

Pain

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Thank you for coming. I was wondering whenever I found out this was Mother's Day night that I was going to be speaking that not everybody would be here and we'd have to just meet in my office. But thank you so much for taking time out of your schedule and carving that out to come to church this evening.

Let me preface this with the topic that I want to cover is kind of a heavy topic for a Sunday night of Mother's Day but as I weaved this through, I think you'll start to see that it's actually very applicable to all of us. I'm not an expert in this. I definitely do not have the experience or knowledge to be able to delve into every aspect of pain because it comes on so many different levels and so many avenues. But I can tell you this right now, that pain is in here. Pain is in our minds. Pain is going on right now, right in this church, and it's interesting that we normally put our best clothes on to come to church and we also put on our best face and it seems to be that even those that appear to be managing life well still struggle with pain. We all have these issues when it comes to pain and we may not see it but it's real and it's there.

I guess my journey into this has been a long time coming but I want to start with an illustration that happened when we were on the senior trip. On the senior trip, we go to two different places, we go to Washington, DC because one of the purposes for why I choose this, it's the same thing every year and the kids are kind of like, "Oh, we have to do that," but the reason being is because we actually try to make it, since we're an educational institution at the Christian Academy, I want to make it educational. So we go to Washington, DC and then we actually see some amazing sights when we go to New York City. We were able to see "The Lion King" on Broadway for the cultural aspect, and we also got to go to the Statue of Liberty. Then just a few weeks ago, we visited something that we've never visited before and that was the World Trade Center Museum and right outside of the World Trade Center where they're currently building the new buildings, is a small little museum actually erected by not the survivors but the people that were possibly married to somebody or the families of those that died on 9/11. And it's completely funded by them and we as a group got to go and it's very small but it hits to the core.

One of the neat things is they show the video of it. It's interesting to see the video because it seems like, to me, it just wasn't that long ago that that took place. And the thrush of

pain that went through our country just this massive movement of pain, and you're starting to sense it and you're there and you're watching this and you're like, "Man, that was just unbelievable the amount of evil that took place there and the pain that reciprocated because of it."

Then you're seeing stories of individuals and then you're also seeing quotes of individuals and then you're looking at artifacts like twisted metal that they were able to take, 1 inch thick metal that's just morphed, just twisted. Then we came to one quote and I'm just like, "That's amazing." And this is the quote, I actually did not take a picture of it. I had to actually call back down to the girl that gave the tour to us and she was so sweet, she took a picture of it and sent it to me and this is by a man by the name of Brian Sweeney and he was a passenger on Flight 175 that went into the World Trade Center. This was a phone message he left his wife. Pretty heavy. "Hey, Jules, this is Brian. Listen, I'm on an airplane that has been hijacked. If things don't go well and they're not looking good, I want you to know that I absolutely love you. I want you to do good and have good times, the same as my parents. I'll see you when you get here. I hope you know that I totally love you. By, babe. I hope I will call you." And you can even sense kind of it's a little bit choppy and imagine, you're on a voicemail knowing that you're probably not going to survive. You're speaking to a recorder that your wife is going to hear later and you're trying to process your thoughts and that must be rough. There is pain that is out there.

Now let me read to you a couple of illustrations here. We are all a phone call away from pain. Some of us are a phone call away from finding out that our son-in-law committed adultery on our daughter. Possibly you're a teenager and you didn't get into the college you wanted. One doctor's visit for your child can render you helpless when you find out that your baby girl has cancer. The one that you married loves someone else. Miles away, you're walking through the illness of your child. You have to move away from everything that you've ever known. Your grandkids moved away from you. You don't know what to do. It could be the death of a child in the womb or without. And by the way, these are not illustrations that are out there, these are all illustrations among us that I know personally.

We live with pain. We all experience pain and I'm not talking about physical pain at some point in time. It's interesting that as I delve into this topic of pain, the more I probed in my mind that there is a God because one of the biggest crutches or the biggest platform that a lot of atheists and so forth use for why there is no God is there is pain out there. We all see pain. It's all around. There is hurting. Why is all of this happening with the tsunamis? If there is a God that can stop it, why doesn't he?

