

# Podcast Companion

## The Problem of Evil & Suffering

In today's session of the podcast we looked at starting our study on the problem of suffering and evil, but we started off with the most important thing in every instance – Jesus. It's all about Jesus. Now, we've covered a lot of what was covered in this episode in the previous sessions on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, so there's not much more to say here.

This companion will be more of a transcription of the podcast as it covers a lot and has loads of bible verses for you to meditate on and learn.

At the end, I'll throw some resources in there for you, should you want more.

What do we do about suffering and evil in the world? How do we as Christians respond to the idea that a perfectly good, totally powerful God created a world in which there is so much suffering?

In the following weeks, we're going to take a deep dive into this issue and begin to work out what the Bible says about this, how God's character relates to suffering, and a defence to the existence of suffering and evil.

Before we do this, however, we're going to take a step back and look at Jesus.

Why, you might ask? Because it's all about Jesus. All of the time, all of the ways, it's all about Jesus. But with regard to suffering, when we look at suffering we need to know that, not only does God have reason to permit suffering, which we'll look at in future, but that God also has suffered alongside us.

In this session, before we jump into loving God with our mind, stay in intellectual high gear, we're going to practice loving God with all our heart.

In this COVID-19 pandemic, whilst people are scared, suffering and fearing for their lives, let's find where God is, and we can find out where He is through the works and person of Jesus Christ.

We've recently celebrated Easter, considered Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and looked at Jesus' suffering. Let's review some more amazing truths from the Easter story.

### Jesus' Suffering

This week, we're going to focus on the suffering Jesus went through for you, and how this gives us hope, solace and comfort in this pandemic.

Firstly, let's review how Jesus suffered – he suffered physically, mentally, spiritually and financially. Let's explore these, but first let's consider Jesus prior to this point.

When the universe was created, who was there? Jesus.

When Adam and Eve sinned, who was there and aware? Jesus.

When sin became a reality, God had 2 choices to make – the first option was to just throw His hands up, turn His back and walk away. He could have left the whole thing alone, just call it a night and chalk one up to a mistake. He could have simply retreated away from sin, away from hatred, away

from suffering, back to His place of eternal glory, happiness and peace. Instead, what God chose to do, His second option, was to enter into the world, add humanity to His divinity, and suffer for us. Because He loves us.

## Jesus loved us so much He chose to take on the troubles we would suffer, times them by a million... and endure them.

Imagine being faced with that choice! If someone said to you, right now, “hey, I can take you away from all this suffering and pain and send you to an eternal paradise where you will never be unhappy. Do you fancy it?” how would you reply? I know what I’d say! “Can I bring the wife and kids?”

It wouldn’t even be up for debate!

But not Jesus – He gave up His eternal glory, seated on a throne at the right hand of God, with angels singing “glory, glory, hosanna in the highest”... to be born in a stable, grow up poor, work his hands to the bone with His dad swinging a hammer, essentially wander the country homeless with a bunch of guys who, it turns out, aren’t great friends, be falsely accused, be beaten, be humiliated, be shamed, and be murdered in the most brutal way possible.

Jesus loved you and me so much He chose to take on the troubles we would suffer, times them by, like, a million, and endure them... for us.

Now, with that set in place, let’s review Jesus’ suffering.

### Jesus suffered financially

This will be the shortest of the sub-headings!

Right now, we’re seeing employed people losing their jobs, being furloughed, self-employed people not having work from which to earn, eating through their savings in order to survive.

But how can Jesus relate to this?

Well, as I said, He spent His life either living in a poor rural family or broke wandering around the wilderness with His similarly broke friends.

Beyond that, He had a friend in His group who was the bookkeeper – Judas Iscariot. Now, we all know Judas for another reason, but did you know He was also stealing from Jesus?

In John 12:6 we read, of Judas, *“He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it”*.

The man was a thief. Do you think Jesus knew He was doing this? I would imagine so!

