

The Lord is My Shepherd pt.8

If you have your copy of God's word turn with me to Psalm 23.

We will continue in our examination of this incredible Psalm (read.)

By now, you know that as we approached this Psalm we have done so with two guiding, fundamental questions:

1. "Who is God?"
2. "Who is God to me?"

These questions have been and are **pivotal** because all of life is lived in light of these two questions.

This is true even for unbelievers. No one gets to escape asking and answering these questions.

Of course, unbelievers answer these questions wrongly. But, they nevertheless have to answer these questions.

And what is tragic is that many saints answer these questions wrongly!

Our desire is to **rightly** answer these questions not only because God has revealed the answer to these questions, but the answers to these questions radically impact and affect the way we live!

Our world-view is shaped and forged by these two questions!

We must get these right!

So, the first question, "Who is God?" helps us to know God's character and nature.

God has been pleased to reveal Himself. And as we review this, I think it would be

best simply to put the text before you where God speaks and testifies to His own character and nature (*I would encourage you to write down these references for further mediation later.*) *We will only look at a few passages, but they are magnificently weighty!*

Exodus 34:6–7

6 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Jeremiah 23:23–24

23 “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? 24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.

Isaiah 45:5–7

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God;

I equip you, though you do not know me,

*6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;*

I am the LORD, and there is no other. 7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Isaiah 46:5–11

*“To whom will you liken me and make me equal,
and compare me, that we may be alike?*

*6 Those who lavish gold from the purse,
and weigh out silver in the scales,
hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god;*

then they fall down and worship!
7 They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it,
they set it in its place, and it stands there;
it cannot move from its place.
If one cries to it, it does not answer
or save him from his trouble.8 “Remember this and stand firm,
recall it to mind, you transgressors, 9 remember the former things of old; for I
am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,
10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet
done,
saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ 11
calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I
have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”

Malachi 3:6

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

Leviticus 11:44–45

*44 **For I am the LORD** your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. 45 For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for **I am holy.**”*

This is how He has revealed Himself!

This is who God is!! He is all these things and more!

Now, we must ask the question, “Who is God to me?”

And it just hit afresh today, when we ask the question, “Who is God to Me?”, if the answer to the question is anything other than:

- Holy Judge or
- Righteous Executioner

We have a God who is overflowing with grace, mercy and patience!
Because based on the holy character of God and our sinfulness, God has every right to be anything, but a Shepherd, which is what the text reveals to us!

- ❖ How marvelous it is to think of this God as Shepherd when He could be a Judge!
- ❖ How marvelous it is to think of this God as Shepherd when He could be to us a Holy Adversary!

The fact that He is a Shepherd to you is enough for you to lay prostrate!

Praise Him for being your **good and gracious Shepherd** instead of the one who inflicts holy wrath on His enemies!

Now, as we considered Him being a Shepherd, I would remind you, based off this text, there are several ways He cares for us:

1. He Provides/Protects (vv. 1–2a)
2. He Leads/Restores (vv. 2b–3)
3. He is ever present with us (v. 4)

As we considered these things, we are confronted with the reality of suffering that David mentions in v. 4, “Even though I walk through the valley...”

We have been taking our time in considering this reality, because if there is one area of our theology that is either underdeveloped or an area that we consistently need reminders on is our theology of suffering.

I thought that we would be done HOWEVER, the Lord has other important insights for us to consider.

As we talked over the past several weeks about this matter, we have done so by being reminded of a couple of soul anchoring truths:

1. **God is sovereign over all suffering!**
 - That is to say that there is no such thing as random or accidental suffering!

No one trips and stumbles into suffering. Instead, God commissions suffering!

If we want to add another word that captures the heart of this, we could say: That all suffering is **appointed!**

God has determined that He will schedule us an appointment with suffering. And He has EVERY intention to make sure that this appointment is not missed!

Suffering occurs because God has sovereign planned, designed and coordinated and employed suffering to accomplish His good purposes.

2. God uses our suffering to accomplish His good purposes in us!

- For the saint, there is no such thing as “needless suffering!”

ALL suffering (trials great or small) or what the 1 Peter calls, “various trials” are not only being used by God, but are necessary!

God, according to His great goodness and loving kindness has obligated Himself to not only to appoint our suffering but to use it to accomplish His purposes.

We looked at some of those purpose, but just to be thorough:

Romans 5:3

“...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...”

- God is producing endurance, character and hope in the midst of our suffering.

Romans 8:28–29

“**28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,^[h] for those who are called according to his purpose. **29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his

Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

- God is making us more like Christ in the midst of our suffering. (We will come back to this thought in a sec.)

1 Peter 1:6–7

“**6** In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, **7** so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

- God is refining our faith; making it more pure! And He promises to reward us for faithfully enduring suffering!

Now, at this point I want to press further into this because God has let me connect a few dots that I think will be profoundly helpful to you. (And I pray the Holy Spirit will help you see these connections and be helped by them as well.)

There are three main text that I want to connect together that I have never connected before that has impacted the way I see and understand suffering:

The first text is:

1 Peter 2:18–21

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. **19** For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. **21** For to this you have been called,

because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

The immediate context for this is suffering unjust treatment by way of persecution.

But what I want you to see in principle form is the fact that: 1) We have been called

not only to endure suffering, but to suffer! 2.) Christ left us an example on how to suffer.

