

Theology of Suffering and Job

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Well, suffering! Who is exempt from suffering in this world? This world is full of pain, suffering, injustice, tragedy, failures, shames, sorrows, shock, separation, loss and deaths. We don't agree until we are main actors participating to this suffering of how hard this world may be. Nobody is exempt from this pain of suffering. Everybody has this and that different pain and suffering. They try not to be succumbed by it; they try not to be eaten by it; they try not to be down by it. Listen to so many songs that sing about sorrows and separation and pain.

Facing this terrified suffering, we Christian preachers face serious challenge. Why? Why? Why? If God is alive and loves us why this suffering happens to us? Why me? Why us? God hates us? Our serious question starts then. We didn't ask this question until we are main actors of this suffering. We once sang a joyful song with dance in front of God for the blessings and peace that God gave us. But now we can't sing anymore, we can't dance anymore, and even we can't pray anymore because now we feel that God is so far away from us, that God abandoned us, that God punished us, that God hates us. Is it? Is it true? Did God really abandon us? Did God really punish us for what we did wrong? This is all we ask when we face this challenging suffering. We once believed that God is the One who blesses us not punishes us nor abandons us. But now it seems God has turned around from us.

In this time Christians and preachers face serious challenge of their faith and preaching. What can we talk now before suffering and tragedy? Can we say that God still loves you without skeptic mockery from those who suffer? What can we preachers tell them who are dying of pain and shame? This is not easy question that we can answer, preach and help them. But we have to face it. So many Christians and preachers hurt those who suffer when they help and preach because they don't know and don't understand deeply about human suffering. I think many of them understood God with Shamanistic view. Natural religion which is represented by Shamanism has a theology that understands that God is the One who acts always with cause and result. They understand God with human reason: cause and effect. For God there should be reason for effect always from our human reason. But it is wrong. We have to accept that we are human and God is God. We can't understand why God allows and acts that way. Many

times, we should leave open the answer to our questions because we are creature and God is creator. It is arrogant when we try to understand everything that God does and acts! Christians and preachers should acknowledge this humbly: we don't know everything! Maybe someday we will know in the earth or in the heaven. How high and how deep and how big and how far God is from us, although God is with us in our suffering. This is irony of God. God is hidden though God is seen at the same time. When we can't see God we should be silent, we also should be hidden from rationalization humbly.

Another big problem when we face suffering is that we are quick to attack God for the cause of suffering. This is very interesting! From my experience, whenever we face serious pain and suffering, we are quick to resist against God, without thinking who really caused that pain and suffering. This is Shamanistic view of religion and god. Everything has to do with automatically god or God mechanically. And no human being is not responsible but only god or God is responsible for everything. Isn't right? No! Thinking clearly, before we offend god/God as cause of our pain and suffering, it was us, it was people, and it was our neighbor. After first humans disobeyed to God and took the forbidden fruits, human beings were given freedom to be able to choose the good and the evil (refer to Genesis 3, Bonhoeffer's Ethics, and Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning). Some people say that God created us with will of freedom, but I think the former is more correct.

This is serious anthropology of human being whatever its origin was. Human beings are able to choose to do evil as well as good to others. So many pains and sufferings have happened from this cause: By human will of freedom to do evil to others! Then let us not complain against God too fast! Let us think about clearly who caused the pain and suffering, and let us accept as our destiny from our sin of first humans and so we wait redemption and salvation from this broken world humbly! This can give and cover a lot of questions to our sufferings and pains.

Another important cause of our pain and tragedy and suffering comes from nature. (Refer to Romans 8: 18-25) Because of the first sin of first humans this nature also was broken and "cursed". So, so many disaster and tragedy that comes from nature also we should accept as our destiny from our sin of first humans. Then there is no God to whom we complain.

God is God who suffers with us who suffer. God is sad when he see how we suffer from our own sin and mistakes although it is from first humans. God is God who save, love, and prepare to heal us. We can go back anytime we suffer from others and nature. God is not the One we should complain. God is suffering with us suffering. God sent his only son to save us who suffer from the sin, pain, hurt, suffering, tragedy, sickness, and death. God is healer, comforter and savior through Holy Spirit! Amen!

We can't preach and help those who suffer with easy explanations. We can't give them quick help to those who suffer long time or terrified tragedy. What we can do for them who suffer is to love, comfort, and participate with their suffering, showing what God is doing for them. Don't judge them with your silly cause and effect theology of God. There are many classical answers for suffering: to punish your hidden sins, to train you like silver and gold for future, to help you from worse pain, to give you future blessings, to make you closer to God etc. Well, it can be good answers... but we need to be very careful...when we preach and help others who suffer. Like God, just be with them with love and prayer.

I like to read 4 materials with you in this class. First one is book of Job, second is book of Second Corinthians, third book is "Cuando a la gente Buena le pasan cosas malas (Vintage espanol, Nueva York, 2006)" written by Harold S. Kushner. This book touched my heart most among many books about suffering as well as Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning. And last, "Consejeria Cristiana Efectiva (Portanvoz:Grand Rapids, 1992)" by Gary Collins. Let us read together these materials and let us discuss:

1. What did you learn from reading this book?
2. What do you not agree with this book? Is there something you don't agree?
3. How can you preach about suffering from this book?
4. How can you help those who suffer from this book?
5. I like you to write one sermon about suffering and present with others.

You can preach from Bible. Free to choose text like Job, II Corinthians, Psalms etc.)

Let us be Christians and preachers who really comfort those who suffer!

Let us be Christians and preachers who not hurt those who suffer at least! Tell them that God is suffering with them in suffering with tears and sighs and loves and Jesus!

God is crying with us who suffer with broken heart! Amen!