

Date: 2.4.21  
 Text: Matthew 27  
 Title: Suffering!  
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On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2012, Thomas Kelly was walking hand in hand with his girlfriend along the main street of Kings Cross. They were enjoying a night out. They were minding their own business. When out of nowhere someone he didn't know and had never met before randomly came up to him and king hit him. Just once.

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He fell to the ground. Knocked his head against the concrete foot path. And two days later the family made the painful decision to say good bye and turn off his life support.

What pain that one punch has caused on that family. One life lost. Dreams shattered. Family fractured. Evil confronted. Justice never received. And since that time they experienced a decade of suffering. A life sentence in fact. A wrong that will never be righted.

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Suffering. There is so much suffering in our world. Where ever we look it is there. It is not like Thomas Kelly is the only example I could have used to start this sermon. What about Brittany Higgins? Or Daniel Morecombe? What about those affected by the floods or the bushfires or COVID or the drought or White Island volcano? What about what is going on right now in Nigeria or North Korea or Myanmar? Our world is chock a block full of suffering. Always has been and always will be.

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And today we come to Good Friday, a day synonymous with suffering and pain and death and betrayal and injustice. And so it's a good time to look at the issue of suffering. What are the causes of suffering? What is God going to do about suffering? What does God hope to achieve through our suffering? Big questions. Massive issues. That the Bible doesn't shy away from. So, let's turn to Matthew 27 for in this passage we see

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### **1. The Causes of Suffering.**

For weaved through Matthews narrative we find four people who are suffering for one reason or another. And the first is Judas. <sup>3</sup>*"When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. <sup>4</sup>"I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."* <sup>5</sup>*So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself."*

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Judas suffers in our passage doesn't he? He is filled with remorse. He goes back to the chief priests to try and fix up the wrong that he has done. But they don't care about him at all, do they? They needed someone to betray Jesus and Judas was the guy they found willing to take the money so that Jesus would be delivered into their hands. But when Judas struggles to cope with the guilt of what he has done. That he has betrayed innocent blood. They don't care too hoots about him. That's your responsibility they say to him. It has got nothing to do with us! And so with no offer of forgiveness, no care and compassion given to him, Judas sees no other option but to end his life. So *"he went away and hanged himself."*

Judas suffers greatly. And the cause of his suffering is his own sin. He has betrayed God's one and only son. He has caused an innocent man going to his death. And it is just eating him away. His conscience is condemning him. His guilt is real. And that guilt leads to a hopelessness. And that hopelessness ultimately leads him to take his own life. Matthew 27 reminds us that some suffering is self inflicted.

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And yet there is other suffering that isn't the suffers fault at all. Skip down to verse 19.  
*<sup>19</sup> While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, **for I have suffered** a great deal today in a dream because of him."*

Pilates wife hasn't done anything to cause this suffering has she? Sure, at other times and other places she might have done things that deserve suffering but here her anguish is due to a dream. And you can't control your dreams, can you? They just come and go. They often don't seem to relate to anything that is going on or have any particular meaning at all. So here Pilates wife suffers just because she lives in a world where suffering exists.

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And a few verses later we meet Simon of Cyrene. And he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was going into Jerusalem to sacrifice his Passover lamb when he met the lamb of God that was about to be sacrificed for him. As Simon walked casually by, it was obvious to the soldiers that Jesus couldn't carry his cross any longer. And so, Simon was forced to carry Jesus' cross. All 136 kilos of it. Simon suffers that day because the evil all around him suddenly enters into his world. And there is nothing he could do about it.

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And yet in the midst of these stories of three people who are suffering we see a story of Barabbas who deserves to suffer and yet amazingly escapes all suffering. Barabbas is a thief and a murderer, someone who according to the rules of the day rightly deserves to suffer, deserves to die. And yet he gets off scot free! The crowd chooses to release Barabbas and crucify Jesus in his place. He should buy himself a lottery ticket, shouldn't he?

You see there is no justice in this world. There are plenty of people who deserve to suffer and who don't. And plenty more who don't deserve to suffer and who do. Suffering is just a part and parcel of life. You can just be in the wrong place at the wrong time. You are just a part of a mixed-up world. You are doing your own thing and wow it changes the course of your life. Yet the person next to you seems to sail through life & completely escape pain's clutches. There is no rhyme or reason. There is no magic formula. Suffering just happens.

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## 2. The man of suffering

Now do you think God understands that? Do you think that God safely tucked away in heaven knows that, can feel that, can relate to that at all? Well Good Friday says, yes, he can. Because Matthew 27 shows us that God's Son Jesus suffered terribly, tragically, unbelievably. In fact, compared to Judas suffering or Pilates wife or Simon of Cyrene's suffering Jesus suffering is not even on the same page as the others.

