



Experiencing Suffering and Death

Life isn't always what we dream it could be. Many have tried to create a utopia, a perfect world, but those dreams shatter. Life is often full of suffering. Broken relationships, sickness, abuse, poverty and death affect people in every corner of the earth. Is that all there is? Will it ever change?

- Discuss what you think is the hardest suffering to endure.
- What is it that has given hope to sustain those in the hardest situations? What happens when a person loses hope?

[Watch "My Son, My Savior" Chapter 4 - The Lamb is Sacrificed]
What struck home most as you watched?
What questions emerge for you?

John the Baptist's Longing

Read Luke 7:18-35

- Discuss Jesus' answer in vs. 21-22 to John's question, "Are you the one who was to come?" How did that give comfort to John? (You can look up Isaiah 35 and 42:7 to understand more.)
- What was Jesus implying, "Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of me" (v.23 ...see also Matthew 5:11-12).
- Figure out what Jesus meant when he said, "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (v.28).

Understanding the Ultimate Suffering

Many people in life have suffered untold pain, yet there is a suffering that far exceeds anything experienced here that should be at the core of our understanding. Scripture reveals what we cannot see, that those who do not stand before God in full righteousness will forever experience "eternal punishment; the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:36-43; 25:41-46). The beauty in all this is that our God of justice is also a God of mercy who has a burning desire to restore us to an intimate relationship with him, now and forever. But salvation has a price.

The Lamb who was Slain

Read the prophecy of Isaiah 53.

- Identify the imagery that illustrates how Jesus would be the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" and the impact it has on us.
- For further insights into Christ as the Lamb, capture the picture these passages paint for us:
1 Peter 1:17-20

Hebrews 7:23-27

Hebrews 9:11-15, 27

Hebrews 10:1-22

- Illustrate in your own words, sketches, or role play how this is explained in the follow passages:

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:19,21 – The Great Exchange).

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:13-14).

Crucifixion Account

Matthew 26-27
Mark 14-15
Luke 22-23
John 18-19

New Life Emerges

- Discuss how the following passages depict Jesus' resurrection effect on you today.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ...having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead...God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins...For your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 2:9-15; 3:3-4).

Resurrection Account

Matthew 28
Mark 16
Luke 24
John 20

- Skim through the following passages in Revelation and build a description of what it says about the Lamb on his throne:

Revelation 5:1-14

Revelation 7:9-17

Revelation 13:8

Revelation 17:12-14

Revelation 19:6-10

Revelation 21:5-11*

Revelation 21:23-27

** (Holy City, Jerusalem is imagery in Revelation for His Church - those who throughout time believed in the Messiah)*

The Journey of Faith

After Jesus ascended to his throne in heaven, we see Mary, Jesus mother, taking her place alongside the others who looked to Jesus as Savior and waited in eager anticipation of what he would do next: *They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:14).* That is the last time Mary is mentioned in Scripture. From mother to disciple; from one who protected him as a child to one who finds salvation in him as her Savior...such was her journey of faith, a faith many other disciples staked their lives on.

Now that same Holy Spirit who miraculously caused a union of the divine and the human inside of Mary in the person of Jesus, also miraculously causes Jesus to live in us by faith through the powerful gospel coming to us in the Word, in baptism and Holy Communion. For us in this life it is a journey of understanding – a continual struggle to understand our relationship with God more clearly in a world that often denies him. It is the struggle to live more in line with his purpose and role for us in our period of time. All in all, like Mary, we are blessed to call Jesus our Savior!



Session FOUR: NARRATIVE

John the Baptist's Longing

John the Baptist was familiar with suffering. He was not afraid to speak the truth to expose what was in hearts that kept people from God. At one time he called the Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of vipers who were looking only to poison God's message and bring death. He had also rebuked King Herod for the evil things Herod had done, which included committing adultery by taking his brother's wife Herodias to be his own (Luke 3:19-20). Although Herod actually feared John as a holy prophet, he arrested him, bound him, and put him in prison. How do you keep faith in a situation like that? John's true joy was to know who Jesus was – the Messiah "whose sandals he was not worthy to carry" (Matthew 3:11). His comfort was knowing who Jesus came to be – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That didn't make his life easy. Herod eventually killed John the Baptist, put his head on a platter, and presented it to his niece to fulfill a foolish oath to her (Matthew 14:6-12).