Throughout His ministry, His meagre income from people giving Him money for food to survive was subject to Judas creaming off the top.

This was before Judas betrayed Him to His enemies, by the way.

Jesus knows what it’s like to be broke, to be scared, to have no home, and to be stolen from.

### Jesus suffered mentally

So, while we are going through the current pandemic, it's worth considering how people are suffering mentally.

There are so many people worried about their family members – elderly grandparents, sick relatives who are in hospitals, people who are lonely because they're isolated on their own or can't get out to get food.

There are people who are anxious about their futures – not sure if they will keep their jobs, not sure if their company will survive, scared their mortgage won't be paid, not sure if their university will still accept them.

There's more but I won't go through it all, but suffice to say people are suffering, and you might be too, but there's good news – Jesus knows how you feel and can minister to you.

**We can be encouraged by the fact that the  
mighty God of Heaven knows how you feel and  
has assured your eternal happiness.**

Whilst in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was *“deeply grieved, to the point of death”* (Matthew 26:38), and he was so stressed he sweat blood (Luke 22:44). This sweating blood sounds like fantasy, or metaphor, but it is a very real, though rare, phenomenon known as hematidrosis.

On GotQuestions we read *“Hematidrosis is a rare, but very real, medical condition where one's sweat will contain blood. The sweat glands are surrounded by tiny blood vessels. These vessels can constrict and then dilate to the point of rupture where the blood will then effuse into the sweat glands. Its cause—extreme anguish.”*

This is mental anguish to the greatest extent. This is the greatest mental suffering a person can endure.

When we consider our own mental suffering, the stress and worry we might be feeling, we can be encouraged by the fact that Jesus has been there. That the mighty God of Heaven and Earth knows how you feel and has assured your eternal happiness even if this current patch is rough.

### Jesus suffered physically

Obviously, people right now are suffering physically.

COVID-19 is a physical ailment, it's a virus. It causes a high fever and a dry cough, which can unfortunately lead to death. Aside from that, people are suffering from a lack of food, personal care products, medicines, or even being stuck in a house without food or with abusive family.

The whole world is suffering physically, but I would argue no one is suffering like Jesus suffered.

Let's consider some of Jesus' suffering –

- The bible records simply that *“Jesus was scourged”* (John 19:1), but scourging is rough. The implement used to scourge someone was a handle with several leather straps coming from it. Along these leather straps are metal balls or stones, designed to tenderise flesh. At the end of the straps were hooks, designed to hook into the tenderised flesh. People would then take turns ripping them out, taking the skin off the person's body. History outside of the

bible records that sometimes a man's rib would come flying out with the hooks. Many people didn't survive this.

- When Jesus fell with His crossbar on His back, given the weight of the crossbar, doctors have compared this level of trauma to a head on collision in a car, with no seatbelt, your chest hitting the steering wheel, at 40mph. When that happens, internal bleeding begins immediately, and without constant and immediate medical attention the person will slowly die from that damage alone.
- Jesus, the carpenter who spent years hammering nails into wood, then has nails driven through the most sensitive nerve centres in the body – the wrists and feet – and is attached to a cross. This cross is then raised and dropped, hard, into a hole in the ground. Crucifixion had been around for a while by this point, the Persians having invented it hundreds of years previously, but the Romans really perfected it by adding the cross bar. The cross bar meant that most people actually died of asphyxiation (not having enough oxygen to live), because when they slumped on the cross they could no longer breathe. In order to breathe, the crucified person would need to push down on their nailed feet, gulp a few breaths, then slump down again. People did this for so long (sometimes as long as 9 days) that soldiers would eventually break the legs of the person to hasten their demise. To be clear, this whole process is *so painful* that they had to invent a word to describe it – excruciating. That literally means 'of the cross', because that's the only place you can be in that much pain.

Jesus eventually died on the cross, with His side being pierced by a Roman soldier's spear under His ribcage and releasing blood and water from His heart.