*<sup>27</sup> "Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. <sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and*

*then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said."*

Jesus was stripped by the guards. So, there is no dignity there. And when he goes to the cross, they take all of his clothes. You see the Romans' crucified their criminals completely naked. For all the world to see. How humiliating would that be?

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They stripped Jesus and <sup>30</sup>*"They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again."* According to verse 26 Jesus had already been flogged by the Romans. Now if you were punished by the Jews you received the forty lashes minus one but the Romans had no such restrictions. They attached small pieces of bone and metal on the end of heather thongs and gave the prisoner all they had. It reduced the prisoner to a bloody pulp and caused incredible pain and suffering.

It was all part of a process of shaming the criminal. Spitting. Stripping, striking, crucifying. This was not the punishment for Roman citizens or even for ordinary crimes. This was for the worst of the worst. The dregs. The ones you wanted to make an example of. The ones that were beneath contempt. And what made it even worse, if you were a Jew, was that Deuteronomy 21:23 said *"Anyone who is hanged on a tree is under God's curse!"*

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Jesus was hanging on a wooden cross so He was under God's curse. O the shame of being cursed by God and being slandered by all those around him. Look what the soldiers do to Jesus. *"Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. <sup>30</sup> They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again."*

Look what the crowds did. <sup>39</sup>*"Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup> and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"*

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Look what the religious leaders do. <sup>41</sup>*In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. <sup>42</sup> "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross & we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup> He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"*

Look what even the criminals do. <sup>44</sup>*"In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him."* It's a free for all. No one misses out on getting in on the act. No one. And Jesus doesn't fight back. He doesn't give an eye for an eye. He just takes it on the chin. He absorbs all the pain and suffering. Everything that is thrown at him.

As the Jewish leader's arrest, reject, accuse, judge and mock their Passover lamb. As the Romans leader's sentence and crucify the King of the Jews. As the soldiers, strip, scourge, mock, beat and spit on the Son of God. As the crowd's ridicule, revile, shout at their Messiah. And as the disciples betray, deny, disobey, scatter and desert their Good Shepherd. You think it can't get worse than that. But it does. God Himself abandons Jesus.

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<sup>45</sup>*From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. <sup>46</sup> About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My*

*God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”). God turns his back on his one and only Son. And if you think the physical suffering that Jesus endures is bad. If you think his relational and emotional suffering is beyond anything else you have seen in this life, please consider the spiritual suffering that Jesus now goes through.

The cup of God’s judgment is now passed onto him to drink. The sins of the world come upon his body. The wrath of God now descends upon him in all its fury. Shrouded by darkness and seared with pain, Jesus faces this alone. Without God’s help or strength or comfort. You see God can no longer look at his son because he is so full of sin. The righteous has now become unrighteous. The perfect one is now a sinner. And he faces this all alone.

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Martin Luther put it this way *“Our most merciful Father, seeing us to be oppressed and overwhelmed with the curse of the law (so that) we could never be delivered from it by our own power, sent his only Son in the world and laid upon him all the sins of all men, saying? Be thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer, that sinner which did eat the apple in Paradise; that thief that which hanged upon the cross and briefly, be thou the person which hath committed the sins of all men, see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them (all).”*

This was the greatest suffering the world has ever seen and none would ever surpass it. Hendrickson puts it this way. “Hell came to Calvary that day and the Saviour descended into it and bore its horrors in our place.”

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Do you get it? We worship a suffering God. We follow a suffering servant. We believe that Jesus suffering is infinitely greater than any suffering that we will ever experience, any suffering than anyone will ever experience. You see God is no absent academic who writes a book on the problem of pain. God got his hands dirty. He got involved in the muck and more of this world.

Jesus was born into a peasant family. His first bed was a feeding trough in a stable. He became a refugee almost immediately because the authorities wanted to kill him. He grew up in the despised region of Galilee, was a manual worker. He never had a home that he bought, he was never married, never had any savings. By any measure his life was a tough one. And his death was even tougher. And as Jesus hangs on the cross it looks like Jesus has lost. That evil has one. That there is no point to this suffering and probably no point to anyone’s suffering. But then in our passage we have our eyes opened and we begin to see

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### **3. The Results of His Suffering**

But no. Look back at our passage. <sup>50</sup>*“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. <sup>51</sup>At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”* Wait a second, now God has granted people access to the holy of holies. You don’t need to be a high priest, you don’t need to have a blood sacrifice, God has broken out of the temple and made himself available to all who put their trust in the lamb of God.

