

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

PAIN IS LOVE

DAVE WAGNER

Today, our text is going to be in few places: **Revelation 3:17-19**, **Hebrews 12:4-11**, **1 Corinthians 11:29-32**, and **Psalms 119:75**. I apologize again for how widespread those verses are. I know that can be confusing, which is why I sent that email earlier this week to give you a chance to see them or even print them out in time. I think it'll be worth us looking at. So I'll give you a minute to flip to that first text in case you want to, and when you're there, we will pray together.

Let's pray.

Oh father, you're glorious. You're righteous. Your son has exalted above the heavens. Your spirit is our omnipotent comforter. We call upon you, Lord and beg you that you would take note of our feeble efforts here. Lord, we would look into your Word and receive a blessing. If you permit it, we would look into your Word and hope to see the glory of God and the face of Jesus Christ, that we might be transformed from one level of glory to the next, that we might proceed on our way to glorification. Oh dear Lord, would you work on us? Would you beautify us as the city of God? We beg you, Lord, to give truth, give clarity; give help, give right emphasis protected from error. Oh Lord, would you grant your Holy Spirit to work among us? Lord God, hear us. We need you terribly. We are in great need. We don't have the wisdom, the strength, or the holiness that we need. We beg you to come and be present to work among us, to wield your own Word for the care and the love of your people; for the conversion of the lost. We ask for all these things hoping in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want to start today by mentioning to you that as we go through this subject on pain of pain, I'm not preaching this to you because I think that I've got this figured out. In fact, I think I deal with this in general so poorly, that I figured I would read to you a paragraph which describes my feelings on preaching about something concerning the subject of Christian pain. So this is a book by C.S. Lewis called *The Problem of Pain*, and he apparently felt something similar to what I do when he sat down to write it. And I want to sum up my feelings and preaching on pain to you from just about the first paragraph here. So listen as I read to you what Lewis has to say here:

“When Mr Ashley's Sampson suggested to me the writing of this book I asked leave to be allowed to write it anonymously. Since if I were to say what I really thought about pain, I should be forced to make statements of such a parent fortitude that they would become ridiculous if anyone knew who made them. That would be an accurate way to sum up how

I feel in preaching sermons of these. The sort anonymity was rejected as inconsistent with the series. But Mr Samson pointed out that I could write a preface explaining that I did not live up to my own principles, this exhilarating program I'm now carrying out. Let me confess it once in the words of good Walter Hilton, that throughout this book, I feel myself so far from true feeling of that I speak that I cannot Alspac cry mercy and desire after it as I may. “

That's kind of a complicated sentence, which means the things I'm speaking about, I struggle to feel and believe and to live out. And yet, all I can really do is cry for mercy and desire for the help to speak it as I may live it as I may. So I certainly don't preach these sermons because I think I'm an expert on how to experience pain in the Christian life. If anything, I'm probably on the lower end, and there'd be folks here who would have some practical wisdom that would be far beyond me, but I speak it because the Bible talks about it. And I'm emboldened to say whatever the Bible says, however difficult or embarrassing people take it to be. Um, even though I myself am far from attaining too much of it, so we are talking about pain in the Christian life and I've told you what I mean by pain many times. I mean the general sufferings of this life.

Introduction

We're talking about Pain in the Christian life. I need to emphasize that everything I say in these teachings is designed for Christians and no one else. Christ has a bank vault of precious treasures for the Christian, some of which pertain to the experience of pain, but the non-Christian has no access to these treasures, unless they want to repent of their sins and be baptized.

I've told you Christian Pain is Predestined and that Christian Pain is Necessary. Those are powerful truths which, if believed and fed upon, will go far toward holding the Christian up in suffering. Today we go one step further and I suppose we should say it's a big step we're taking! My point today is that Christian Pain is an expression of God's Love. Pain is Love.

Explanation

Pain is Love. By Pain I mean the varied sufferings of fallen people in a fallen world with devils running loose. By Love I mean a warm, emotional, inward affection of God which issues in practical, active help in meeting our deepest needs. Since our deepest need is to be reconciled to God and returned to his eternal and glorious presence, all God's love aims at securing this end, however multifaceted and endlessly diverse it might be in expression. So every hurt the Christian suffers finds its source in the predestinating love of God, various in its expression but united in its intention to fully restore the sinner into a perfected and glorified state and to return the sinner into the intimacy and direct presence of The Triune God. Every instance of suffering is a plank God throws down over a precipice that the child of God may walk safely, though not comfortably, over. The ravine is apostasy ending in hell fire and darkness. By pain the sinner walks over safely, avoiding the fatal fall. Every pain is one more rung on the ladder, or step on the

