



The Grace Gospel and Suffering

Sermon - Steve Stanis

14 & 21 August 2022

Genesis 48:10-22

John 4: 1-10; 27-35; 39-40 (Romans 5:1-11 8am)

The Gospel Grace and Suffering Applied

The Bible is full of Scripture about suffering. I have based my sermon on the readings in the Study booklet, however, you will have noticed I have chosen two further readings for today. My preparation for this sermon took me on a surprising journey to the woman at the well. This passage was the first ever sermon I preached in any church; no doubt there was some suffering then, as for all present today 😊!

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria.

A journey you did not want or expect to take...

In John chapter 4 we see Jesus going through an unexpected place. In verse 4 it says, "Now he had to go through Samaria." Samaria can be referred to as a geographical term, but could it also be 'some area' that we don't want to go through? For the disciples, they were willing to double the time of their trip so they didn't have to go through Samaria. Samaria represented division and resentment.

Jesus had to go through Samaria; so do you and so do I. We will all go through 'some area'... the areas of our lives

that we want to keep beneath the surface... the things we want to be spared... the things we want to avoid.

The woman at the well does not look for easy answers or clichés; she keeps asking questions. After Jesus spends some time with her, she who was so ridiculed by her society that she would go to the well in the hottest part of the day but so valued by her Creator that he went out of his way to speak to her! The gospel of grace!

Verse 27 "Just then, his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with the woman."

The unexpected!

Here is the unexpected turn of this event. The disciples thought they were just going to buy lunch. They had no idea that Jesus was going to change this woman's life by showing grace. He would nudge her through the barriers of potential suffering to a place of new light.

We never know the unexpected in our lives!

To follow Jesus, you have to expect surprises. I like it that the disciples were surprised because, just like me, sometimes I get caught off guard. I thought God was going to do this, but then he does that! I thought my life was going to look like this and then it looks like that!

What is it in your life that has caught you off guard?

We are just living our life, going through each day, minding our own business, like the disciples going to buy lunch when, all of a sudden, God disrupts our expectation of how our day was supposed to go. This is gospel grace.

We must approach each day as the day the Lord has made because you never know...

She came to get water, but she is about to meet the Well. She was trying to fill her jar with water; God is trying to fill her. Just when this Samaritan woman expected it the least, she received the greatest revelation of her life.

This is the gap between what we expect and what we experience. We never know!

When we think about the unexpected in our lives, I want to stress how important it is to be attuned to what the Holy Spirit is doing in us, because we never know.

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son, Joseph.

⁶ Jacob's well was there.

Is life ever going to be different?

John goes into detail about the plot of ground that Jacob had given his son Joseph. John takes us back to God's story, that he called a man named Abram out of Ur. Abram was too old to have children but... Abram has a baby!

Then there's the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Wasn't it supposed to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Esau? Just when you think you know what God is about to do ... Jacob got blessed before Esau.

Some of you are in a season of your life where you have told yourself the story is never going to be any different. You are like the woman who came out to the well in the

heat of the day to avoid the attention and the accusations and the condemnation of other people. You are stuck.

But the God who is at work throughout time, the God of Abraham, Isaac and **Jacob**, does things his way... the way he wants.

This plot of land that Jacob gave Joseph is the area of land that everyone avoided but it is the area Jesus intended to go through.

God's Story - the Bible!

We cannot measure our suffering.

Go back to God's story. For 22 years Jacob thought Joseph was dead. Jacob's suffering would have been great; remember, Joseph was his favourite. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and left for dead. Jacob must have given up... felt lost and hopeless.

John is reminding us in John chapter 4 that we worship a God who takes things you thought were dead and things you thought were over and the suffering you face but he stays with you working out his purposes. We cannot measure our suffering. This is a human temptation. Instead we must push back on this tension and, through suffering, seek to be a blessing.

In Genesis 48:11 Israel (Jacob) said to Joseph,

"I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too."

If your suffering is intense right now, if you feel your life is on hold or interrupted, remember God is the God of the unexpected turn.

Genesis 50:20 "You meant it for evil, God meant it for good".

Unexpected blessings in unlikely places!

It was a famine in Canaan that made Joseph's brothers go to Egypt, where they found Joseph. Genesis 50:20:

"You meant it for evil, God meant it for good".

Get ready for unexpected blessings in unlikely places.