And you're like, "Brian, how is it the more you've journeyed into this, the more you've found out the more there is a God?" Well, let me put it to you this way: when you talk about the three wealthiest men that probably ever lived were probably Job, Abraham and Solomon, all writers of Scripture at one point in time. You've got doctors and lawyers and peasants and kings who have written the Scriptures. If there's no God and these reputable men of their time made up a God that's good, what's wrong with that picture? Why would anybody if there's no God make up a God that's good? It doesn't make sense. So here we're faced with and here I came to the conclusion it really just solidified more in my

mind God is there. God wants to walk through this with you. He's not there to take it away because he's building something that's bigger in your life than that moment.

One of the reasons why I wanted to address this is that we're full of pain. Someone once said that each of us are two questions away from crying. For me it's a little less than that but for most of us, two questions away from crying. Many times we live in the middle of knowing what we see and what we know of God and the reality and the pain. I think the struggle to understand with our mind that God is good in whatever circumstance is a tough tough thing to really wrap our mind around. For example, we don't, I mean, I could say most of us, if Ed McMahan, I'm not sure, is he still around? I don't know. Ed McMahan, if he came to your door with a bunch of cameras and pulled out this check, you won \$5 million, you could easily say God is good. But the policeman that comes to your door, does that mean God is good still when he brings bad news?

Our minds say that God will never leave us nor forsake us but sometimes we feel differently, don't we? Sometimes we feel differently. I want you to turn in your Bibles to John 9 and we're going to tackle this subject through this passage that I found to be so rich and so deep. When you start to study something, there are nuances to it and textures of it that I don't see when I just read over it and gloss over it.

So let's take a look here at chapter 9 and verse 1. Let me first of all, before we get into this too far, I want you to understand there are really two sources of pain in our life: one is natural occurrences, a tsunami, cancer, things that are natural; then there are others, the pain caused by another individual or possibly yourself. That can happen. Death, I would say, would fit under the first category. Those are natural occurrences unless it's happened at the hand of somebody else. So pain is real and it's normally caused by those two circumstances.

But let's take a look here at verses 1 and 2,

1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

Now, here we're faced a circumstance that pain is reality. There is no way you can get away from the fact that there is pain, okay? But in Jesus' day blindness was very well known. There were no optometrists, there was no place to go to get Lasix surgery or anything like that but blindness was very very common. You'll see sprinkled throughout the Gospels that there are going to be people that Jesus healed of their blindness but there is an assumption there that the disciples are making, that there is some connection, there is some sort of a cause and effect going on between sin or somebody else sinning and this guy's blindness. And God Almighty, who is Jesus, says, "No, no, no, that's not what's going on here. That's not what's going on here."

The blind in this day appeared to be really really hopeless and I think this is a beautiful spiritual analogy that those that are out there looking for answers to their pain is they are

hopeless. There was no social net to catch the blind. There were so many of them. They were rendered really useless in society. They couldn't carry a job. They couldn't do much. This future was bleak and he knew it. There was no Braille. There was no way to read anything. Have you ever noticed they have Braille on drive-up ATMs? I find that really scary. We are not talking about legally blind here. I don't even know what that means. Is there illegally blind? But we're not talking about legally blind. This guy could not see at all. He could not function. And do you know what? Many times pain makes us feel alone and helpless, similar to this blind man.

Pain is woven into the fabric of life. Many times pain comes from opening ourselves up to something amazing and that's one of the things that is so true to our Christian life. If we open our hearts, if we open ourselves up to others, we also open it up to them to break our hearts, don't we? So here you've got, you're caught in between. I can go through life and a lot of times we only look at marriage and kids, look at it like, "Oh, I can't wait to get married. All my problems are going to be over and I'm just going to move forward with life and things are going to be amazing." Remember this, when you open up your life to somebody else, you open it up to goodness but you also open it up to something that could be bad.