Understanding the Ultimate Suffering

There is a suffering that far exceeds anything experienced here. It is described as the second death – an eternal separation from God, an absence of any his blessings. *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient* (Ephesians 5:5-6). What about me...and you? The Scriptures point out that we don't stand up to God's standard of holiness no matter how much better we look than the next guy. The apostle Paul explains: *Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law. Clearly no one is justified before God by the law" (Galatians 3:10-11a). There is no one righteous, not even one (Romans 3:9-20). We feel the resulting guilt, pain, brokenness. This is the burden the law exposes. Sin has its price – the ultimate thing of value--one's own life (Matthew 10:28; 16:26). Death came to all people, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).*

The Lamb who was Slain

Salvation has a price! The sacrifice of a lamb was a central part of Jewish religious life, especially noticeable during the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur - Leviticus 16). God was illustrating to them that without the shedding of blood there was no forgiveness. The blood of the sacrifice painted a vivid picture of an innocent substitute giving up its life in place of the guilty one (Leviticus 17:11). Families like Mary's would also have been familiar not only with the sacrifices of lambs but with prophecies which looked ahead to the Lamb towards whom all the other sacrifices were pointing.

Just as Isaiah had written that he was *led like a lamb to the slaughter*, so the Jewish religious leaders handed Jesus over to the Romans. He endured the ridicule, the spitting, the whipping that tore open his flesh. Then he was hung on a cross like a common criminal in plain sight of all people. But this was no common crucifixion. More was happening than what met the eye. It was an earth-shattering event that would change the world...and your life. That is why it gets more detail in all of the Gospels than any other event. Its significance is central to Scripture...and how God views you. No one is innocent and sinless except Jesus. He is Immanuel, the holy God who lived among us, who became fully human without a human father in the womb of Mary. Perfect in all his obedience, he is the Lamb without blemish or defect. He is the ONLY one qualified and equipped to save us before the judgment of God. *God our Savior... wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people* (1 Timothy 2:4-6).

Atonement

The action or price that restores peace to a relationship by cleansing or covering over the sin that shattered it in the first place.

On His Final Breath He Defeated Death and the Devil

Picture it. God, who had stepped into our world as a helpless baby now made himself helpless again. The toes that Mary may have counted on her newborn child 33 years earlier were now fastened to the cross. The arms that reached out for her to hold him up when he was a toddler, now were stretched out on the crossbeam to hold the punishment of everyone's sins. The hands that held the universe, now were pierced with nails to put him on display as he carried the weight of the world's wrongs to defeat the devil. *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death* (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus fulfilled the promise that God had made first to Adam and Eve when they infected God's perfect world with sin. *“And I (the Almighty God) will put enmity between you (the devil) and the woman (Eve), and between your offspring (followers of the devil) and hers (followers of God); he (Jesus, the one promised offspring) will crush your head (Satan's) and you will strike his heel”* (Genesis 3:15).

Near the base of the cross were the faithful women including Mary, his mother. All of them could only watch as he suffered alone the punishment that would make him their Savior. Yet as Jesus was nearing his final breath, he still cared for the one who had given him birth and raised him until he was ready to go on his own. He said, *“Dear woman, here is your son”* and to the apostle John, *“Here is your mother.”* Perhaps Jesus wanted someone who could share the comfort of his promises with her during those dark days, since it appears Jesus' brothers may have still struggled to understand Jesus. After he said, *“It is finished”* he died. It must have been difficult for Mary to see her son being wrapped in cloths to be laid in a tomb – the son whom she had wrapped with strips of cloth as a baby and laid in a manger. But she had fulfilled her role in God's plan by bringing him into our world, and now he fulfilled his role as our Passover Lamb who has been sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7) to bring us into his world.

New Life Emerges

Although Jesus had often told them that these things were going to happen, the disciples locked themselves in a room for fear of what might happen to them. Much earlier when the angel Gabriel announced to teenage Mary that she would have a child, the angel told her, *“The Lord God will give him the throne of this father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end”* (Luke 1:32-33), just as had been prophesied for centuries (cf. 2 Samuel, 7:16; Daniel 7:13-14). It must have been hard for Mary and all his other followers to picture it at first...his bloody body taken down from the cross and put into a grave. But in God's kingdom, things aren't always what they seem to be as God works out his plan for our good. That's why his followers live by faith and not by sight...by trust in God's promises and not the changing views of mankind. Angels announced Jesus' birth to shepherds 33 years earlier. Now angels visibly enter the scene again on the third day to announce Jesus' resurrection to Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, Salome and others who had come to take care of his body. The angel said, *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen...Go quickly and tell his followers, Jesus has risen from the dead. He is going into Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there.”* That evening Jesus appeared also to the disciples who were still hiding in fear behind locked doors. Then for the next 40 days he appeared to many and gave convincing proof he was truly alive (1 Corinthians 15:1-10).

He was born in poverty to a peasant girl and now lives in heaven as king who reigns over all things forever (Philippians 2:6-11; Ephesians 18:23). Thus God fulfilled his covenant promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3) that all peoples of world, including Mary, will be blessed through him. He is the one who brings us to the true Promised Land – life with God forever.

Put it into Practice:

- Regularly read through the crucifixion and resurrection accounts. Consider how many staked their lives on this as you go about your day. Determine its impact on your choices.
- See your life as one that has been reconciled (reunited) with God. Wake up every morning with thankfulness that it is a historic fact in Christ and let it drive your daily relationship with God.

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