Now, again, the immediate context is suffering that is caused by persecution. But please do not think that Christ is our example of how to suffer ONLY when it comes to being persecuted!

He is our example on how to suffer, period!!

This leads me to this point (and listen to it carefully):

God is so committed to using suffering as a means of growth for us that only one who did not need to suffer suffered, so that through His suffering we would learn how to suffer. (2x)

Let me say it another way:

God is so committed to using suffering that He sent Jesus to be the perfect sufferer to teach us how to suffer!

A third way to say it is this: **The suffering of our Lord Jesus, serves as an example to us on how to suffer.**

So, please catch the weight of this thought: **If it pleased God to send Jesus to be an example to us on how to suffer, then why do you think you will escape suffering!?**

(Allow me to pastorally challenge you):

Who do you think you are that YOU should avoid suffering, while the sinless, son of God suffered?

So, the conclusion of the matter: **The degree to which you look to Jesus and His example on how to suffer, will be the degree to which you suffer well! (2x)**

Let me say in the negative: **The reason you may not suffer well is because you are not looking to Jesus and His example on how to suffer!**

So in a real way suffering becomes the test God uses to verify the authenticity of your faith!

And now it makes sense how God uses suffering to make up like Jesus, because Jesus actually actually suffered!

And it is through suffering that we conformed to the one who suffered!

That's the first text, 1 Peter 2:18.

The second and third text is Hebrews 5:8 and Philippians 4:10–13

Hebrews 5:8, which says, when speaking of Jesus:

“**8** Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”

Philippians 4:10–13

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. **11** Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. **12** I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Now, the word “learned” we see in passages is translated the same, but there are two different words being used.

In Hebrews 5:8 and Philippians 4:11 the word is the same in the Greek, and it means to “to learn by practice or experience; to acquire a custom or habit”

So listen to this: For Jesus and Paul, God used suffering as a custom...as a habit!

And then the word that is used in v. 12, which is translated the same way as “learned” is a different word which means, “to initiate, instruct in the sacred mysteries; to be disciplined in a practical lesson.”

So, you take these words together God uses suffering as the custom, habit and discipline as regular means of instruction to help us to obey and trust God as our

Father and to be content!

Another way to say this:

God uses trials and suffering as a classroom to teach you how to obey and trust Him.

We get a glimpse of this reality in both Jesus and Paul's life.

We will look at Paul's life this week and next week, will look at Jesus' life and how He suffered.

Turn to **2 Corinthians 11:23**

23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with **far greater** labors, far more imprisonments, with **countless** beatings, and **often** near death. **24** Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.[195 lashes] **25** Three times I was beaten with rods. **Once** I was stoned. **Three times** I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; **26** on frequent journeys, in **danger** from rivers, **danger** from robbers, **danger** from my own people, **danger** from Gentiles, **danger** in the city, danger in the wilderness, **danger** at sea, **danger** from false brothers; **27** in toil and hardship, through **many** a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, **often** without food,[b] in cold and exposure. **28** And, apart from other things, there is the **daily** pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

So, if Paul was here and we said, “Brother Paul, you are very humble and content! How did you learn to be content and trust God?”

He will tell us, He learned to trust God when He was:

- Locked up in prison!
- When he was floating on pieces of wood adrift at sea!
- When He regained consciousness and healing after being near stoned to death!
- He learned how to trust God when his stomach was starving from lack of food!
- He learned to trust God when he was suffering one many sleepless nights, when he lacked shelter!

- He learned contentment when his life was under constant threat!

You see, God taught Him to trust and obey through suffering!

God enrolled Paul into the University of Suffering and has study under Dr. Hardship!

And he graduated with a PhD in Content, Trust and Obedience.

The problem with us is that we want to grow apart from suffering!

We say we want to be like Christ, but we do not want to suffer!

What you must realize is that if you want to be like Jesus, you must be **willing**, and **ready** to suffer!

As we close, I want to tie what may be a loose end from last week:

I mentioned that we must be careful to question God.

There are some nuances that must be explained:

- ❖ **Any** and **all** questioning of God that includes a heart of contempt, complaint, murmur, doubt, faithlessness, judgment or anger is altogether sinful!!

You sin every time you cross-examine God! There is no room for trying to rebuke God and call His ways, methods and decisions into question.No exceptions!

So, all this nonsense about it being ok to “yell at God and tell Him what's really on your mind” needs to never be named among us!

Now, here comes the nuance, if you have come to understand and humbly embrace what God has been teaching us about His sovereignty over suffering and how He is using it to perfect us:

❖ Then I think it is ok to search the heart and mind of God for what He is specifically seeking to produce in you!

So, for example, you go through a trial where your finances are tight and you seek God asking what He is trying to accomplish in your life through this struggle, I think that's fine.

And I trust that the Lord will reveal what He is working in you!

But here's the thing:

Based off what we have revealed to us in scripture we know for certain that God is working to produce more of the fruit of the Spirit within us!

So, if you are uncertain what specific fruit God is trying to increase in your life, choose the one that you are struggling the most with in that trial and go to God and He will help you!

The point of all this is to deal with your heart posture!

By God's grace, humbly yourself!

Humbly embrace the revealed will of God concerning suffering and seek to be like the Lord Jesus, who learned obedience through the things He suffered!

Let's pray!