So that's why wisdom and counsel are very good when you go into situations like that but one thing is true: pain is real. It's a reality. The next thing is in verse 3, don't blame, deal. Now you see that Jesus here says,

3 Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. 4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Verse 3, some Christians actually could say that this is a conflict because God causes pain in order for him to be glorified? And actually some people interpret that verse this way. I don't. I look at it this way: this is a reality, this guy is blind, let's see God work in it. "I can do something with this," and that's how we need to look at pain and I'm telling you, pain covers a gamut here, but one of the things that's true is if you blame, it will be a cancer that crawls in your mind and will seat itself so deep in your soul that it will be almost undeniable that you can get out of that. But if you deal with it on its own merits and say, "God, what are you going to be able to do through this, through this pain?" And Jesus here is not saying, "Oh, God did this so he could be glorified." No, he's saying God can be glorified through the pain and that's what's amazing.

One thing is very true, we cannot change circumstances. The longevity and the breadth of the pain can be really really hard. Some people have been going through pain for years but God still wants to take that brokenness and make you shine as well as himself and you be a true reflection of Jesus in this.

One of the things that I think we tend to get caught up in is looking back when it comes to pain. I mean, we've all suffered loss on some level. If you have not suffered the loss of

someone close to you, you will soon. But the idea there is that many times we have regrets but I've found that the more you have regrets, the more you're going to basically in a quagmire and you're not going to go very far. But to understand that using the wisdom that God has been able to give you through the Scriptures to assess that and say, "I'm going to be a better believer because of that and my strength and my faith is going to be strengthened because of that person or because of that circumstance," and you need to move forward.

We need to be constantly asking as David did, "Is there any wicked way in me? Is there anything in me, God, that I don't even see right now that could hinder my walk, that could actually stifle my pain and encourage the pain so that it ends up to be something that holds me back instead of brings me forward into light?"

Verse 6, "When he had thus spoken," and he says this, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Which again, this is a great illustration of either Jesus was a lunatic or he was who he said he was. You don't go around saying, "I am the light of the world," and be normal. So there is some validity here. This is a great illustration of he was God.

6 When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, 7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) [John had a reason why he actually put that in there.] He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing. 8 The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? 9 Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. 10 Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? 11 He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. 12 Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

So not only do we need to know that pain is a reality and we can't get to the point where we blame, that we deal with it, but we also need to understand that God uses creation in order to do his work. Not always does God make these booming miraculous miracles to come in and show himself in your room in the middle of the night with lights and everything and tell you exactly what to do. He does use creation. He does use godly people that know the word. He uses counsel. He uses anything and the Bible even says, "If people don't cry out to me, even the rocks are."

So he uses every aspect. I do realize, though, that man, humans, are the pinnacle of his creation but here he bends over and this is even a beautiful illustration to the idea of pottery that is sprinkled throughout the Gospels as well. He spat on the ground and made clay and then he sent him to the pool of Siloam, which means sent one. Over 20 times in the Gospels Jesus is know as the Sent One so there is no accident here. This pool and you'll see a picture here, the pool of Siloam is actually, it brought water into the

tabernacle. There was nothing miraculous about the water. There was nothing miraculous about the spit. There was nothing miraculous about the clay or the dirt. The thing that was miraculous about it is that it was used. It was used. Just like you and me as creations, we are to be used to help people through their pain.

What are we doing to help people through that pain? The ancient world had very very few answers to these disabilities of blindness, and so for them, this actually kind of resonated with them because they understood that there is some sort of miraculous work that can happen because they had heard rumors of Jesus. But now they start to see something different because now they've rested in superstitions and magic for some of the things that they've seen that have not brought true healing, but this man does something and brings true healing.

You know, we try to do that too. We try to do things without God. How do we do that? Well, many people today through their pain go to things like alcohol, drugs, which are symptoms of the larger problem. I'm telling you, if you take drugs and alcohol out of these people's lives, they're just people that are not alcoholic or drug addicts that are seriously still in trouble, that don't know Jesus. It's a symptom. It's a way of dealing with it. Some people even deal with it with self-absorption. "It's all about me," and that's how they deal with their pain, or possibly through some sort of pills or medication from their doctor that's legal and we can deal with things that way.

Jesus here uses the physical element of dirt. God uses the physical element of people to help build up but if we are not clay in the Potter's hands, we're unable to add stability and true healing to what God is doing. Man must work as Jesus has to do the will of the Father to build up and to encourage. What are we doing to help build up and to encourage?

