Germany was accepted socially by Nazi Germany, do you get that? And if there is no God, then it's not right or wrong. The philosopher Fyodor Dostoyevsky said, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted." There are no boundaries, there are no rules. Murder, rape, pillaging, it's all permitted, if there is no God. The murderer Jeffrey Dahmer said, "If it all happens naturalistically, then why can't I be my own law? After all who's gonna stop me?" That's a good question. And I say this respectfully but those who deny the existence of God have no answer to it. They don't know what to say to Jeffrey Dahmer, not ultimately anyway. They don't know who he's going to answer to, but we know he's going to answer to God. He's going to give an account to Him and not only that, but the scriptures teach us that God does bring good out of all this suffering.

Just to give you a small sampling of the good things He brings out of the evil in the world, for one thing He shows us mercy through the evil. If you've ever wondered how God could bring good out of all the suffering, this is one way He shows mercy through it. If God punished evil right away, none of us would be here, do you understand that? If as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, that's it, He dropped the bomb, He killed them, do you understand we would not be having this discussion? It's His mercy that allowed the world to keep going. It's His goodness that allows us to be here today. He forgave them. He showed them grace. Suffering allowed Him to do that, now that doesn't answer every question, but it answers some. This world is still here because God allows it to be here.

You could also add to this, this world is not as bad as it could be, you ever thought about that? You ever thought about how evil this world would be if people didn't have a conscience? Look at your co-workers, how moral are the people that you work with? Some of you work with people that are more moral than you are and they're not believers, are they? Now how did that happen? It's God's grace and mercy on this world giving men a conscience.

That leads to another way He brings good out of evil: by sending Jesus. If man never sinned, God would have never sent Christ, we would have never known attributes like mercy or compassion or grace that were shown in the cross. If Adam and Eve didn't fall, then Jesus would not have come to save us. He would have stayed up in the heavens. But God sent Him because He is merciful.

Another way He shows good out of the evil around us is He uses suffering to show us good in other people. I don't have to ask you guys if you've ever suffered and someone's done something nice for you, anybody know what I'm talking about? We had a couple move this past week, and moving is suffering right? You know you're getting your crowns in heaven for every time you move. And my wife actually went by to say "hi" to them, and she said, "Boy, the house was just full of people from the church," bringing them meals and helping them out. The suffering allows you to see that. It allows you to see good in other people.

But the point is, and the point Peter's making in verse 2 is that God uses this suffering to grow us in salvation and let us taste His kindness. In 2016, John Piper was diagnosed with cancer and as any theologian would, he wrote a book about it. Any time something important happens in a pastor's life, he's supposed to write a book about it or a blog about it, that's the thing now, you got to blog about it. And he wrote a little book, if you ever want to pick this up, it's very good, it's called, "Don't Waste Your Cancer," little pamphlet. And he said this,

You waste cancer when you do not believe that it is designed by God. When you think it is a curse rather than a gift. When you seek comfort from your feelings rather than Scripture, when you think that beating cancer is more important than cherishing Christ. And you waste it when you spend more time studying cancer than you spend studying your Bibles. Essentially you waste your cancer when you don't let it draw you closer to God. You waste your suffering when you don't let it grow you and make you stronger in Him.

And my friends I want to remind you this morning, don't waste your suffering. Don't waste this opportunity the Lord has given to you. Just by talking to you guys in personal conversations, there's a lot going on in our church. A lot of you are suffering, God is squeezing you, He's shaking you. Don't waste that. If you complain about it, and whine about it, and just wish it away, if you act like a wimp (as we talked about earlier in that sense) you're missing the point of it. By the way if you missed the point of it the first time around God will bring it back a second time around, so it's best to get the point the first time. It was given to you, it is being given to you to draw you closer to Christ. It's being given to you to teach you to trust Him, to taste His kindness, to find His goodness in the pain. I'm not gonna pray for you to suffer this morning because that's inevitable. You live in this world, you're going to suffer, but I will pray that you won't waste it. I will pray that you learn how to be strong and firm in the Lord when you're

slapped around and hit, and when God dumps cold water on you. Let's pray this morning and thank Him for his kindness and grace, and for wisdom in seeing His goodness in the midst of all the evil around us. Let's pray.

Father, we do pray that You would help us to reconcile these things in our mind. I don't want to in any way, downplay the suffering or evil that some of our dear people here have experienced or are experiencing right now. And I don't want to, in any way, make that a small thing. It's a huge thing. And Lord, I pray, if there's any here this morning whose heart is broken as they think of what's going on, You would pour in the balm of your grace and mercy. But I do pray, Father, You'd give us perspective on this. I do pray You would help us to move away from our circumstances for just a moment and think about the greater picture of eternity, how You in Your kindness are bringing these things sovereignly in our lives to help us.

We don't have all the answers. We never will, but we do know that You're a good God and You're not a puppet master, You're not up in heaven pulling our strings. You care about us deeply. You've sent Your Son to die for us, which was the greatest sacrifice ever told. And as we approach the Lord's Supper this morning, as we approach the table, Father, give us hearts for what we're about to receive and give us minds to understand the mysteries of the cross and to glorify You and we pray this in Christ's name, amen.