



# God Has a Story, Too

## *Reflections on Suffering & Evil*

### **Schedule/Topics**

Jan 14 – Defining the problem, framing a solution  
Jan 21 – Suffering & evil from a non-Christian perspective  
Jan 28 – Suffering & evil from a Christian perspective

Feb 4 – Suffering & evil in light of the cross  
Feb 11 – Suffering & evil as a mirror  
Feb 18 – Suffering & evil does *not* get the final word

---

**The Bible Project Video — Sacrifice & Atonement** (see <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/sacrifice-atonement/>)

### **Suffering and the Cross**

What can we say about the sufferings of Christ? Although Christ's suffering was qualitatively different from ours, it runs parallel to our suffering in that:

- Christ experienced alienation from God (expressed in his cry of dereliction, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" See Mk 15:34). So too with Adam and Eve and with us (Gen 3:23-24; Eph 2:13).
- The significance of Christ's sufferings is the wisdom of God on display to the entire world. (1 Cor 1:18; Philip 1:13). Our sufferings bear the same gospel witness to everyone (Philip 2:17-18).
- Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb 5:8), not as the result of his own failings, but the failings of others who were hell-bent against God's will. He knows the costly price of listening to and living for God. So too must we be heaven-bent on pursuing what God is doing through our suffering, no matter the costs (1 Pt 1:7). After all, "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12; also 1 Pt 2:21).
- Since Jesus was fully human, he suffered like us and shares in all our human weaknesses. He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is 53:3; see also Heb 4:15-16; 5:7-9; Mk 14:33-36). Therefore, Jesus was no super-human simply because he is God-Incarnate. So, let's not entertain any notion that it was easier for him or that he really can't understand what we're going through.
- Three times Jesus pleaded with God to "take this cup" from him (Mk 14:33-42) and yet this request was answered in the negative! No matter how much passion, submission, and devotion surrounds our prayers, it simply may not be in our best interests to receive what we ask. Clearly it was not in anyone's best interests for God to grant Jesus's request and remove the cup! Jesus **does** feel the depth of our despair whenever the world around us is flying upside down and "all hell is breaking lose." Our sufferings are likened unto his.
- Christ did not suffer solely as a victim nor was his suffering entirely passive. He voluntarily and actively embraced it because he knew there was purpose (Jn 10:17-18). When we embrace our suffering, then God's purposes are not held hostage by our despair or outrage. What more could God do to redeem our suffering than what he has already done in Christ?
- The Lion of Judah is also the Lamb that was slain (Rev 5:5-6). Christ's resurrection and exaltation are direct results of his suffering. The road to glory is traveled on the rails of suffering (see esp. Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5; Philip 3:10; Col 1:24; 2 Tim 2:3). So too with us. *God has a story, too!*



# God Has a Story, Too

## *Reflections on Suffering & Evil*

### *Living the Cruciform Life*

Although the devil is defeated by the cross and resurrection, he has not yet conceded defeat. To be sure the devil has been overthrown, but he has not been eliminated. The battle continues to rage (Eph 6:11-13 ;1 Pt 5:8-9) and believers are called by Jesus to engage in battle by living a cruciform life (Lk 9:23; Gal 2:20; 1 Jn 3:16).

- In a world compromised by sin at every turn, perfect love necessarily will be a suffering love; a love governed by and finding its culmination in the cross of Christ (Rom 5:8). Living the cruciform life involves all the pains and perils of a suffering love.
- Some suffering is God's loving discipline to shape us (Ps 23:4; Heb 12:7-11). The parent who scolds their child in a crowd of children expresses their devotion and commitment to the child's growth and maturity. Hardships likewise may be God's means of marking you as children and molding you into Christlikeness (Rom 5:3-4; 8:18; Jm 1:2-4; 1 Pt 4:12-13). If the means of discipline seem too harsh or too cruel, then maybe we have not sufficiently understood or embraced God's glorious ends.
- The cruciform life extends forgiveness to others and receives it from others (Eph 4:32). Forgiveness turns hell on its head and frees us to love and be loved. Offering forgiveness to an offender overcomes evil by empowering the offended with the requisite freedom necessary to love the offender. Love, therefore, has the final word, not the offense.
- Forgiveness is not only a healing power but the reigning power over evil. Whenever we offer forgiveness, not only is the grip of resentment loosened, but the master of evil is disarmed. The powers of hell were overthrown at the cross and our entire debt to sin was paid (Col 2:13-15). The extension of forgiveness reenacts this victory.
- The cross of Christ is God's triumph predicted (Gen 3:15; Matt 16:21-23) and our victory secured (Heb 2:14)!
- The cross of Christ is the culmination of an obedient life lived (Rom 5:19; Philip 2:8). Christ's moral victory over evil was procured by his refusal to disobey God, hate his enemies, or use his power wrongly.

In short, Christ took our place, bore our sin, became our curse, endured our penalty, and died our death. Therefore, God is not an unwilling judge who has to be persuaded by Jesus to love and to forgive, because it was God himself who demonstrated his love by providing the atoning sacrifice for all our sin. "It is finished!"

It was God himself who conquered evil by the cross of Christ and changed forever the trajectory of all human suffering. He has paid our debt in full without remainder! "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Cor 15:57).

\*Some information here can be referenced in other sources by Clay Jones, Craig Blomberg, Eleonore Stump, N. T. Wright, Doug Moo, John Feinberg, D. A. Carson, John Wenham, Paul Helm, John Stott, Gordon Fee, Doug Geivett, A. E. Wilder-Smith, Bruce Demarest, Alvin Plantinga, Henri Blocher, C. Stephen Evans, Oscar Cullman, Steven Boyer and Christopher Hall.