I'm going to paraphrase actually the rest of verse 13 through 34. They brought the blind man to the Pharisees. This is an interesting story. So they bring this man, this blind man that was blind that is now healed to the Pharisees. The Pharisees are like, "Oh, praise the Lord." No, they weren't like that at all. The Jews blamed Jesus number 1, for working on the Sabbath. "This can't be a man of God. He did this on the Sabbath." Many times the religious are those that we meet with adversity during times of pain. "I told you so." When people are hurting, what's our reaction? "Well, why is that? Why is that? You shouldn't be hurting. That's not a big deal." It's real to them.

The blind man's parents were called because they're like, "Well, we don't believe you. We're going to ask the blind man's parents." So they bring the blind man's parents over, what they do, "Well, have you asked him? Talk to him." So they shirk total responsibility. They don't even want to have anything to do with it because they realize if they say, yes, Jesus did heal my son, then what they would be doing is separating themselves from the synagogue, from the church. They don't want to do that but they don't realize the loyalty is not to the church, it's to Jesus, to God.

I found this really interesting because they said, "Well, we follow Moses." So it's interesting that whenever somebody dies, you can almost fabricate and manipulate what they said to really make it believe whatever you want it to believe. And it's interesting this parallel even, because the book of John starts off with Jesus is the Word. Jesus is the Logos. But then you have this interesting thing where Jesus is now faced with the consternation and the difficulty from the Pharisees because he's done something that's good and here they don't believe he should have been able to do it because it was done on the Sabbath. Do you see how the Jews could be nervous because of John 1? Because now their pretty little packaged religion, that basically they can make it say what they want and then all of a sudden a human that is living comes to them and is able to disagree with some of their religious beliefs.

Then he finds out that verses 32 and 33, I want you to read this,

32 Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. 33 If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

Nobody has ever healed anybody's blindness but this guy did. It's different. This is a great example of apologetics at work. Even in verse 34,

34 They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?

Basically the Pharisees are saying, "Who do you think you are? Sure, you may say you were healed by this man but you're teaching us?" Lack of humility.

Then it says,

And they cast him out.

They removed him from the temple. "You're gone." Then we pick up here with God is working in verse 35.

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? [He's talking to the blind man.] 36 He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? 37 And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. 38 And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. 39 And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. 40 And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? 41 Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

Many times we focus on the problem so much that we forget that walking with Jesus has the real answer to pain. And one of the keys to understanding pain is to realize what is the answer to the pain? Not the pain because a lot of times, you know, we can say, "God, why did you bring this pain?" and we really generally don't say that when it comes to something that's good that's happened. "God, why did you allow this good thing to happen to me? I don't understand." We don't generally say that. But when it's bad, we don't understand.

And here we see that Jesus is the only thing that has the answer to the pain. You can go to whatever you want out there and I'm just giving you permission now, you can go to whatever you want to figure out how to deal with pain, but the only thing that has true deep meaning is Yahweh, is God. True healing came to the blind man not when he saw physically but when he saw spiritually. Whenever you start to see that there is a grandiose picture that God is painting with brushstrokes and beautiful colors on a canvas of light, you'll start to see my little perspective of that that I'm focusing on in that pain, is so much bigger than just that pain.

It was Archbishop William Temple who said, "The longest journey in life is from the head to the heart." Now, can I do an exercise with you guys? I want to distinguish with you real quick what the difference between the head and the heart is real quick, okay? I had an individual pull into my driveway about a year and a half ago in an Audi. An Audi is a vehicle. Now, this was a vehicle not just like any other car. This is about a \$110,000-120,000 vehicle, okay? It was very nice. I'm a tall dude so not necessarily would I look the coolest in that thing. I'd have to be folded up in several areas. It was just a really small car, but the truth is, if there's something that you know and you see that I want, I'm like, "I really want that," but your head is saying, "I can't afford it now. But I want it! I don't need it." That's a good example of understanding the feelings, the seat of emotion that is involved in that moment without understanding that there's a part of you that is head knowledge that makes logical sense that you should actually listen to sometimes. And do you know what? Sometimes we actually disregard feelings. That's not always true, that's not always good. God created feelings but a lot of times we let that drive us and that's wrong. But God has created emotion, it's a good thing.

