

## ‘Growing through pain’. (2)

A teacher gave out the 1<sup>st</sup> half of some proverbs and asked the children to finish them off which would make sense to them. This is what she got.

As you shall make your beds..... As you shall mess it up  
 It is always darkest before.....daylight savings time  
 Don't bite the hand..... that looks dirty  
 You can't teach an old dog..... New maths  
 If you lie down with dogs you will..... Stink in the morning  
 A penny saved..... is not much  
 Twos company three..... Is the musketeers  
 Children should be seen and not..... Smacked or grounded  
 If first you don't succeed..... then get new batteries  
 There is no fool like..... Aunt June

I would like you finish of this expression for me, ‘no pain, no gain’. Do you believe that? No pain, no gain. You see I really think that deep in our hearts what we want to say is ‘No pain, no problem’. Pain meets us from the moment we enter this world.

What do we call what mothers go through when they give birth? We call it labour pains. And what does that baby do the moment it is born if it is healthy? It begins to cry. And from the moment we enter this world to the moment we leave it; we deal daily with the reality of pain. But we refuse to make pain our friend and so because of our refusal it has a devastating effect on us.

Kind of like the story I heard about a woman who had a little budgie named, Polly and his cage had become kind of dirty and she wanted to clean it as quickly as possible. So she thought that she would just Hoover the bottom of his cage. She got her Hoover out and opened up the cage and she was Hoovering down the bottom when the phone rang and as she turned and she accidentally sucked Polly right up the hose. So she put the phone down, turned the Hoover off and got the little bird out. He was still alive, but covered with dust. So she ran to the bathroom and cleaned him under the water. Well, little Polly started shivering and shaking and so she got her hair dryer out and began to blow him dry. The reporter who told this story a few days later asked, ‘How is Polly doing?’ She said, ‘Well, Polly doesn't sing much anymore, she just kinds of sits there and stares.’

And I wonder if some of you have had times in your life when pain so paralysed you, it took away your song too. It could have been a divorce, it could have been the loss of a loved one or a child or a parent or a mate. It could have been a financial setback, it could have been an illness that is a part of your every day existence. Pain is going to come into your life, the question is, is it going to take away your song?

I think pain has gotten a lot of bad press, in fact, what would our view of pain be, if we let the Bible inform us? I believe a Christian views pain as an opportunity for gain. Now the difference between a person that believes the Bible and the person who doesn't believe in the Bible is typically this. If you are not a believer in God, you let your circumstances affect your belief system. In other words, what happens to me in life, determines what my beliefs are going to be.

But a Christian wants to let his belief system, what he says from God's word is true, shape, how he is going to look at his life. So when pain comes into my life as a believer, what I'm going to do is, believe against the grain. You see, the reason the unbeliever can't handle pain is because it seems to have no purpose. And there is nothing more difficult than a pain without a purpose. But the Bible says that pain can be a tool of God and He could use it for a good purpose.

I want to show you this in John chapter 11. The story about the raising of Lazarus. Mary and Martha had a brother named Lazarus, he was very sick. They sent a messenger to tell Jesus. And the messenger did. Look at verse 4+5 “When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”. Now look at the next word, ‘yet’, that might be the toughest 3-letter word in the vocabulary. He loved them ‘yet’, ‘when He heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where He was two more days’.

Now that was a tough story and there are **2 things** I want you to notice. I want you to notice that **1. God cares about people in pain**. Jesus really did love Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And when pain comes into your life the first thing that Satan wants you to think is. **'God doesn't love you anymore'**, but that isn't true. The presence of pain does not mean the absence of the love of God.

But the **2<sup>nd</sup>** thing and the hardest thing about this story to notice and accept is this. **Sometimes Christ has a goal that is so important, it is worth the prolonged agony of the people He loves**. You see He loved these 3 people and they are in agony, **'yet'**, **'He let them stay in pain a while longer.'** Mary and Martha are going through intense emotional pain, caring for a dying brother. Lazarus is in intense physical pain, his life is waving. **'Yet'**, Jesus says, **'let them stay there longer'**.

And I may not want to preach this and you may not want to hear it. But the Bible is telling us today, some things are more important to God, than a pain free existence. God could get rid of all pain **'right now'**, **'that fast'**, if He wanted too, in fact the Bible says that one day, **'He will.'** But right now, in our lifetime, He is allowing pain.

