

THE GOSPEL IN PRINCIPLE 2 REDUX

I am going to take a pastor's license tonight and take a detour from our series through the Gospel in the Beatitudes. We have been progressing through the eight principles of Celebrate Recovery, looking closely at the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ spoken to His followers at the Sermon on the Mount. We have wanted to emphasize the good news of Jesus Christ, because the more we understand the Gospel the stronger our recoveries will be.

But I have been reading a book called *How We Grow* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, and when I read their chapter titled *No Pain, No Gain*, I was convicted that I had not done justice to the 2nd Beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." I talked about mourning over our sin – this is Godly sorrow, and as we mourn over what we have done to others and to God, more than we mourn for ourselves, we sow tears that water a seed of grace leading us to repentance. This is true enough.

And I talked about how we're forgiven, so that even as we mourn over our sin, hope is stirred that indeed there is "a power that can restore us to sanity," as step 2 says. Again, this is true enough.

And we find comfort in God's word, in the midst of fellow mourners, and in the presence of the Comforter Himself. Again this is true.

But I glossed over any discussion of the pain that causes us to mourn, and the tremendous value that pain can be in our recovery and in our relationship with God. This is a true statement: **God uses our pain to heal us.**

So I want to talk about pain tonight, and how God uses pain for His great purpose in making us more and more alive in Christ and more and more dead to sin. Now we'll get to the second beatitude, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," when we talk about mourning or grief as the most useful kind of pain that God wants us to enter into. But first, I would like to talk about what we know of God, and why a good God even allows pain.

God is Sovereign Over Your Pain

Let's start with an analogy. Imagine walking down a street, turning into an alley and being approached by a man wearing a mask who stabs you in the stomach and takes all your money. You would call this a mugging.

Now imagine walking down a street, turning into a hospital where another man wearing a mask approaches you, stabs you in the stomach and takes all your money. You would call this surgery, and you would call the surgeon later to thank him.

It is the same pain. It is a similar circumstance. Many of you here tonight are in pain. The question is, "Are you being mugged, or are you being operated upon?"

And I submit that the answer starts with what you know of God. Do you understand, and do you accept that God is sovereign over your pain?

We know the story of Job in the Old Testament. God Himself describes Job as the most righteous man on earth. And yet, God permits Satan to test Job. All of Job's family is destroyed. He loses all his possessions. He is afflicted with various diseases. And in all of this, the Bible says, Job did not sin. But he does complain – he

is in serious pain! And as the story progresses, we see Job grow in his disillusionment. He is angry with God. He claims he did not deserve all that happened to him. And we readers know that he's right! He did not deserve what God allowed. Was Job being mugged or operated upon? Was he being mugged by Satan, or operated upon by God?

And then God reveals Himself to Job. He says: **40** And the LORD said to Job:

² “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
He who argues with God, let him answer it.”
And Job, very intelligently, says in effect, “I’ll sit down now and wait for my answer.” God goes on to explain just Who He is and exactly what He is capable of doing. His tone is angry, severe and firm. Finally, Job responds:

² “I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
³ ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
⁴ ‘Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.’
⁵ **I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;**

Job had obviously known who God was for his entire life. But now he **really** knew who God was. He had seen God. Principle 2 says that we “earnestly believe that God exists” – not just believe, but earnestly believe. Job now earnestly believes that God exists, and he can affirm that God is indeed sovereign over all his pain.

God tells Habbakuk, another man of God questioning God about how so much evil can exist without God doing anything about it, and God says, (2:4) “The righteous shall live by faith.” Faith is much better than sight. Faith says, “I don’t

know what you're doing, Lord, but I trust who You are. I don't know why I am in so much pain, but I trust You in my pain. I trust that You are sovereign over my pain."

Faith says that it's the surgeon stabbing you in the stomach, not the mugger.

John Calvin says, "Ignorance of Providence is the greatest of all miseries; knowledge of it is the highest happiness." Job would never understand why tragedy happened to him, but his vision of God gave him great comfort that all would be made right because God is sovereign. His vision of God proved to be his "highest happiness."

