

EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN LIFE IS NOT ABOUT YOU

I WANT TO BEGIN by taking a look at one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. Sadly, this verse has been completely misinterpreted in our age of me-centric Christianity. Our culture has taught us to think that “it's all about me”, and that pagan attitude has damaged our ability to understand the Bible.

The verse that I want to discuss is this one:

Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

When the modern generation reads that verse they interpret it like this: “All of the trials that I will face in my life are just the road that I have to take to get to a better life. I may be going through a rough spot now, but on the other side of this trial my life is going to be a lot better.” From the perspective of the pagan modern church, the verse might as well read like this: “And we know that all things work together for my personal benefit, so that my life on Earth might be made richer and more comfortable.”

But is that really true? Is that actually what that verse means? I think the answer is a resounding *no*. In our fervent

desire to make everything about ourselves, the true meaning of this verse has become lost. The truth of the matter is quite different.

When people think of this verse they tend to think of two examples: Joseph and Job. Joseph, as you may recall, was sold into slavery by his brothers. Eventually that led to a series of circumstances that put him in charge of Egypt. Joseph went from being sold as a slave and put in prison to being second in command over an entire country. In other words, he went from being an impoverished prisoner to being royalty.

Job's case is a little different, but his story ends in a similar way. Job went through some terrible trials: he lost his wealth, his family, and his health. However, after the trial was over Job got everything back and became an even greater man than he was before. The trials of Job and Joseph led to great personal enrichment and wealth – which enforces the modern interpretation of Romans 8:28.

But does that really happen *every single time*? Do *all* trials end in fame, fortune, and personal enrichment? Do all trials result in a better and more comfortable life? Well, let's take a look at a few other famous Biblical characters and see what we find.

THE SUFFERING SAINTS

In the Old Testament there was a prophet by the name of Ezekiel. He was a righteous and faithful man, and he served the Lord all his life. When the Lord gave him a message he delivered it, and when the Lord gave him a command he obeyed.

There came a time when Ezekiel was faced with a great trial. God told him that He was going to kill Ezekiel's wife (whom he loved very much), and He commanded Ezekiel not to mourn

over her death:

Ezekiel 24:15: “Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

16 Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.

17 Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.

18 So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.”

The reason God did this was to warn the Israelites that a terrible judgment was coming. Ezekiel's actions were a graphic and potent sign of what was going to happen to the nation if they did not turn from their sins and repent. This trial was very difficult and painful for Ezekiel, but that was the entire point:

Ezekiel 24:21: “Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword.

22 And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men.

23 And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another.

24 Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to

all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord God.”

So, after this trial was over, did Ezekiel get his wife back? No. Did God give him another wife? No. Did Ezekiel's life improve now that his wife was gone? No. The reason God did this was not to improve *Ezekiel's* life, but to warn the nation that if they did not repent God would send a terrible judgment upon them. God did this for the benefit of *the nation*, not for the benefit of Ezekiel.

Another example of someone who suffered greatly is the apostle Paul. During the course of his ministry he experienced many trials and hardships:

2 Corinthians 11:24: “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”

That is some pretty severe torment! So did these sufferings enrich Paul's life? Did they lead to fame and fortune? Was his life improved by the beatings and imprisonments that he received? Not exactly. The apostle tells us that all of these things actually happened for a very different reason – to *further the spreading of the gospel*:

Philippians 1:12: “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;

14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

According to Paul himself, the many trials that he faced were not for *his* benefit but were to further the gospel. Likewise, Ezekiel's trials were not for his benefit but were to warn the nation of Israel to repent.

Which brings us back to Joseph. According to Joseph himself, the reason all those terrible things happened to him was *not* so that he could one day be royalty and live a fabulous life. No, the reason they happened is so that God could save the lives of many other people:

Genesis 50:19: “And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”

Why did God afflict Joseph? He did it to save the lives of his family – *the very same people who hated him*, persecuted him, and sold him into slavery. God put Joseph through a terrible ordeal in order to save people *who once plotted to kill him* (Genesis 37:20). It wasn't about Joseph at all.

We can find something similar in the story of Job. One of the things that people tend to overlook is that Job is not the only person in the story who suffered. In fact, a lot of people lost their lives:

Job 1:14: “And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them:

15 And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

16 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

17 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

18 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

19 And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.”

When God tested Job's faith He allowed Satan to kill Job's servants and children. Those people didn't die for their benefit; they died so that God could test Job. In other words, all of those people died *in order to benefit someone else*.

SUFFERING: IT'S NOT ALWAYS ABOUT US

That is the key point that we miss. It is indeed true that all things work together for good for those who love God. However, we tend to forget that sometimes the good is for *someone else* and not ourselves. Ezekiel suffered in order to warn the Israelites. Paul suffered for the sake of the gospel. Joseph suffered to save the lives of many people. Job's children died so that Job could be tested. All of these things *did* work out for good – but the recipient of that good *was not the person who suffered*. Instead God allowed one person to suffer in order to enrich the life of *someone else*.

Now, I am not saying that our trials *never* result in personal blessings. There are indeed times when the trials in our life are followed by periods of blessing, and there are examples of that throughout the Bible. It is also true that when we suffer for the sake of Christ we will receive Heavenly rewards.

My point is that we tend to think that everything that happens to us is somehow about us. We think that when God sends us a trial, the next thing He will send is a great blessing that makes everything better. We overlook the many godly people who suffered and saw no reward for it:

Hebrews 11:36: “And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

A great many saints have suffered terrible things throughout history, and many of them only saw their circumstances get worse. Prophets boldly proclaimed the word of the Lord and were thrown into prison for it. Apostles preached the gospel and were executed for their faith. These people will receive Heavenly rewards, but let's be honest: when modern Christians think about Romans 8:28 that is *not* what they have in mind. We have this idea that our Earthly sufferings will be followed by Earthly blessings, and we forget the many, many people who suffered greatly and saw no such physical blessings.

The key point we need to remember is that everything that happens in life is *not always about us*. Sometimes God works through us to bless those who are around us. Sometimes God puts us through great trials so that someone else can be enriched. Sometimes we must suffer so that others can be saved – and God does not always repay earthly trials with earthly riches. I think it is unwise to believe that everything that happens to you happens for *your* temporal, earthly benefit. As we have seen, sometimes God has a very different plan in mind.