

HELP IN TEMPTATION AND SUFFERING

Hebrews 2:14–18

Focus Statement of Sermon: Jesus' faithfulness in suffering and death enables him to help those who are tempted and suffer.

Function Statement of Sermon: To exhort believers to trust that Jesus will help them through temptation and suffering because he too suffered and was victorious.

SCRIPT

Introduction

At the beginning of the year, I usually see people posting on their WhatsApp, Instagram, or Facebook that, "I hope this year God has not put me in his list of strongest soldiers." The story behind this statement is that the person went through hardships, suffering, pain, heartbreak, and testing in the previous year. Because of that, they are hoping that they will have a better, and even easier, experience in the new year. An experience not filled with suffering. It seems like, in our minds, suffering does not cohere with living the good life. The good life, the life God designed for us, is one where there is no suffering. We have challenged then, when we hear Jesus saying, "*You are truly flourishing when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*" Our normal translations say, "blessed are you when..." A better translation is the one I proposed above. In other words, Jesus is saying a life of true flourishing in God's kingdom involves suffering. I want to propose this morning that testing and suffering are necessary elements of walking and following Jesus. Testing and suffering prepare us for the calling God gave humanity.

Move 1

The fundamental calling for humanity is to rule and work the earth.

- The task of ruling, working, and serving on earth is royal as well as priestly.
 - In Genesis 1, God commands humans to rule, dominate, and subjugate the land he has created.
 - Ruling is what queens and kings do in their kingdoms.
 - Ruling is about maintaining order and creating an environment where life can flourish and thrive.
 - In Genesis 2, God puts the humans in the Garden so that they can keep and serve.
 - These two terms—keep and serve—are used to talk about the work of the priests later in the Tabernacle and Temple.
 - Keeping is about guarding the space so that nothing unwanted comes in.
 - The work of humans in the Garden is not just about agriculture—it is about keeping the land as God wants it to be.
 - It is about serving God as we do anything and everything that needs to be done.
 - Later in Israel's history, the Psalmist mediated on the human calling from Genesis 1.
 - In Psalm 8, the writer says, "*What are humans that you should be mindful of them? You have crowned them with glory and honour and put everything under their feet.*"
 - Here again, we meet two words that were used to describe queens and kings—glory and honour.
 - In other words, the psalmist reflects amazement that God decided to give humans part of his attributes as king.

- Out of everything that exists, even angels, God decided that humans will be the creatures that represent him on earth.
 - I don't know about you, but this is a great responsibility that I try to carry with the seriousness it deserves.
- Even though humans are given this blessing and responsibility, it has never looked like we are doing this well.
 - Right from the beginning, we read that Adam and Eve failed to subdue the serpent in the Garden.
 - To subdue is to bring something under your control.
 - It is a military term that was used when an army fights and wins against another.
 - Adam and Eve were supposed to subdue—control—the serpent... but they were subdued by it.
 - Instead of keeping/guarding the land from outside enemies, they allowed the snake to have dominion over them.
 - They were supposed to keep the Garden... after their failure, God places two angels at the entrance of the Garden to keep them from entering the Garden.
 - The history of humanity is a history of trying and failing to rule, keep, and serve the land in the way God desires.
 - Even today, we are still failing to do this.
 - Part of the reason is because it was God's design that *ruling, working, and serving would fully happen through testing*.
 - It was going to be through being tested that we were going to demonstrate our ability to do what God wanted.
 - It is when we successfully pass the temptations and sufferings they bring through trusting God that we truly do what God wants.
 - Adam and Eve trusted what their eyes saw.
 - Abraham and Sarah trusted their ability to produce a child through their means.
 - Solomon trusted chariots and armies.
 - And the list goes on and on...
 - And the list will continue until we can learn that...

God has been trying to teach us is that doing what he wants only happens when we trust him instead of ourselves.

Move 2

The Bible story is a story that is looking for the true human who will do what God wants and lead others to do likewise.

- Sin does not stop or change God's purpose... It only delays it.
 - The disobedience of Adam and Eve did not stop or change God's will.
 - God still wants people to rule, keep, and serve in the land God has created.
 - God still wants his people to live with the glory and honour he has given to them.
- Even though we continue to fail and make a mess of things, God's purpose for his creation still stand.
- Israel's kings were supposed to be those who demonstrate total trust in God.
 - As we said that ruling is what queens and kings do, the kings were rightly placed to show what true ruling means.
 - They were supposed to live and lead the nation to total obedience to God.