If you knew that suffering for one hour would guarantee a lifetime of joy and happiness, you would most likely agree, even thank God for that one hour. So it is with our view of God. His ways are much higher than ours. Let history finish – God is sovereign, God is good, and God will finish the good work He has started.

God Uses Pain to Get Your Attention

C.S. Lewis says that pain is God's megaphone to rouse a sleeping world. He whispers to us in our pleasure, but shouts to us in our pain. Face it – we need to be shouted at, just as Job did. Our sin natures have blinded us to what we've become to God – ungrateful, rebellious, disrespectful children. But God is greater than our sin. His plan for us will not be thwarted; no matter how much pain we have to endure. He is the Father disciplining His children for their own good. Listen to what God says through the prophet Zechariah:

⁹ And I will put this third into the fire,
 and refine them as one refines silver,
 and test them as gold is tested.
 They will call upon my name,
 and I will answer them.
 I will say, 'They are my people';

and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.' ”

First, understand from this verse that you are precious to God, just as silver and gold are precious metals. Sometimes our impurities have to be burned off, just as the impurities are melted off of the silver and gold in the fire. And notice that God's people will say, after they have been refined, "the LORD is my God." They will not say, "Why me, Lord?" They will say in effect, "Thank you for the fire that purified us and brought us back to you."

Principle 2: "Earnestly believe that God exists, and **that I matter to Him.**" Think about this – God would not use your pain to get your attention if you did not matter to Him. He is the Surgeon – the pain He inflicts is necessary for your healing. And God wants to heal you, because you matter to Him.

Now – God not only uses your pain to get your attention. He used Jesus' pain to get your attention. As the song goes, "Jesus drank the bitter cup reserved for me." He drank the cup of suffering to the dregs. Jesus gave up being God to experience a kind of pain that we'll never know. The crucifixion cross was the most brutal instrument of pain ever designed – now it is the most powerful source of healing and redemption. What Satan intended for evil God used for the salvation of all who would believe.

Yes, God uses pain to get your attention, but your pain will never be the same as the pain He inflicted on His own Son. And if the way of the Cross was the way for Jesus to go, the way of the Cross has to be the way for His disciples to go.

There is Good Pain and There is Bad Pain

At this point I want us to be clear that there is good pain and there is bad pain. Certainly the pain of a mugging is bad pain. It is senseless; it is life in a

fallen world. Bad pain often just happens. God may use even this pain – the survivor of a mugging can be used by God as an encouragement to another mugging victim.

But in the context of recovery, bad pain is pain that is not used by God to heal us. It is pain that is self-inflicted because we want to avoid the pain of God's healing process.

Bad pain is pain denied. It is us saying, "I'm fine," even as the infection rages within. You've been abused; you've been ignored; you've been cheated on; you've experienced loss. Pain denied is a broken arm that you refuse to let the doctor set.

Bad pain is pain medicated. We don't want to feel the pain and so we use a variety of ways to medicate – substances, TV, computers, pornography – you know how you medicate. The thing is, pain medicated is pain not felt, and pain not felt is absolutely useless.

Did you know that perhaps the worst thing about leprosy is that the leper cannot feel pain? He can cut himself and not know that he's bleeding (unless he sees the blood). He can stick his hand in a fire and not know it's being burned. Pain is a warning system for us designed by God. When we medicate, we shut down His warning system, to our great harm.

Bad pain is afraid. Since it may be all you know, you don't want it any other way. "I just want my life back," we say. We delude ourselves into thinking that we have a better idea of what we need than God does, and so we stay stuck with desires that are bad pain.

And bad pain says, “Why me?” Bad pain blinds you to the reality that God is sovereign over your pain and that God loves you enough to allow pain to form you just as He allowed it to form His Son Jesus.

One of the most important jobs of recovery is to move us from a place of bad pain to a place of good pain. Again, the knife wound to the stomach hurts the same, but in a mugging, you are the victim; in the operating room, the surgeon is caring for you.

