

Things that broke Jesus' heart (3) - Suffering

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John 11:17-44

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[Please note these are unedited preaching notes and are not for publication. They are made available here to aid the deaf community in Christ Church and to be a reference for anyone who found the sermons useful.]

This week I was privileged to meet with some one who came to see me, not part of Christ Church and so she has not heard me preaching these last two Sundays. She came to see me because of a concern about the spiritual state of one of the schools in this area. She is a mother who has been praying faithfully and fervently for the school her children attend for a number of years. She and her husband are both actively involved in the school and deeply concerned about the spiritual life of the school.

Without going into details which would be inappropriate she expressed her concern about decisions being made and a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it. I listened attentively and supportively, but knew that there was very little I could do and very little comfort I could offer. Then I asked, "What is the real heart of your concern about the school?"

She looked at me and tears filled her eyes and she said, "These people - these children and parents - are lost. They have loads of money but they are caught up in drugs, and affairs, broken marriages, and leading destructive lives. They are hurting. My heart breaks." She sat in my office and cried.

It was a holy moment. My prayer was - "More, Lord. More tears please, Lord." More tears not only for her, but for me and in others too.

My sense was that she was very close to God in that moment and I did not want to do hinder what God was doing in her. I sensed too that her visit was as much God's gift to me as anything else.

I prayed that the Lord would give me a broken heart and tears like that for those who are lost and hurting and on a path to destruction.

Over these last two weeks I have looking at things that broke Jesus' heart.

We looked at Jesus weeping over the sin of Jerusalem and the blindness to the peril they were in because of their sin and their blindness to the offer of peace that God was offering.

Last Sunday we looked at Jesus weeping in the Garden of Gethsemane over the lost.

Tonight I want to look at Jesus' broken heart over suffering.

But they are all linked of course. Sin and its perils are but the result of being lost and leading destructive lives that cause suffering for ourselves and for others. I am not saying that suffering is simply a result of sin, or that being saved prevents suffering. We know that is not the case.

But what is clear that these things broke Jesus' heart. They caused him to weep and cry out to God the Father.

So again tonight I invite you to look with me at the way suffering broke Jesus' heart and what flowed from that, and to receive the invitation to join him there.

There are four things that I see flowing from Jesus broken heart over suffering.

The first response I see in Jesus when he saw suffering is that ...

(1) He was moved with compassion

When Jesus sees people suffering he is moved with compassion. It touches him deeply. He does not simply sigh and say, "Oh dear". Suffering does not leave Jesus unmoved. It stirs something in him.

In the reading from John 11 we have the shortest verse in the Bible – verse 35 which states starkly – "Jesus wept"

It is one of three words John used in this passage to give us insight in Jesus feelings and his broken heart.

In verse 33 it says Jesus was deeply moved, he was troubled and in verse 35 it says he wept.

But these English words don't adequately convey the meaning of the Greek words used. Eugene Peterson's *The Message* and the *New Living Translation* do better.

The NLT reads:

³³When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled.

Jesus was not just hurt and resigned about Lazarus death. He was angry.

This same word is used in Mark's gospel (14:5) where some who were present in Simon house were upset with the women who came and broke the alabaster jar and poured all the expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. It says that they were upset by his waste (it was worth a year's wages) and its says "they scolded her" or "they rebuked her".

Same word used of Jesus response to Lazarus death. Anger welled within him.

He was troubled. The word is used in John 5 of the waters in the Pool of Bethesda that got stirred up and brought healing. The waters were not just flat and stagnant. They got stirred up and something happened.

Jesus was stirred up by Lazarus death. It did not leave him unmoved.

This moved him to tears. Jesus wept.

The writer to the Hebrews says ...

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death ..."

Suffering did not leave Jesus' unmoved. Anger welled up in him and he wept.

We get a similar picture of Jesus from Matthew. Look at chapter 9 verse 35ff.

READ Matt 9:35-38

When Jesus looked the crowd it says he saw that they were "harassed and helpless" and he was "moved with compassion".

The word used there is a different word. It is the word *splagchnizomai*

It is not a pleasant sounding word, and it does not have a pleasant meaning either. It means guts or bowls.

When Jesus saw the crowds helpless and harassed he was moved in his gut. He was angry. Everything in him welled up and shouted out, "NO!" "This must not be. No more! Enough! Stop!"

Now two important things for us to take hold of as we consider this point.

Firstly: Be reminded that Jesus is not unmoved by your suffering. May that be a comfort to you. What ever you are suffering how ever big or small it is does not leave Jesus unmoved.

Secondly: Jesus is not unmoved by the suffering of those around you – he is not unmoved by the suffering of others. Anger wells up in him. He is gripped in his inner parts and with loud cries and petitions he and with tears in his eyes he calls out to the Father, "No more".

