

The Suffering of Christ

Introduction

- The suffering of Christ relates to two areas of Christology: His humiliation and His sacrificial death.
- For the sake of this lesson, I will divide the physical sufferings (Gethsemane, beatings, crucifixion, etc.) from His death and the spiritual suffering of bearing our sins.
 - Most theology works I referenced do combine the sufferings of Christ with His death, but then go on to speak almost exclusively about His death and blood.
- We must also define the scope of our study by deciding a point before His death to begin our study.
 - Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) took this extreme position: “And to instance in his circumcision, what he suffered in it, had the nature of satisfaction: the blood that was shed therein was propitiatory blood; but as it was a conformity to the law of Moses, it was part of his meritorious righteousness.” (*History of Redemption*, emphasis added)
 - If the sufferings of Christ are a part of His humiliation, then I suppose we must count His entire Incarnation as suffering as He dealt with the frailties of human existence (pain, hunger, thirst, exhaustion, etc.).
 - If the sufferings of Christ are part of His sacrifice, then I think we should begin at Gethsemane and end at His death on the cross.
 - Our primary focus will be on the relation of His sufferings and sacrifice, so we will take use the latter range of events.
- Our question today is: How does the suffering of Christ factor into His redemptive work, or does other value for believers today?

Biblical Record of Christ’s Suffering

- There is no doubt that Christ suffered before He died, and these verses speak of that and not just His humanity or death.
- It was prophesied in the Old Testament: Psalm 22; Isaiah 50:6, 52:13-53:12; Zechariah 12:10, 13:6-7
- It was predicted by Christ: Matthew 16:21, 20:19; Luke 9:22, 9:44, 18:32-33
- It is recorded as historical fact: Matthew 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-20, Luke 22:63-64, John 19:1-5, Acts 17:3, 26:23
 - The agony of Gethsemane (Matthew 25:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:40-46) was *anticipating* the cross.
 - C.H. Mackintosh – “What was the difference between Christ, in Gethsemane, and Christ, at Calvary, if He were a sin-bearer all His life? There was a material difference! but it is because He was not a sin-bearer all His life. What is the difference? In Gethsemane, He was anticipating the cross! at Calvary, He was

actually enduring it. In Gethsemane, 'there appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him;' at Calvary, He was forsaken of all. There was no angelic ministry there. In Gethsemane He addresses God as 'Father,' thus enjoying the full communion of that ineffable relationship; but at Calvary, He cries, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Here the Sin-bearer looks up, and beholds the throne of eternal Justice enveloped in dark clouds, and the countenance of inflexible Holiness averted from Him because He was being 'made sin for us.'" (*Notes on Leviticus*)

- The mistreatment at the hands of the Jews (Matthew 26:66-68, Mark 14:65, Luke 22:63-65, also John 18:22) was their *rejection of their Messiah*.
 - These actions show their contempt for Christ great than their words express.
- The mistreatment at the hands of the Romans (Matthew 17:27-31, Mark 15:16-19, John 19:1-5) was their *rejection of the King of Kings*.
- Carrying the cross (John 19:17) began the shame of crucifixion.
- The physical agony of crucifixion (Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:33, John 19:18) is unimaginable, one of the most painful methods of execution ever employed by man.

Generic Suffering Versus A Specific Sacrifice

- Christ's suffering can be used as general term (I Peter 5:1), but the specific work of redemption is clearly through His death (Romans 5:8) and His blood (Colossians 1:14).
 - In Hebrews 13:12 and I Peter 3:18 have the general use of suffering but then a more specific use of blood or death.
 - Isaiah 53:5 speaks also generically or poetically about His suffering.
 - Under the Mosaic Law, sacrifices were killed and their blood applied, but they were not tortured or mistreated leading up to their death.
- Lewis Sperry Chafer notes this same distinction in this manner:
 - "There is the distinction to be drawn between the crucifixion – the greatest of all crimes – and the cross – contemplated as the sign of God's redeeming grace..." (Systematic Theology, Vol. III, p. 44)
 - "Human hands might inflict physical suffering and death as any victim would die, but only the hand of God could make Christ a sin offering, or could lay on Him the iniquity of other (2 Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:6)." (Systematic Theology, Vol. III, p. 51)

Reasons For Christ's Suffering

- To prove His worthiness of His sacrifice – Hebrews 2:10
- To be an example through suffering and a promise of present power over sin and of future blessing – Romans 8:17; II Corinthians 1:5-7; Philippians 3:8-11; I Peter 1:11, 2:21-23, 4:1-2, 4:13
- To be able to comfort us in our tribulations – Hebrews 2:18