staircase, into the Heavens; wearying exertion is required at many points, and it often threatens to exhaust the Christian, but it is bringing him closer to God every moment. Pain is an affectionate letter written from an adoring husband to his beloved wife; she opens each letter with anticipation and foreboding, knowing there will be some correction and instruction which is difficult, sometimes bitter, but in every case it will strengthen her to weather the storm until he returns. Pain is a spanking; the loving parent, concerned deeply for the worldly and heavenly wellbeing of the child applies firm discipline to him so as to keep him far from evil, and to make him reflect on the real nature of the world, evil, and righteousness. Pain is a bitter medicine a patient is required to take at the hands of an affectionate and attentive doctor. It goes down hard and leaves the patient in discomfort and displeasure for a while, but it is steadily killing the infection and rescuing the patient.

So pain is not divine malice, or divine unconcern, or divine mismanagement; it is the laser-specific application of divine love to the elect sinner for the purpose of guiding the sinner infallibly all the way to heaven. It is warm, it is affectionate, it is emotional, it is feeling, it is concerned, it is attentive, it is tender, it is intimate. It is the loving embrace of God which we mistake for crushing; it is God's caress on our face which we mistake for a slap.

Now lest we get confused here, let me clarify: I'm saying that God plans and executes our pain out of love for us to give us the discipline and difficulty we need to make it to heaven; that doesn't mean there are no other agents or factors in the pain we suffer. If I suffer a mugging, which results in financial problems and injury, this is an event which comes from God's loving hand for my good, but it doesn't mean God is the one who does the mugging; the mugger does the mugging. And what's more, God is angry at the mugger for the mugger; it is sin for the mugger which provokes God's wrath. So God doesn't do the mugging and God doesn't approve of the mugging, but the mugging has come from God's hand for the good of his people, in love. Or, if I suffer a debilitating sickness, God does not enjoy my pain or sorrow, nor does God enjoy the general evil and trouble contained in the event of a person suffering illness. Illness is evil, and God hates evil. Nevertheless, it is an evil which comes from the hand of God, ultimately for a good purpose and in love to his people.

Proof

So let's examine three texts to prove the point that Christian Pain is an expression of God's love.

Revelation 3:17-19 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.'

What does Jesus do to those he loves? He reproveth and disciplines them, that is, he gives them pain. He does not ignore their sin and let them go on to the abyss. He takes action and applies disciplinary suffering to them. Pain is not, therefore, an expression of God's hatred, but of his love.

Hebrews 12:4-11 *"You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we had ¹earthly fathers to discipline us, and we ^arespected them; shall we not much rather be subject to ^bthe Father of ²spirits, and ^clive? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, ^aso that we may share His holiness. ¹¹ All discipline ^afor the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the ^bpeaceful fruit of righteousness.*

The Hebrews were being persecuted for their belief in Christ. V4 says the persecution has, so far, come short of martyrdom. Now how does the writer interpret the persecution these Christian Jews have suffered? He interprets it by quoting Proverbs 3, where Solomon speaks of God disciplining the children he loves. So pay careful attention: The writer of Hebrews interprets the persecution of Christians as being the loving, fatherly discipline of Christians by God! This idea can also be found in 1 Peter 4, where Peter describes the persecution of Christians as the judgment of God upon them. It is not there a judgment of condemnation leading to hell, but seemingly a judgment of purification and discipline leading to greater spiritual faithfulness. But persecution of Christians is loving, fatherly discipline from God. Of course you know what kinds of pain Christians experience in persecution: Beating, whipping, mocking, vandalism, slander, false accusation, legal trouble, confiscation of property, ostracization, rape and murder. All of these pains fall within the scope of divinely given pain; all of it comes from the love of God to shock his people awake and keep them on the path to heaven.

In this same vein, notice another text:

1 Corinthians 11:29-32 *For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.*

Here Paul corrects Corinth for their abuse of the Lord's Supper. V30 says their abuse led to God giving sickness to some Christians and even killing others ("sleep" is a euphemism for death in this text). By abusing the Supper some of the Corinthian Christians had "eaten and drunk judgment to themselves". But lest we mistake God's purpose in judging some of the Corinthians here, notice v32.

Paul says the judgment in question is the Lord's discipline of his people, and it is designed to prevent his people from being condemned along with the world. Apparently, God enfeebled and even killed some of his people to stop them from continuing on a path which would have led them to hell. Dear Christians! Do not fear! We may be attached to this world, but God is not. Our commitment to being saved may be weak and sickly at times; his is not. He's so committed to saving us that he will even kill us if he has to! And let everyone with open eyes praise the persistent and irresistible love of God which is willing to go to whatever length to keep us from The Second Death, even if it means applying to us the First. Christian pain, even including the pain of death, is an expression of God's love.

