

God Suffers in All Who Suffer in This World

Scripture Readings: 2 Kings 5:1-14; Mark 1:40 to the end; Acts 5:12-16

Sermon

As we delve into the profound theme of “God Suffers in All Who Suffer in This World,” we turn our attention to key narratives from the passages from 2 Kings, Mark and the Acts of the Apostles. These passages illuminate the deep reality of human suffering and the divine response that accompanies it. The story of Naaman extends our understanding of suffering through the perspective of an unnamed Israelite girl who, despite her own captivity, offers a glimmer of hope. In Mark’s Gospel, we meet a leper who approaches Jesus with a desperate plea for healing, revealing the compassionate heart of God that reaches out to the marginalised. Furthermore, the account in Acts highlights the early church’s role in manifesting God’s healing power as they respond to the suffering of the people. Together, these texts invite us to reflect on God’s intimate presence in our pain, calling us to embody His compassion and grace as instruments of healing in a world longing for relief and restoration.

The Context: As we turn to **2 Kings 5:1-14**, we meet Naaman, a man of great valour, a hero in the eyes of many. Yet, beneath his armour, he carries an affliction — a devastating skin disease, one that isolates him and diminishes his dignity. In ancient times, leprosy or similar ailments were seen not only as physical ailments but also as spiritual handicaps. Naaman, despite his military success, finds himself in a place of defencelessness and despair.

In this narrative, the first lesson we learn is the universal nature of suffering. Naaman’s suffering is exceeded only by the silent suffering of the unnamed Israelite girl who had been captured and forced into servitude in Naaman’s household. Her simplicity and faith shine through as she shares that there is a prophet in Israel who could heal Naaman. **This young girl embodies a powerful truth: even in her own suffering, she becomes a beacon of hope and healing for another.** Naaman eventually seeks out the prophet Elisha, and upon receiving instruction in humility to wash in the Jordan River, he is initially resistant.

Application: What a profound reminder this is for us: Like many of us, he struggles with the simplicity of the solution presented to him. We often seek profound miracles, yet **God invites us into the ordinary to experience the extraordinary.** God often works in the mundane and simple acts of obedience. Healing may not always come in grand gestures but can be found in the willingness to listen, to act in faith, and to engage in the transformative power of God’s words. We are surrounded by suffering on many fronts — sickness, injustice, division, and despair. It can be overwhelming. However, God calls us to respond to suffering as instruments of His grace. **Just as the servant girl spoke up in her own suffering, we too are called to offer hope and healing in places of brokenness.**

We are reminded that in Christ, God entered our suffering fully. The Cross is the ultimate expression of a God who understands our pain and shares our burdens. In Christ’s own suffering, we find solidarity and hope; we are reassured that our struggles have a purpose. **Are we willing to be catalysts for healing? Are we ready to walk alongside those in pain, sharing in their journey? Are we ready to offer God’s grace to those who suffer, even when we feel disconnected from their experiences?**

The Context: Moving now to the passage read to us from the Gospel according to **Mark 1:40 to the end** of the chapter, we meet a desperate man — a leper — who approaches Jesus, falling to his knees and pleading for healing. His condition renders him not only physically ill but socially disliked, forced to live in isolation from his community. Leprosy, as we understand it, symbolises more than a physical ailment; it embodies abandonment, shame, and loneliness. The law at the time required that he call out “Unclean! Unclean!” whenever he entered public spaces, ensuring that others kept their distance.

In this solemn moment, we recognise the deep, abiding truth that Jesus demonstrates through His actions. When the leper approaches Jesus, he does so with a desperate faith: “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” This statement echoes through the ages as a cry from not only this afflicted man but from countless souls who yearn for healing, restoration, and acceptance.

The second important truth we glean from this encounter is the character of God as revealed through Christ. Mark’s Gospel tells us that Jesus is “moved with compassion.” In the original Greek, this phrase, from *splanchnizomai* (Strong’s Concordance, G4697), conveys an intuitive, deep-seated yearning — a compassion that stirs Jesus to act. Here we discover a heart that is attuned to the suffering of others. Jesus responds to the leper’s plea not with detachment but with compassion, going so far as to reach out and touch the man, a revolutionary act in that time and culture. This act

of touch is monumental. By touching lepers, who were deemed unclean, Jesus crossed social boundaries, defied cultural norms, and showcased a **God who enters into our suffering**. God does not stand far away; instead, He draws near to those in pain.

