

The Pilgrimage to Zion

Tony

Scriptures:

Romans 8:18

Genesis 2:17

Genesis 3

Isaiah 53

John 16:33

"For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy of being compared with the glory which will be revealed in us". (Romans 8:18)

Suffering is not easily understood. Scripture makes clear that suffering would not exist if sin had not come into the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience to God in eating the forbidden fruit. (Genesis 2:17). Genesis 3 shows the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin.

Thousands of years later, in John 16:33 Jesus warned His disciples, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world."

God understands suffering. Such is His love for mankind that He sent His one and only Son to die in our place. Never was such injustice worked out in the life of an innocent man. Never was such pain endured on behalf of sinful mankind.

The old testament prophets saw Jesus' suffering and wrote amazingly accurate words many years before His birth. (read Isaiah 53).

Existential Christian Philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard believed that there is no rhyme nor reason to life and therefore no explanation for suffering can be found. However, in general, Christians believe that there is purpose because God is Sovereign, and He promises that nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate the believer from Him for all eternity. One day God will reveal all things and by then suffering will be no more for those who belong to Him.

In the summer of 1974 a church member came to ask me if I would visit her neighbour, Doreen, who was very poorly with cancer. Doreen was a nursing sister and an atheist. In response I called at Doreen's home two days later. Her husband seemed glad to have someone to talk to but told me that Doreen was not willing to see me. Before leaving he said he was happy for me to pray for them.

Soon afterwards Doreen was admitted to a major cancer hospital in Middlesex and she sent a message requesting that I visit her. It was a beautiful summer day and I sat with her in the Hospital grounds watching squirrels batting between one tree and another as Doreen began to ask questions. Her past lifestyle and vehement rejection of God had caused her to imagine she could never be acceptable to Him in eternity. I read John 3:16 to her and explained

the gospel in a straightforward way. She wept floods of tears as she realised it was not too late. She received Jesus as her Lord and Saviour that afternoon. I gave her a New Testament bible and a booklet explaining the steps she had taken. Two days later she phoned and asked if I could visit her soon. The news was devastating. The Consultant had told her that death was imminent. She asked if I would tell her husband for her.

I popped in to see him on my way home and told him that Doreen's cancer was spreading rapidly. She had only weeks to live. I prayed with him and told him that she had given her life to Jesus at the Hospital. He also became a Christian and was baptised on the following Easter Sunday. His children became part of the Young People's Fellowship. In time he met and married a Christian lady. God had been able to bring good even out of all the suffering the family experienced.

C. H. Spurgeon once said:

"Your victory will come with your song. It is a very puzzling thing to the devil to hear saints sing when he sets his foot upon them. He cannot make it out."

Prayer: Father, thank You that although we don't like or understand suffering, You are able to bring salvation even through the saddest of circumstances. Thank You that You have promised never to leave us nor forsake us. Amen.