The apostle Peter is a great witness to both bad pain and good pain. He wanted Jesus to avoid the pain of the Cross, an attitude that so upset Jesus that He says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan.”

He avoided the pain of aligning himself with Jesus, and so he denied Christ three times, causing much more pain, bad pain. Imagine his pain – the Son of God crucified, along with all his hopes and dreams; he had thought Jesus was the Messiah, sent to prosper all of Israel, and especially the twelve disciples. Now he was dead, and his dreams were dead along with him. Some of you here tonight have dreams that have died, causing great pain.

And imagine his guilt and shame at not even standing up with Jesus as he was beaten and spit upon. We claim to love the Lord, and yet we deny Him; we turn our back on Him as we turn to other sources of comfort. There is tremendous guilt and shame here tonight that is similar to what Peter felt.

But at some point in Peter’s pain, he remembered these words of Jesus:
³¹ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And *when* you have

turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

And when Peter remembered the words of Jesus, his bad pain was transformed into good pain. He became what Jesus predicted he would be – the leader of the early church. Satan does nothing without God’s permission, and when the Son of God is praying for you, as He is right now – right now, interceding for you – is that not an encouragement and a hope, even as you deal with your stomach wound?

Trust God as your surgeon. Picture the blood on the surgeon’s hands as not just yours but his own. His hands were pierced, and now those pierced hands are the hands caring for you, as he cuts out the infection and closes the wound.

Put to Death What God Wants to Die

Now Peter would go on to lead the church, and much of what he had to say involved suffering. We are here tonight dealing with sin, and we are here tonight dealing with pain. So hear what Peter says about both:

4:¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

Peter says that Christ died so that we might no longer live for our own passions, desires and dreams. Instead, as a child of God we can now live for God; His will becomes our greatest desire. But to get there, we must suffer in the flesh. And as we do, we cease to sin. Good pain, in other words, is pain that frees us from sin, and frees us to follow the will of God.

This is an important connection. The victim feels bad pain. It hurts, but it causes no change, and so he continues to sin – he continues to trust his will,

not God's; he continues to medicate, to feel no pain, even though God wants to use this pain to get his attention.

But when the victim says, "It hurts too much. I have to go see a surgeon," he ceases from sin. The suffering of the operation will result in healing and transformation.

So Christ suffered in the flesh to transform your bad pain to good pain. And now Peter says, we must suffer to be done with sin. As Christ was crucified, so there are parts of us that must be crucified as well:

Crucify old desires. Crucify resentments. Crucify failed relationships. Crucify destructive patterns of behaviors. Yes it hurts, but it is necessary suffering. Bad pain – the pain of resentment, addiction, judgment – and the medication of that pain are unnecessary. But the crucifixion of that part of you is necessary. It is God at work in you.

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn – Throw a Funeral

The final part of the principle 2 statement is "He has the power to help me recover." "Earnestly believe that God exists" – really believe; trust Him, even when you don't understand Him, just as Job finally did. "That I matter to Him" – never forget the pain that Jesus experienced for you; you matter to Him. And now: "He has the power to help me recover." We finally come to the beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Yes, God has the power to help you recover, and one of His most powerful tools is grief or mourning.

When a loved one dies, we throw a funeral. It is a way for us to process our grief. We cry; we laugh at good memories; we hug each other – note that

funerals are an expression of community. And, hopefully, at a Christian funeral we cry even as we rejoice in the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Now there are parts of the old you that have to die – the resentful you; the selfish you; the victim you; the medicated you – you must crucify them in order to be done with sin, as Peter says. So as you put them to death, throw a funeral party. Grieve over what has been lost; do it with others who love you; do it with the hope of a resurrected you fully in view.

Allow yourself to go through the grieving process. There will be denial that this is happening; there will be anger; but there will be, finally, submission to the will of God, acceptance of His plan for you, and then freedom – freedom from your past; freedom from your pain; and freedom to live as God always intended.

