

**DOES GOD KNOW WHAT HE IS DOING?
I PETER 4:12-19**

NEED: TRUST IN GOD

PROPOSITION: GOD IS FAITHFULLY AT WORK IN THE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LIVES.

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD PERSONS TO TRUST IN GOD WHEN THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING IN LIFE.

INTRODUCTION:

Every pastor has had a parishioner ask, "Pastor, why is God letting this happen to me?"

The question may have been prompted by a difficult illness, an untimely death in the family, a financial reversal, or some terrible injustice but they are made to ask that unanswerable question of why.

Does God really know what He is doing? This question assumes that God is good and that God is powerful. It assumes also that God is exercising at least some measure of control over what happens in the world. Could a good and all powerful God exist, and our lives be subjected to the sufferings that we have known?

Evidently Christians in the first century must have had such questions in their minds.

Their questions came after they made personal commitments to Jesus Christ and then begin to suffer persecution. Instead of bringing blessings into their lives, their new faith seemed to be leading to all kinds of difficulties. How do you explain this? Peter reflects this when he says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trail you are suffering

as though something strange were happened to you.” Obviously Peter assumed that suffering would be normal in the Christian life. Billy Graham was interviewing two Christians from an Eastern Block country who worked in a Christian radio station. When he asked how it felt to be persecuted for their faith, they replied, “We thought it was the normal Christian life.” Billy Graham observed, “They were right. It is we who are living abnormally - for the present.” So, we are not to be surprised when suffering comes our way. Experiences of suffering are not inconsistent with the goodness and the power of our God. So, God does understand what He is doing.

I. YES, HE IS USING SUFFERING TO PREPARE HIS PEOPLE FOR GLORY.

This is a part of the answer that Peter shared with those early Christians. The sufferings to which they were being subjected were consistent with the purpose of God for their lives.

1. The sufferings for a trial.

Peter uses the word “painful trial” in our text. In the older version it is translated, “firey trial.” The word used in the original language reflects this understanding of a medal being tested for its genuineness by being placed in the fire. The sufferings that come to us in life are to us what the fire is to the metal. In the purpose of God they come to test us, to see if we are the genuine article, if we do indeed have true faith!

If you will begin to look at your sufferings as friends rather than enemies, even though they bring great pain to your life, they are still faithfully under the direction of an all good and wise heavenly Father.

2. They purify us.

Peter adds this word, “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. “The sufferings that we know because of our faith is an evidence of our identification with Christ. The world has not changed so if you and I begin to live in the world as Christ lived in the world, they will react to us like they reacted to Him. They will take their welcome signs down and we will find ourselves alone and isolated. We will begin to suffer repercussions because of our righteousness.

However, God will use those sufferings that come into our lives to purify us and prepare us for the glory that is to be revealed. The sufferings will not destroy our faith. They will perfect our faith. The sufferings should not turn us to bitterness. They should make us better.

Scientists are agreed that pearls are the product of pain. “Sometimes the pain is caused by a microscopic worm and sometimes by a boring parasite. In this latter case, the shell of the oyster or mussel gets pierced, chipped or perforated and some alien substance (a speck of sand it may be) gets inside, immediately all the resources of the tiny organism rushed to the spot where the breach has been made. On the entry of the foreign irritant

the unsuspected healing powers of the little creature are marshaled at the point of _____
-powers that otherwise would have remained forever dormant are called out by this new
emergency: the foreign irritant is covered and the wound is healed - by a pearl. No other
gem has so fascinating a history.” God is seeking to make you a pearl, a pearl that will be
naturally at home in heaven. He does this by allowing your life to be invaded by
suffering, to be surrounded by pain, to be buffeted by adversity. As these assailants come
against your life, pearl like character is formed in your life. God does know what he is
doing! He is preparing his people for glory!

II. YES, HE HAS ALREADY BEGAN HIS JUDGMENT ON SIN.

Peter turns to the Old Testament for an explanation of the experience of those early
Christians. He says to them, “For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God;
and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of
God?”

The imagery of judgment beginning at the sanctuary is probably taken from the prophecy
of Ezekiel. That Old Testament prophet was allowed to see the avenging angels of God
administering judgment upon the people of Judah, and the angels were instructed that
they were to begin their process of judgment at the sanctuary and move outward. Peter is
alerting us that we are living in a period in which God has begun His judgment and He
began at the sanctuary with the people who know him and love him.

1. For the believer the judgment is chastisement.

When Peter considers the judgment of God and understands the sufferings that believers know in this life, he identifies it with the chastisement of God. There is this distinction to be noted in the judgment of God - the judgment of God against sin in the life of a believer or in the life of a church is always chastisement or discipline. It is designed to bring about correction in the life of the believer. God does use the pain of life to bring us into greater conformity to his will. C. S. Lewis in his book on The Problem of Pain says that pain is God's megaphone. It is the way God gets our attention and calls us into a deeper relationship with Himself. So, judgment has already begun in the world, and it has begun at the house of God.