Application: In our own lives, how often do we experience moments of suffering where we feel isolated, alone, or misunderstood? In those moments, we must remember that Jesus, the embodiment of God, understands our pain intimately. He is not a distant deity but a compassionate friend who walks with us in our darkest valleys. When we encounter suffering in our lives or in the lives of those around us, we are called to respond as Christ did — with compassion and love. This does not mean we always have the answers or can resolve the pain, but it invites us to be present. It calls us to bear one another's burdens and offer the healing presence of Christ, however imperfectly.

When we experience God's healing, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, we are often invited to share that gift with others. We are called to bear witness to the transformative power of Christ in our lives, bringing hope to those still walking in the shadows of suffering. Our testimonies can speak life into death, hope into despair, and love into loneliness.

Who around us is calling out for healing? Who feels isolated as they battle their pain? We are each called to reach out, to listen, and to extend grace. Are you prepared?

The Context: Shifting gears, we now move to read the **apostles performing many signs** and wonders among the people, with some being healed simply by being in the shadow of Peter. This era marked a time of profound miracles and divine interventions as the newly formed church began to grow and thrive amidst both encouragement and opposition. But tucked within these verses lies the deeper reality of suffering and healing, a reminder that God is intimately present in our pain.

What stands out in this narrative is the atmosphere of hope that surrounded the suffering of the people. The sick and afflicted were brought to the apostles in great numbers. They did not shy away from their condition; rather, they openly sought healing. The very act of bringing the sick into the presence of the apostles signifies a communal acknowledgment of suffering — a recognition that healing is necessary and possible.

As we explore this text, we find the first profound truth: God sees our suffering. The people who flocked to the apostles came from various backgrounds and ailments — those tormented by unclean spirits, the sick, and the marginalised. In our own lives, we may experience different forms of suffering, whether it be illness, loss, or emotional turmoil. **God sees us in our darkest moments and does not turn away**. He invites us into the community where healing can take place.

Application: When we extend our hands to help those in need, we participate in bringing God's love into the very fabric of suffering. God is present in our times of strife; He walks with us through every valley of the shadow of death and every storm.

The presence of suffering often leads us to wonder, "Where is God in all of this?" As we engage with others who are suffering — whether due to illness, grief, or injustice — let us remind ourselves that God is not absent. He suffers alongside those in pain, intertwined with their struggles. Think of Jesus, who Himself suffered on the Cross. He knows our pain intimately, for He took on human suffering to bridge the gap between divinity and humanity. He is a God who weeps with us.

Have you ever wondered if God the Father suffered when God the Son, Jesus in His human nature, suffered on the Cross? In the light of what we learned today, I would say He did suffer. Our benevolent God could not have stayed away from the triumph of Christ's historical suffering, never to be repeated. Seemingly separated, but not really, for the same Substance of One Godhead could not have refrained. The cry of "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) is not merely the cry of Jesus in despair, but a final instruction for all of us to seek Him in our afflictions. Therefore, the theme of God suffering alongside humanity calls us to action. We are tasked with being the hands and feet of Jesus in a world filled with pain.

In conclusion, the theme of "God Suffers in All Who Suffer in This World" illuminates the profound truth that our Lord is intimately acquainted with our pain and calls us to embody His compassion as we navigate the challenges of life. Through the stories of Naaman, the leper, and the early apostles, we see a God who actively engages with human suffering, offering healing, hope, and restoration. These narratives challenge us to reflect on our own responses to those who are hurting around us. We are reminded that our actions matter; when we reach out in love and kindness, we become vessels of God's grace, participating in His redemptive work in the world. As we leave this gathering, may we carry with us the call to be messengers of hope and healing, responding to the cries of the suffering with hearts full of compassion, revealing the presence of a God who suffers alongside us and desires our ultimate healing. Amen