It's why Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." The pain of mourning, or grief, frees you from the sin and pain of your past, and there is no greater comfort than this knowledge.

Now this is just step 2 and principle 2. Grief is hard work. Submit yourself to God's will – that will be step 3. Face your pain and resentments – that will be steps 4 and 5. But enter the process. Move from pain that happens **to** you to pain that happens **for** you, and watch what God does with it.

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Introduction

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God is Sovereign Over Your Pain

The analogy of a mugging versus surgery: It is the same pain. It is a similar circumstance. Many of you here tonight are in pain. The question is, "Are you being mugged, or are you being operated upon?"

Job's example: He is angry with God. He claims he did not deserve all that happened to him. And we readers know that he's right! He did not deserve what God allowed. Was Job being mugged or operated upon? Was he being mugged by Satan, or operated upon by God?

And then God reveals Himself to Job. He says: **40** And the LORD said to Job:

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and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

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**5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;**

- **Earnestly** believe that God exists. Habbakuk: “The righteous shall live by faith.” Faith is better than sight. Trust you even when I don’t know what you’re doing.
- John Calvin says, “Ignorance of Providence is the greatest of all miseries; knowledge of it is the highest happiness.”
- God Uses Pain to Get Your Attention
- C.S. Lewis says that pain is God’s megaphone to rouse a sleeping world. He whispers to us in our pleasure, but shouts to us in our pain. Face it – we need to be shouted at, just as Job did. Our sin natures have blinded us to what we’ve become to God – ungrateful, rebellious, disrespectful children. But God is greater than our sin.
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- Now – God not only uses your pain to get your attention. He used Jesus’ pain to get your attention. As the song goes, “Jesus drank the bitter cup reserved for me.”
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- But in the context of recovery, bad pain is pain that is not used by God to heal us. It is pain that is self-inflicted because we want to avoid the pain of God's healing process.
- Bad pain is pain denied.
- Bad pain is pain medicated. Lepers feel no pain.
- Bad pain is afraid. Since it may be all you know, you don't want it any other way. "I just want my life back," we say.
- And bad pain says, "Why me?"
- One of the most important jobs of recovery is to move us from a place of bad pain to a place of good pain. Again, the knife wound to the stomach hurts the same, but in a mugging, you are the victim; in the operating room, the surgeon is caring for you.
- The apostle Peter is a great witness to both bad pain and good pain.
- His dreams and hopes dead. His guilt and shame alive.
- But at some point in Peter's pain, he remembered these words of Jesus:

³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And *when* you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."
- Trust God as your surgeon. Picture the blood on the surgeon's hands as not just yours but his own.
- Put to Death What God Wants to Die
- **4:**¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.
- So Christ suffered in the flesh to transform your bad pain to good pain. And now Peter says, we must suffer to be done with sin. As Christ was crucified, so there are parts of us that must be crucified as well:

- Crucify old desires. Crucify resentments. Crucify failed relationships. Crucify destructive patterns of behaviors. Yes it hurts, but it is necessary suffering. Bad pain – the pain of resentment, addiction, judgment – and the medication of that pain are unnecessary. But the crucifixion of that part of you is necessary. It is God at work in you.
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- Now there are parts of the old you that have to die – the resentful you; the selfish you; the victim you; the medicated you – you must crucify them in order to be done with sin, as Peter says. So as you put them to death, throw a funeral party. Grieve over what has been lost; do it with others who love you; do it with the hope of a resurrected you fully in view.

Allow yourself to go through the grieving process. There will be denial that this is happening; there will be anger; but there will be, finally, submission to the will of God, acceptance of His plan for you, and then freedom – freedom from your past; freedom from your pain; and freedom to live as God always intended.

- It's why Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."
- Now this is just step 2 and principle 2. Grief is hard work. Submit yourself to God's will – that will be step 3. Face your pain and resentments – that will be steps 4 and 5. But enter the process. Move from pain that happens **to** you to pain that happens **for** you, and watch what God does with it.