If we pray that prayer, "Lord break our hearts with the things hat break yours", we will find a welling up compassion that has a growing intolerance for suffering.

So the first response we see in Jesus when he saw suffering is that he was moved with compassion. And secondly this took him straight into ...

(2) Conflict with the enemy

The biblical record indicates that the moments when Jesus is most deeply moved is when he was in conflict with the power of evil.

In the case of Lazarus, death is the enemy. Jesus' tears, Jesus' loud cries are because there is that there is battle going on and in this moment evil had a victory.

Death is the enemy – it is not our friend.

There are times when some one is terminally ill and we pray that they may be released from their suffering. We get to the point pastorally where we release them and entrust them into God's care. But death is always the enemy.

I was sitting with Basil Nuthall on Friday hours after his wife Alma died. They were married one day short of 50 years. She has fought cancer for 25 years.

His comment to me was, "Duncan, she won the race". Indeed she had. But at the same time he said I wish she were still here.

Suffering and death are the enemy's strategies – not God's. We do not attribute to God the things of the enemy.

Jesus broken heart over suffering takes him straight into conflict with the enemy.

Going back to Matthew 9 we read that Jesus had been going through all the towns and villages doing three things:- teaching, proclaiming good news, and healing.

In each of these he was in direct conflict with the enemy.

In his teaching he was bringing truth – truth that would set people free and in doing that he was coming against the falsehood of the liar and deceiver.

He was proclaiming good news – the gospel of freedom from the slavery and destruction of sin and in that he was in direct conflict with the enemy who wants to keep in bondage and captive to sin.

He was healing every disease and sickness and in that was in direct conflict with the enemy who seeks to steal, kill and destroy.

Matthew goes on to say that he looked at the crowd and when he saw them he was filled with compassion - *splagchnizomai* - anger welled up in him because not only were they helpless - not only did they not know what to do and how to do it – not only were they ignorant, not only were they helpless – they were being harassed. There was an enemy out to get them. They were like sheep being attacked by wolves. There was an enemy having a go at them.

Now what we need to note here is very important. When we respond to suffering we enter a spiritual battle. Do not think that this is neutral just normal stuff. When we respond as Jesus did to suffering we enter into conflict with the enemy. We will come into the firing line, and so we need to be prepared and alert.

I have seen too many people who are casualties of burn out. They have thrown themselves in to caring for those who are suffering in a wonderful sacrificial way. They have been inspiring examples of self denial and demonstrated love – all the things we were looking at last Sunday, but they have not taken into the account the severity of the battle and the evil intent of the enemy to steal, kill and destroy.

Now we don't need to be afraid. This should never cause us to shy away from the battle. There is no safety in withdrawal or feigning ignorance. We just need to be aware that we go into a head to head situation with the enemy when we respond to suffering.

But in Christ we need not fear the enemy. We can counter his attacks by putting on the armour of Christ.

Ephesians 6:11ff

¹¹Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

¹³Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Now that is a whole study and sermon in itself. Take the insights gained from your study and meditation of that passage of Scripture into account as you respond to suffering.

So we see that Jesus' broken heart over suffering moves him with compassion – deep anger welled within in. This led him into direct conflict with the enemy – there was a spiritual battle going. And so thirdly and not surprisingly he the response to suffering is ...

(3) To pray

Matthew 9:36ff

³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his

disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Jesus turns his gaze from the helpless and harassed crowds to his disciples and he says to them, pray.

Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send workers into his harvest field.

Prayer is the universal activity of last resort. We will do everything except pray.

When we have our hearts moved, broken by suffering, we can respond in all sorts of ways. We will design programmes and raise money and order materials and search the internet, we will dash off a few emails, we will do anything except but pray.

In the face of the crowds being helpless and harassed Jesus turns his disciples and says to them get off your butts and do something now. No, he does not. He says pray that God will send workers into the field.

You see, we don't need people doing things. We need "sent people" doing things.

The real answer is God sending workers. The real answer – the thing that is going to count in the battle against suffering is people going with the power and authority of God - listening to him, empowered by him. It is amazing what "sent workers" can do.

ILL: **The first disciples.** A handful of "sent workers" changed the face of civilisation. The Roman empire was based on paganism, it was entrenched in it. Within a century and a half it was completely changed.

ILL: It is amazing if you look at history of what a few sent people can do. eg. - **D L Moody**. Could hardly spell or read or write. And his message was basically a collection of illustrations around the message that God loved sinners so much that he died for them. That was his message. That was all he ever preached, and yet God used him. This illiterate American was used in Cambridge to speak to academics and professors and a missionary movement was born. If only we had a few "sent people" like that - can you imagine what would happen?