This might help us understand better some of the things that happen around us. It is probably true that Christians have a more difficult time than those who are not Christians. God in His mercy is withholding judgment from the unsaved rebel, while at the same time he has allowed the process of chastisement to fall upon His people.

2. The judgment on the believer is a warning to the unbeliever.

Instead of seeing great pain and difficulty in the life of a believer as a sign that there is no God, the unbeliever should see it as a warning. "And if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? If believers encounter so much suffering in this life and they maintain a strong commitment to the Lord through it all, what will the outcome be for those who have never bowed the knee or acknowledged Jesus as the Lord of their lives?"

III. YES, HE HAS ALREADY DETERMINED THE END OF THE UNGODLY.

While reflecting upon the great difficulties that those following our Lord encounter, it prompts Peter to consider the outcome for those who refuse to obey our Lord. While He never answers the question about the outcome, he leaves it without any question as to the ultimate outcome.

1. Who they are.

It is interesting to note the words that Peter uses of those who are yet to undergo the judgment of God. He first identifies them as those, “who do not obey the gospel of God.” He is referring to men and women who will sit in this worship time this morning, will hear the word of God declared, but then will willfully refuse to do anything about it. It is not that they have not had opportunity to know. They have had opportunity to know but refuse to obey what they know.

The second word he uses to let us know who they are is the word, “ungodly.” “What will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” Ungodly refers to someone whose life is marked by irreverence and thoughtlessness. This person refuses to give any regard to God. They have no fear of Him and have no desire to please him. Their whole objective in life is to please themselves and to get all they can out of life. These are the ones who are to anticipate this awful judgment.

The third word is “sinner.” “What will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” This word refers to someone who is actively and willfully committing acts of sin. They are not

sinning unconsciously but rather it is a conscious choice on their part. They choose to be adulterous. They choose to be dishonest. They choose to be unloving. They choose to harbor hate. They choose to blaspheme the name of God.

Now, the question is: “If it is hard for the unrighteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

2. What they get.

We are not told what the ultimate form of the judgment of God will be for them. We are just left with the strong impression that it will be indescribably horrible. If those who know God and are seeking to serve Him have such a difficult time, what will it be like in the day of judgment for someone who chooses the broad way in the day of judgment?

Does God know what He is doing? Yes! Even though it may appear that God does not know what He is doing, He has already determined the final end for sinners and their sin.

The day of their judgment is already scheduled. The form of their judgment is already determined. The sovereign God of this universe has already made His determination. He knows exactly what He is doing.

IV. YES HE DESERVES YOUR TRUST AND SERVICE.

The last verse of this chapter is such a strong statement. “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commitment themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.” This is an appropriate word for us this morning. If it seems to you that God does not know what he is doing, if life has come upon you with great pain and

disappointment, then this is the word for you. If you have never made a commitment of life to God, then this is a word for you.

1. Trust Him as a faithful creator.

The word Peter uses for trust in our text is properly translated “commit.” It is borrowed from the banking world. It is the technical word for making a bank deposit. When you go to the bank and deposit with them your salary check, you are entrusting to them those monies to be preserved for your good and best interest. We are to do with our lives what we do with our money. We are to trust our lives into the hands of a faithful creator. Isn't that a beautiful way to describe God? Faithful creator! Oh, there are other terms that we could use for God that might speak more of His love and His grace, but creator is a reminder to us of God's long standing interest in our lives. He is the one responsible for our very being. He is faithful in the sense that he is absolutely trustworthy. You can trust God with your life that He will do only that which is best for you.

If life has really become mysterious and difficult, then entrust yourself into the hands of the faithful creator.

2. Serve God by doing good.

The closing admonition is “and continue to do good.” What a helpful word! What do you do when you are in great pain? You entrust yourself into the hand of God and do whatever good you have the opportunity to do. Don't let the difficulties of life

discourage you from doing what God has put you here to do. Fine someone who has a need and meet that need.

E. Stanley Jones shared about a dramatic illustration of this truth in the life of Walter Callow. Mr. Callow was known as “the human log.” He was called the human log because his body was totally immobilized. He could not even brush a fly from his face. He could not move his arms. Both legs are gone and he is totally blind. Yet, he became a very useful man in Canada. He had a suite of offices at the big Camp Hill Military Hospital in Halifax. His own room was a hive of industry where his secretary answered the phone all day long. The Spirit of the Lord was at home in the life of Walter.

He invented a bus to care for invalids. A wheelchair coach which takes shut-ins to sporting events, to special occasions, to entertainments. He had four of them in operation every day and they took the patients freely to these events. He said of himself, “I could be a lot worse; I want to thank God that at least I can talk and think. I want to repay him for I believe that after a man dies, they will ask only one question: “What did he do for others?”

That’s what you are suppose to do when you wonder about God. Trust God to take care of you and find ways to help others.