Forgiveness is now available through the blood of Jesus. We don’t need the sacrifices of bulls or lamb to have our sins forgiven. Jesus death has given us access to God. An all access

pass to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. The sins that have kept us from the Father have now been washed away. There is nothing that now separates us from the love of God.

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But there is more. *“The earth shook, the rocks split<sup>52</sup> and the tombs broke open.”* God is shaking the earth. God’s new age is now breaking in. The death of Christ, the sufferings of Christ now means that something new is happening. There is the offer of new life in him.

*“The earth shook, the rocks split<sup>52</sup> and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.<sup>53</sup> They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”* Jesus death is now bringing others to life! Death cannot hold them anymore. Death is no longer the strong man bullying every human being. It has been defeated. Smashed. Destroyed. Life is stronger than death. Life is available to all who put their trust in Jesus death.

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And that leads to a confession.<sup>54</sup> *“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”* It is now crystal clear who Jesus really was, he is not just a good man but the son of God. You see it is in his suffering, in his death, in his offer of forgiveness, it is in his finishing God’s work that Jesus is finally seen for who he really is. God’s son. Our Lord & Saviour. Our sacrifice. The Suffering Servant promised to us by Isaiah.

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How does the apostle creed put it? **“I believe in Jesus Christ, born of Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried”** That’s what we believe in. That’s who we can put our trust in. That’s who we can follow all our life. Jesus Christ who suffered, was crucified, dead and buried. Do you get it? Because Jesus gets it. He gets your suffering. He understands your pain. He can feel the stuff that you are going through even now.

But notice that in the apostle’s creed there is no mention of his teaching or his miracles or the calling of his disciples or sending them out to the world. Instead, the creed just talks about believing in Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary who suffered under Pontius Pilate.

You see Jesus sufferings are terribly important. In fact they are vital. They are one of the key reasons that Jesus came to the earth in the first place. Far from an afterthought they are a crucial part of God’s plan for his Son’s life. In fact in our passage we see that God’s wants to take Jesus suffering and pain & redeem them and use them to save the world.

He wants to give people access to God Himself because of Jesus suffering and death. He wants to forgive our sins because of Jesus suffering and death. He wants to offer us life after death because of Jesus suffering and death. And God also wants to take our suffering and redeem it as well. So, let’s look at my last point.

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#### 4. The Results of Our Suffering.

James 1:2-4 says, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* God is going to use those trials, that pain and suffering. He will use them to grow in your faith. It is through our suffering that God makes you and I complete.

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Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”* God is going to use your suffering to help others around you that are caught up in a world full of suffering. Your experiences are not a waste of time they can be given to God and used to help others in similar circumstances.

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In Romans 8 Paul also tells us, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* It will be worth it in the end. What you go through now cannot be compared to what you will receive in eternity. Yes what you are experiencing today is tough & difficult & at times you don’t think you can make it but God will hold onto you. He promises that in the end our sufferings will be eclipsed.

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And lastly, in Philippians 1:29 *“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”* There is a way where our sufferings bind us more tightly to Christ. Actually, Paul goes on to say in Colossians 1:24, *“Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”*

Our suffering joins us to Christ’s suffering. Friends suffering is not meaningless, God is using our pain and suffering to grow us in our faith, to help others in their faith, to look forward to the world ahead and to draw us closer and closer to Jesus.

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Do you remember that as a result of that horrendous incident with Thomas Kelly that many lives have been saved. The State government enacted legislation that meant pubs and clubs had to close earlier. It introduced one punch laws that meant in the future justice would come down heavily on those who couldn’t control their fists, even if they were under the influence of drink or drugs. And Ralph and Kathy Kelly have been wonderful advocates for victims of assault. Their work has led to less suffering for our community. But it also came at a cost. The cost of great suffering for them and their family. They suffered for our good.

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And I think that is the last lesson we can learn from Good Friday. Jesus bares the brunt of undeserved suffering in order to help us in our suffering. He is the one who can give us meaning and purpose while we suffer. He is the one who one day will end all our suffering. Because he is the one who suffered for us and continues to suffer with us. And he is the one who, if we turn to, can redeem our suffering.

But he only redeems it for those who put their hope in his suffering. If we don’t have our hope in Jesus, then our suffering has no silver lining, it is just suffering. But if we do trust him a whole new age will break in. An age of forgiveness of sins, of access to God, of resurrection to a new life and confession of faith. All those things are available to us today because Jesus suffered. He suffered on our behalf. For our sins and for our shame. To bring us life! Which might be why we call it Good Friday. It wasn’t good for Jesus but it certainly is good for us.