ILL: **Josephine Butler** a social reformer who died just on 100 years ago. She was married George Butler a minister of the Church of England. Josephine led a campaign on behalf of the young girls in Liverpool and later

else where who were ensnared in a life of prostitution. She opened homes for prostitutes, with Josephine campaigning on their behalf. The Contagious Diseases Acts, passed in the 1860s, imposed police surveillance, arrest on suspicion, and compulsory medical examination of women thought to be prostitutes. Josephine objected strongly on the grounds that the women were being denied their constitutional rights. She won the support of other influential women such as Florence Nightingale and succeeded in influencing opinion in Parliament to get the acts repealed in 1886. Josephine Butler did not limit her activities to Britain. She alerted many people in Europe and America to the way in which young girls were procured for prostitution, and to the link between licensed brothels and the white-slave trade. In 1877 she organized a world congress on these matters in Geneva. Modern attitudes to such problems and resulting international legislation can be traced back to her crusade.

When one looks back at her life one can not but be moved by her compassion and commitment to make a difference and marvel at the difference she did make. But thing about Josephine Butler that I find inspiring is that she was a woman of prayer.

She was faced with a huge mountain of obstacles and at times felt quite over come by the enormity of it all and drowned by the extent of the pain and misery. She frequently got to the place of not wanting to see any more because she was not sure she could take it.

I want to read you an extract from a letter she wrote to her sister at the end of 1880 as she was looking back over the year. It may have been the precursor of the round robbin to family and friends as the story of the year is told.

She writes: -

I was pondering one evening, when I suddenly recollected that on New Year's Day of this year, and for many days after, I had taken upon me to make a special and define request to God for light to fall upon these 'dark places of the earth wherein are the habitations of cruelty.' Some strong influence seemed to urge me to make this request. I used to kneel and pray,

'Oh God, I beseech thee, send light upon these evil deeds whatever it may cost us and others. Flash light into these abodes of darkness. Oh send us light; for without it there can be no destruction of the evil. We cannot make war against a hidden foe. In the darkness, these poor sisters of ours, these creatures of thine, are daily murdered, and we do

not know what to do, or where to turn, and we find no way by which to begin to act. Send us light, Oh our God, even though it may be terrible to bear.'

I had made a record of this petition, and then I had forgotten it. But not so our faithful God. His memory is better than mine! He did not forget, and he is now sending the answer to that prayer. Then I thought of the words, *'O fools, and slow of heart to believe.'* Here is the very thing I had asked for, brought about in a way I had not dreamed of.

What an amazing women! What an awesome God, who can take our efforts and who hears our prayers and answers them in ways we did not expect even when we had forgotten what we had prayed.

In the face of suffering Jesus is stirred – it does not leave him unmoved - he is moved with compassion.

It takes him direct conflict with the enemy who is out to steal, kill and destroy. It leads him to prayer – with loud cries and petitions he offered up prayer to the Father who had power over death.

And fourthly ...

(4) It moved him to action

In the gospel account of the raising of Lazarus there is a telling moment where Jesus asks the question ...

“Where have you laid him?” And the reply is, “Come and see.”

Jesus went to the tomb. Jesus moved to the place of sorrow.

There are other incidents in the Gospels where we see Jesus moving to be involved.

In Mark 9 when Jesus comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration – a passage we looked at recently in Luke. Jesus is confronted by the father of a boy possessed by an evil spirit that causes him to gnash his teeth and foam at the mouth and throws him to the ground or into a fire or into water to try and kill him.

Jesus looks at this says, “How long has been like this? Bring the boy to me.”

Jesus moves to the place of pain and suffering. Jesus takes the boy by the hand.

Jesus heals responds to suffering in word and action.

Last week I quoted Hebrews 12:2 ...

*For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame,
and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

For the joy of seeing people delivered from suffering and illness and diseases and the captivity of sin and destruction of sin ... Jesus went to the cross.

He invites us to do the same. To move.

He invites us to join him at the grave of Lazarus – to go with him to the places of suffering.

He invites us to join him in taking the hand of the boy plagued and almost destroyed by the evil spirit – to reach out our hands with his to touch those in torment whose lives are being destroyed.

Suffering broke Jesus' heart. It did not leave Jesus unmoved.

It stirred him – anger welled up in his heart – this must not be.

It took him into conflict with the enemy.

It drove him to fervent prayer.

It moved him to the place of suffering.

It lead him to reach out a hand to touch the one in torment.

If we pray, Lord break our hearts with the things that break your heart, we can expect that that is where we will find ourselves too. And as you do, know that close companionship of Jesus.

Like the woman who came to see me this week who I mentioned as I began, may you know Jesus real presence with you in that moment of being broken hearted, and in your tears may you know that you are very close to him who has over come the evil one and won the victory over sin and death.

Amen.