

Revelation #39 – PAIN serves a Godly purpose: the lesson of the Leper

How many of us have asked God, “*Why is there so much evil and pain in the world? Why does He allow so much suffering?*” Most of us don’t feel He gives us a clear or reasonable answer, other than that we are evil, and we deserve it somehow! But is that really the truth? Is it possible that God created **pain** to serve a **GOOD** purpose? (I am not addressing the question of *good and evil*, which I will talk about in a future chapter, but of the true nature of pain in our world.)

“*How ridiculous!*” you might think! How can pain EVER be good? We live in a very pain-averse society. We work incredibly hard and spend a lot of energy and money to AVOID pain, at all costs!! Physical, emotional, relational, it doesn’t matter! Look at the current opioid crisis and other numerous addiction crises in our country! And who do we BLAME for all this pain? GOD, of course!! It’s all His fault. He’s a BIG God, why doesn’t He stop it? It’s one of those hard realities that we are supposed to accept, but we don’t! Scott Peck, in his book, The Road Less Traveled, starts with the line, “*Life is hard! The sooner you accept it, the easier it will be.*”

I believe God has more for us to understand before making such judgments. Let’s look at the story of the leper. In the days of the Bible, anyone with leprosy had to announce themselves as “*unclean*” so that others would know to get away from them and not catch their disease, or to be tainted by them. There was tremendous fear of those with this affliction. Those carrying the disease were shunned and seen as outcasts.

One might think the greatest problem for the leper would be the shame and rejection of becoming an ‘*untouchable*’, a pariah and an outcast. As daunting and hurtful as that would be, the most-deadly aspect of this disease is the LOSS of pain, the inability to feel or know when they had hurt themselves. Ultimately, this LACK of feeling would lead to an unknown wound or infection that would end up in gain-green and the loss of limbs, and eventually losing one’s own life.

It was a missionary doctor in Africa who was working in a Leper colony who first realized that the greatest difficulty of their affliction was not the disease itself but the ABSENCE of pain that kept the patient from recognizing when something was wrong! He realized that without pain to tell them this most vital information, they continued to hurt themselves unknowingly!

God created pain, like certain other difficult emotions and circumstances, to be early warning signs that something is wrong and needs to be adjusted. If these signals are ignored, then something bad might happen! “*Danger! Danger!*”, it is saying. “*Stop! Take a look! Take notice! Something is wrong and needs to be adjusted!*” Without this early warning system, our life can be in grave danger! And we spend SO much money and energy trying to turn OFF this system!!

Let me give you an example. If you and I went on a five-mile hike, after a while our feet might get a little sore, so we would adjust our feet. We’d walk on the side of our foot, walk on the other side, on the front or the back or we’d move our foot around. Pain tells us ‘*something’s wrong, something’s wrong! You’re getting a blister there; move a little bit. Ok, that’s better, Ok, you’re good; move again*’. And we adjust because pain tells us something’s wrong! If you were a leper, you would walk exactly the same way for five miles. You wouldn’t make any adjustments at all! You know what would happen at the end of five miles? When you had finished that five-

mile walk, there would literally be a hole where the bone had pounded right through the flesh, and you wouldn't even have realized it!

When we look at peoples' pain, especially emotional pain, we try to help them realize it is important to honor and validate the pain and to see what's causing it. Some people feel if they just deny it, somehow it will miraculously disappear! Many of us have been told, "*Buck it up! Get over it! You've just got to get on with life! Forget it all and pretend it never existed.*" Does that work? I liken it to having a scab over a wound. Just because I don't feel the intensity of it, doesn't mean that all the toxin has been cleaned out of it! It is important to realize they still may carry pain of unhealed wounds, even if they have gotten good at medicating it!

What causes our pain? Is it a trauma that is unhealed or unresolved? Is it a wound or betrayal that I need to forgive? Is it a lie I've come to believe about myself or someone else that is keeping me stuck in that painful experience? (A lie can keep pain alive forever, even if it has been decades since the wound or offense!) Is it a loss or grief that I just can't let go of, and now has turned into bitterness and resentment? Being willing to look at our pain and to ask God what is keeping that pain alive is one of the true keys to being healed and set free from its' grasp.

Pain needs to serve its purpose before His healing can be complete in us. If we medicate the pain, if we numb the pain, if we avoid the pain, we can't get in touch with what is really wrong! There are many things in our life that have caused us great pain and sorrow. And God wants them ALL to serve His Good purpose

In the Scripture, it says, "*Consider it pure joy when you encounter various trials.*" "*For the joy set before Him, Christ endured the cross.*" Is God just kind of weird that He would often say joy and pain come together? Joy and pain serve a purpose when it's the right recipe to help us see the bigger picture: not pain for pain sake but pain to get me to a place of healing, moving us to a place of glory, moving us to a place of healing and not brokenness.

"*No pain, no gain!*" A phrase we have often heard and often resent! But is that the ONLY way? Surely there is something better? We work with a lot of people with trauma; and we have found that the healing is NOT complete until they can see the whole story. A few years back, we were working with a man who was molested as a boy in a public restroom. He couldn't even go into the scene because it was such a nightmare. But as God brought healing to his heart, he was able to revisit the scene, to see the whole story for what it was, and for there to be no more pain in it! God removed that pain when Jesus came into the memory and healed the shock and trauma, along with all the shame and fear! THAT is why we are willing to do this ministry, to walk with broken people into broken places and see the Glory of the Lord finish His work of healing!

One of the reminders we leave our receivers with is to let God decide what HE wants to heal and work on in any given moment. We don't need to go looking for the pain or hurtful memory. But if HE is stirring it up, it may be Him tapping us on the shoulder and saying, "*It's time*

little one. I have more healing for you. Are you ready to let me heal you? Are you willing?" Jesus will never take us anywhere we aren't ready for. And He **always** asks for our permission to heal the painful places in our hearts! Trust Him! When He say to Jump, GO for it! You will never regret it. Always know that HE will finish the good work He has begun in you! What a pleasure to love and serve alongside Him on this journey! Blessings, Brian