Right now, whatever my situation, I am blessed. Right now, the hand of the Lord is on me.

If you notice in Genesis 48, God continues to do the unexpected. Jacob gives the first blessing to the second child, Ephraim. God is still at work in the world in unexpected ways. His story continues.

The Gospel of Grace in suffering.

We should be prepared for the experiences of suffering.

God's work continues in each of our lives. Most of you know of my health scare. I have shared with you before the slow road of recovery... the isolation, the self-doubt, over reacting and under reacting to normal, every day events... emotions I didn't understand. It was so hard to find joy. I was lost in just managing every day. My head was full of so much. It still is 😊.

I had to work out how to get out of my head and trust the transforming power of Jesus Christ. I needed the Gospel of Grace to change my lens and focus.

This is one episode in my life. There have been other episodes of suffering. The Bible teaches us that suffering is not a unique experience. It is not an episodic experience. Suffering is a universal human experience. In Romans 8:18, Paul says,

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Paul is saying that somehow, in some way, all of us will suffer. And so we should be prepared for the experience of suffering. We shouldn't be surprised. In 1 Peter 4:12, Peter says,

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."

When we are surprised, or rattled, we tend to point the finger and blame? Do we blame God? This isn't fair! Do we blame God as unfaithful, uncaring or unkind? "Where are you, God?" Can you recall a time when you sought God's answer in your life? (Should this not be often as, after all, we are not in control of God's intentions for each of us?)

Our experiences, including our suffering, should not interpret who God is.

Do not be tempted to let our suffering become a way of understanding God. **Our experiences should not interpret who God is.** We must let 'who God says he is' interpret our experience. God is good, he is kind, he is a promise keeper. Trust this so that you run **to him** and not **from** him.

When we suffer (and we will) we must be ready. We must allow the transforming work of the Spirit to minister to our thoughts... to bring us before God... to trust his plan in our life and to trust his sovereignty. This is hard in the middle of suffering. It is why we must prepare. You cannot run a marathon without careful preparation. Dealing with significant, life changing suffering needs careful preparation.

I read an interesting principle. 'Human beings, made in the image of God, do not live life based on the facts of their experience but based on the interpretation of the facts.'

We all have good, formal theology. We understand we live in a spoilt world where there is sadness and unkindness, sickness and death. And yet our theology must shape our life.

The Psalms link suffering to lament and joy (Psalm 27:1)

In Psalm 27: 1 David says,

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?

The Lord is a stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?

God is not out there, in the distance. David is celebrating the grace of God. Because of the grace of God, I am **connected** to the One who is light, to the One who is salvation and to the One who is my stronghold.

My theology does not just define who God is, it redefines who I am as a child of God. As a child of God, I must trust God's good purposes. When this is hard and I doubt, when God's purposes surprise me and I am overwhelmed, I run to God in faith and hold onto him in moments of confusion. He is my Father and I am his child.

As a child of God I am no longer at the centre. Without God, my world is reduced. It's all about me! My wants, my needs, my feelings. But 2 Corinthians 5:15 says,

And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

With God at the centre, I turn to Christ and think about his suffering. You will read about this in the Bible study notes from Isaiah 53 and Romans 5. God, who harnessed the very forces of nature, controlling the events of human

history, to bring his Son into the world, that he would live, die and rise again so that, through faith, we can become children of God. Jesus willingly came and suffered. He is our Redeemer. My focus shifts... joy returns when I remember what Christ has done.

My theology must shape my life. I am a child of God ... And he loves me.

We are a community transformed by the gospel of grace, not silenced by our suffering!

As a final thought, can I add you don't have to suffer in silence. You don't have to be a hero. You are not alone. God has blessed us as a community of believers. I am here for you. We are here for each other. We are the body of Christ.

Suffering is understood in our personal faith in unique ways but also captured by God's grace and mercy so as to share our suffering together with compassion.

We must not seek to explain our suffering away from one to another. Rather can we accept God does not promise to remove suffering, but rather to bless us through suffering?

Our mission calls us to seek to shoulder our suffering with one another so as to "Glorify God, making Jesus known as we love and serve together."

God's Word directs us how to live within any suffering that comes before us with these words we read today in John 4:24:

God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.

Pray with me this concluding prayer from Romans 5.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Amen!

Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman

⁴ Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptising more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria.⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

The Disciples Rejoin Jesus

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

³⁴ "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Many Samaritans Believe

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.



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