It's the difference between Psalm 22 and the difference between Psalm 23. David, a man after God's own heart says this, he says, "why hast thou forsaken me?" in the first verse of 22, and in the next chapter he says, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." So how do we synchronize this? I know God will never leave thee, nor forsake thee, but how come during that moment I wanted to know where God was? Well, let's go and take a look at the most amazing picture of pain and suffering and the beauty that was ever brought right here, the ultimate picture is what we sung about just a little while ago and that's on the cross. The pain and suffering was not the end of the story. The resurrection defines the pain and the suffering and not the pain and the suffering itself.

So it's actually the healing that can come from this, this goodness that Paul talks about that you can get from suffering. It is being made perfect through suffering, that is the good thing. God is not working in us, he is working also in others around us. James 1:3

says and the commentator put it to us: the pressure of our faith, life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. Don't rush the suffering. Don't rush it. Even Jesus wasn't, "Hey, let's just get this over with," when he went to the cross. He pleaded with the Father for the cup to pass from him and it wasn't directly because of the physical pain that he was going to go through, it was the separation from the Father that he didn't want to go through.

But the beauty of the resurrection helps seal the story and so it should in our lives. If we are going to reach our post-modern world, I'm telling you right now and this is a key for mothers and fathers and everybody here, everybody that we're interacting with, the post-modern world today is continually redefining good and evil and bad and all these different types of things but the one thing that if our – like it says in James 1 – if our faith is exposed through suffering, they're watching. They're watching you when you go through pain and suffering and do you know what they're doing? They're testing very similar to how things that are fake are tested.

I can remember Sheila Peterson when we were on the senior trip one year, she really wanted to get something nice for her dad. So we were in Battery Park coming, I think we had just got off the boat coming back from the Statue of Liberty. She saw this wonderful gentleman selling watches and so she's like, "Oh, I'm going to get him a Rolex." So she got this Rolex and I'm not kidding you, I mean, we literally left the next day to come home, it had broken before. So even being used, some things can actually be opened and their true colors can be shown.

So what is it with you? Right now it may be pretty hunky-dory in your life but if we're not walking with Jesus during the good times, when the bad times, it's going to be exposed in your life. And the one thing your children will latch onto for the rest of your life is if you are authentic. That's what the post-modern world is looking for. Everything is plastic. They are told what to like. They are told what not to like by the media, by commercials. They are told what to laugh at. Are you authentic in your Christian life? Are you authentic? May we daily walk with Jesus learning and growing so that when pain comes, it will be a place God can work, not a place that's empty and void of him.

I'm going to close actually with this quote. This quote, oh, you can't really see it that well. I'm sorry. This would be a good quote for the idea of God is working by C. S. Lewis. He once said this, "Do you know that the suffering of the innocent is less of a problem to me very often than that of the wicked? It sounds absurd but I have met so many innocent sufferers who seem to be gladly offering their pain to God in Christ as part of the atonement, so patient, so meek, even so at peace and so unselfish that we can hardly doubt that they are being as St. Paul said, 'Made perfect by suffering.' On the other hand, I have met selfish egoists in whom suffering seems to produce only resentment, hate, blasphemy and more egoism. They are the real problem."

So this Sunday, this Mother's Day, many of you mothers, pain happened when those children came to birth but what a beauty they are. God can take pain and make it good.

Let's pray.

God, you are good in the good times and in the bad. God, as we look at this subject, God, thank you for the beautiful picture of your Son hanging on the cross and the beautiful resurrection that took place three days later. Thank you for your life. Thank you that we can walk with Jesus. Thank you that this is something authentic Christianity, is something that we need to strive for, an understanding of who you are, walking in your ways, knowing your word and knowing you intimately. And God, thank you so much for this opportunity for me to speak. Thank you so much for the individuals that are here. God, I pray that it rested on some mind tonight, even if it was one, that it resonated with them and will help them to understand the truth of your word and that also to walk with you in an intimate way. God, thank you for this night. May we honor you with our lives as we go forth from here this week. In Jesus' name. Amen.

You are dismissed. Thank you.