When we say that Jesus suffered physically, we can be sure that He suffered more than we can ever imagine, and He did so out of love. Love for me, and love for you.

The Bible says in Isaiah 53:5 *"but he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed"*.

There may be pain and sickness now, but there is healing for me and healing for you. The cross was the source of the most physical pain a person can endure, but Jesus endured it so that we could be eternally healed, He endured it for me and for you.

There is no pain, no suffering and no sickness in eternity. Whether we suffer now or suffer later, one day the suffering will come to an end and we will be greeted by Jesus – "well done, my good and faithful servant". He will wipe every tear from our eye and suffering will be over, death has lost its sting.

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## Jesus suffered spiritually

This is our last section today, how Jesus suffered spiritually.

Many people suffer spiritually, much of it a constant battle against sin and its effects on our lives, or quite literally a spiritual battle with enemies unseen. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 6:12 – *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”*.

Elsewhere in the Bible we hear that the devil is like a roaring lion waiting to devour us (1Peter 5:8). Luckily, we have the Lion of Judah on our side – and there is no greater lion in the pack than Him (Revelation 5:5).

Right now, people are hurting spiritually – they’re hurt by the circumstances, they’re struggling to see where God is in this, they may even be walking away from God as they see no way out of the pain and suffering we’re all experiencing. God may seem distant or worse, uncaring.

Jesus knows how you feel, and worse.

When Jesus hung on the cross he uttered the words *“eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani”* which means *“my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Mark 15:34). In that moment, Jesus is crying out to His father, who has turned His back on Him.

When Jesus was on the cross, He who knew no sin *became* sin, so that the wrath of God could be poured out on Him. Why? So that the love of God could be poured out on us.

Jesus did away with wrath and condemnation, taking our place on the cross to suffer the punishment you and I rightly deserve.

Jesus, eternal God who had been in communion and communication with the Father and the Spirit for eternity past as part of the Trinity, lost His connection with the Father, as He was cut off and sin was cast onto Him.

This is the ultimate expression of love. This is the love that changed the universe. This is the love that changed the entire course of human history – without this love we are lost forever, irreconcilable to God.

Revelation 1:5 puts it this way – *“and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood”*.

We can be confident that our suffering is not only something that God can use, but also something that God, in the person of Jesus, has also suffered and understands.

At the last, when the spear punctured Jesus’ side, He died of a spiritual, emotional and physical broken heart.

For you, and for me.

Thankfully, the darkest day in human history turned out to be the greatest win for us! The biggest let down in history resulted in the greatest comeback in history! When Jesus uttered the words *“it is finished”* on the cross, He was declaring victory! Victory over Satan, sin and death for everyone who believes and calls Him *kyrgios*, Lord.

Jesus left the tomb on Easter Sunday in a perfect resurrection body, free from pain, suffering, sickness and brokenness.

This is the promise of our future! This is the hope we have awaiting us! One day we will be in our resurrection bodies, joyful and perfect in the presence of the glorified Christ who gave it all up so that we could be free!

So, Jesus has suffered for us, so that our suffering can be used and not be in vain! We are assured of eternal salvation and by His stripes we **will** be healed.

**We can be confident that our suffering is not only something that God can use, but also something that God, in the person of Jesus, has suffered and understands.**

Our question of the week, however, is this – how does Christ’s suffering comfort me in my own suffering?

Now, let’s look at some resources you may find helpful:

- The book *‘Suffering’* by Alister McGrath is a resource I quite enjoyed using throughout my study for this series. If you can find it then I would recommend it as a really good read! You can probably pick it up on amazon or in a charity shop for like 50p
- [This short Zangmeister video](#) detailing the intellectual argument we will be looking at in the coming weeks
- [This wonderful answer](#) to who is responsible for evil by Ravi Zacharias

And that will about do it for this companion piece!

Hopefully you find this podcast session helpful, move you toward learning to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and help you put suffering into perspective at the cross of Jesus.

Speak to you all again next week!