Returning to the Hebrews text, notice the Lord says the same as in the Revelation text: The Lord disciplines those he loves. The pain which God gives us flows from his committed love for us. Pain is Love. Now one last text to prove the point:

Psalm 119:75 I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.

The psalmist states that God has afflicted him, and that affliction arose from God's own faithfulness to the psalmist. Consider the following description (from the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament) of the Hebrew word for "faithfulness", *Emuna*: °Šmûnâ. Firmness, faithfulness, fidelity.

There are at least ten distinct categories in which this noun is used in Scripture. In its first occurrence in Scripture it expresses the sense of steady, firm hands, a very basic idea ([Exo 17:12](#)). From this mundane sense, Scripture moves almost entirely to a use of the word in connection with God or those related to God.

Basically, the term applies to God himself ([Deut 32:4](#)) to express his total dependability. It is frequently listed among the attributes of God ([1Sam 26:23](#); [Psa 36:5](#); [Psa 40:10](#); [Lam 3:23](#)). It describes his works ([Psa 33:4](#)); and his words ([Psa 119:86](#); [Psa 143:1](#)).

The word, used as a quality of someone, in this case God, refers to dependability; this is a person who can be trusted, counted on, relied upon. They are firm and steady; they are unmoving, unchanging, reliably fixed in place.

What this means is that this text states that the affliction which God has given the psalmist is the result of God's dependability and loyalty to the psalmist. This is to say that if God failed to give this affliction to the psalmist God may be open to the charge of disloyalty and infidelity to the psalmist! This is certainly not because God owes the psalmist anything (aside from punishment in hell), but because God has decreed that he would save the psalmist from death and hell. God has pledged his eternal love and concern to the psalmist and for God to continue honoring that pledge he must give the psalmist affliction. Anything less would be divine disloyalty!

So the psalmist's affliction was an expression of God's loyal love to the psalmist, his committed affection to keep him learning and obeying God's word. Pain is Love. Let's think some now about applying this truth in our lives.

Application

Probably the most important application is this: Believe it! This is a challenging doctrine to keep before us when we hurt. Pain makes us forget our theology in a hurry. But the Christian cannot simply hurt passively; he must hurt actively, by which I mean he must be actively rehearsing the doctrines to himself and actively believing them. These doctrines won't believe themselves; you must actively believe, and of course it will sometimes be very difficult to do so. You will be tempted to believe God doesn't care, or God has mismanaged your life, or God is malicious. You have to resist these temptations by preaching to yourself that Pain is Love and by believing what you preach.

If, once God brings you into pain, you examine yourself and find some notable sin that you believe has brought on the pain, then as Jesus directs in Revelation 3, respond to the pain by zealously repenting. Flee that sin with a vengeance. Purge it all out like Israel purged the leaven out of their houses at Passover. Turn away from it and never turn back.

Whether the pain is brought on by sin or not, follow the advice in Hebrews, as quoted from Proverbs: Do not entertain a low opinion of God's discipline, but esteem it highly and even thank God for it. And do not faint, grow weary, and give up. Endure through to the end of the pain. Remember that your pain, if handled rightly, will produce a new harvest of peace and righteousness in you. It has long been the case with believers that they have desired holiness more than comfort and pleasure; follow in the footsteps of the saints of history.

Hebrews tells us no one enjoys discipline, and I'm not telling you to enjoy pain; if you enjoyed it, I'm not sure we could rightly call it pain. But I'm telling you to look past the pain to the God who wields it in his hand, and to preach the word to your soul. Say, "Soul, do not faint or grow weary, do not grow proud or bitter. Yield to this pain now because it comes from the love of our God, and he uses it on us for a good and wise purpose. God does not hate us, has not forgot us, and is not mismanaging our life. We are right on schedule and this is one more regularly scheduled treatment to kill the sin-infection. Humbly submit to God's painful love now and in time he will exalt you."

Conclusion

Let's summarize and conclude. Pain is Predestined, Pain is Necessary, and now we see Pain is God's Love. It comes right from his hand and issues from his committed affection toward us. It is leading us home to God after millennia of exile from the Garden. God doesn't hate us; he loves us like a good, diligent father who trains and disciplines and punishes his children to keep them from the miserable fate of turning into wicked people. God uses evil men and evil circumstances which he himself deplures, disapproves of, and eventually punishes and corrects, in order to lovingly bring us nearer himself. Every last hurt we endure is the compassion and concern of God exercised toward us.