- Sometimes they did this well... and other times they failed.
- Israel's hopes were always for a king who will lead them in obedience to God.
- Israel looked forward to the day when God would send his appointed king... one who will show total trust in him and lead others to that.
- Those hopes were fulfilled in Jesus.
- It is Jesus who became the long-awaited king.
- The one who showed us what it means to rule in the way God wants us to live—fully trusting him.
- Jesus became us... so that we can become him.

Verse 14 says *"he shared in their humanity."*

- In sharing in our humanity, he went through what we go through.
 - He was tested just as we are tested.
 - He faced the greatest temptation we face every day—*will I trust God or I will trust myself?*
 - The Bible shows that Jesus consistently chose to trust God at every step of his life.
 - Even when the desire to trust himself was there, he still chose to submit his desires to God.
 - In living a life of total obedience, he was living our life before God.
 - He stood as our representative before God.
 - Even to the point of death.
 - He shared in everything that we humans go through.
 - There are times when we think our circumstances are unique only to us.
 - Times when we think even Jesus would not understand.
 - Times when we rationalize our disobedient decisions because we think Jesus does not relate.
 - But... Jesus has faced the greatest test we can ever face—death!
 - If he faced death and was tempted to escape but chose obedience... then there is no temptation or suffering he cannot relate to.
- Suffering and death were the tests needed for him to receive the greatest glory and honour.
 - In verse 9, the writer says Jesus has been *"crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death."*
 - It was through suffering and death that he was given glory and honour.
 - The test of whether to trust God or oneself that faced Adam and Eve at the beginning...
 - The test that Abraham and Sarah faced...
 - The test that Solomon faced...
 - The test that we face ever day...
 - Jesus faced it... and chose trusting God.
 - Jesus became the king we should have become... the king we must be every day.
 - He became a king who trusted God even through suffering.
 - A king who chose obedience over self-preservation.
 - A king who chose obedience over convenience.
 - A king who chose obedience in order to save many instead of comfort in order to save himself.

Move 3

It is because Jesus suffered that we can trust him to help us when we suffer and are tempted.

- We can trust him because he became like us—he knows our journey because he walked it.

- Even though suffering is unpleasant, we must also realise that suffering is what enables us to become better for those around us.
- The writer says, *“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”*
 - A person who has suffered has a different life outlook from one who hasn’t.
 - A person who has suffered engages life differently from the one who hasn’t.
 - A person who has suffered speaks differently from the one who hasn’t.
- Suffering has the ability to teach you much more than what success can.
- Suffering is the birthing place of grace, mercy, humility, and solidarity.
 - One of the teachers and ministers in the Churches of Christ in America, John Mark Hicks, recently wrote this in his Facebook timeline, *“Tragedy has taught me humility, and it has formed mercy within me for others. Over a long period of time, it gave birth to a new me.”*
 - Those who have suffered are able to see the suffering of others and stand with them.
 - Those who have suffered have a bigger heart to help because they know what others are going through.
- It is because Jesus suffered death that he is able to help us.
- Who would you rather trust: yourself (who hasn’t gone through the suffering, pain, heartbreak, or temptation you are going through) or Jesus (who has endured the greatest suffering and temptation and won)?
- Would you rather follow yourself through a path you haven’t walked before or choose to follow the one who has walked ahead of you?

Conclusion

- This letter was written to a community of believers who were undergoing persecution, social isolation, loss of property, and other forms of suffering.
 - Some of them had stopped observing weekly gatherings.
 - Some were on the brink of leaving the faith.
- This letter was written as an exhortation to them to look to Jesus because he went through suffering, persecution, and death... yet remained faithful.
- That is my message of exhortation to you today...
 - Look to the one who has walked before.
 - Place your trust on him because he is able to help you.
- Remember that temptation, suffering, and pain are not your enemies.
 - They are tools in God’s hands to sharpen you.
 - They are meant to teach you to trust God.
 - They are meant to teach you that it is only with God that you can become what you must become.
- In your season of temptation and suffering, who will you trust—yourself or God?