**Why did Jesus say, 'yet'?** He says in **verse 4**, **"This will bring glory to God"**. Pain can actually bring glory to God. Now that doesn't mean we need to go out and look for pain, trust me enough pain is going to find you without you having to go and look for it. But what it does mean is that when pain comes into your life. The question is not **'why'**, but **how am I going to respond?** I don't need answers, I need focus. **How in the mist of this pain can God get any glory out of this?**

Nobody wants to be there, nobody wants to enrol in pain 101 but everyone in this room is going to take that class more than once. **Are we going to pass or fail?** I believe because of what the Bible teaches me, I can see pain as an opportunity for God to get Glory, that God can take pain and use it for Gain.

Let me show you **5 ways**, which He can do that. **1. God can use pain to get your attention.**

Sometimes pain can get our attention and prompt us to rethink, the path we are on. Some people don't change when they see the light, they don't change until they feel the heat. **Do you remember for example in Luke 15, the story of a prodigal son that went off and disobeyed his dad?** He went to a far country and got involved in lots of things that were wrong and finally he ended up in a pigpen. He was experiencing **relational pain**, nobody would have anything to do with him. He was experiencing **physical pain**, he was hungry and cold. He was experiencing **spiritual pain**, because his conscience told him he was sinning against his father.

And the Bible says in **Luke 15:17**, **"Then he came to his senses"**. The pain he was going through helped get him back on a path to his father. The Bible says in **Proverbs 20:30** **"Sometimes it takes a painful experience, to make us change our ways."**

Paul had to write a real tough letter to a **church in Corinth** because of some sin in the church. And it hurt the people, and he wrote back again to them in **2 Corinthians 7:9** and says, **"I'm glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain turned you to God."** You see, God doesn't use pain to break your spirit, He uses pain to break your stubborn will. I am thankful for the pain that happened in my life, which got my attention and headed me towards God.

God can use pain to get my attention and **2. God can use pain to guide me.**

I wish there was another way, but the reality is that you cannot train without pain. **Every teacher knows that sometimes you have to use discipline and punishment to get your classes attention**. Every person who has ever been a sergeant in the forces knows when it is time for getting ready for war; you can't let others stay in bed until 9 o'clock. You have to use pain to get a soldier ready for war. Every manager knows that you don't get your players ready for competition by letting them watch T.V. all day. And every parent here knows that discipline is necessary to produce a character filled child.

The Bible says in **Psalms 119:71** **"The punishment you gave me, was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws."** Hebrews 12:7 says, **"Let God train you, for he's doing what any loving father does for his children."** Who ever heard of a son that was never corrected?

I really need you to understand this point this morning. Now, God loves you, God loves every one of you deeply, God deeply loves His children. And I want you to remember that, but I want you to remember something else, God hates sin more than He hates pain and I do too.

If Roxanne starts to lie a lot, I am going to discipline her. I don't love to do it, I don't delight in punishing my children. But I know the long-term consequences of a dishonest character are much more serious and so I don't love to punish my children but I hate sin, more than I hate pain. And God does too.

In her book, 'Miracles of courage', Monica Dickens tells the amazing story of a little boy named David. When he was 2 years old they found out David had Liceamea. Took him to Massatushish hospital because there is a doctor there named Doctor Truman who is a specialist in childhood blood diseases. And for the next many months David had countless clinic visits and drugs, all the things that have to do with liceamea. But they said, the amazing thing about this little boy is that every time he went to the doctor's office, even though he knew he was in for another round of shots and pin pricks, he would smile. He would smile and go right into the office.

But then when he was 3, they explained that David needed a spinal tap and it is going to hurt. And so she sat down and she did her best to explain. And she said, 'Now David, Doctor Truman is going to do something that is going to hurt a whole lot, but he loves you and that's why he's got to do this, to make you better.' Monica says, it took 3 nurses to hold him down, as he yelled and screamed the whole test. Then the amazing thing is that when they were through and this little boy is covered in sweat and tears, he looked up and said, 'Thank you doctor Tuman for hurting me'. Now, as hard as it is to believe, I know that some people have said, 'Thank you God for hurting me because you saved my life.'

God can use pain to guide us and then 3. God can use pain to gage us.

Pain exposes the real you, when you are upset, people will know what is really inside you. Now that is true, it's when you are upset, that we find out what's really inside a person. That's why the Bible says in James 1:2+3 "You consider it a shear gift friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides, you know that under pressure your faith life is forced into the open, and it shows its true colours." God will use pain to show you what your faith is really like because you need to know.

Deuteronomy 8:2 says, "Do you remember how the Lord led you through the wilderness almost 40 years, humbling you and testing you, to find out how you would respond and whether or not you would really obey him." You see, it's through painful experiences, that my commitment to God is revealed. It's easy for me to be committed to God when I have nothing but one blessing after another to enjoy, but in the midst of pain, my faith life is really exposed.

Do I really love God with all my heart and soul and strength? That's why God said in Isaiah 48:10 "I've tested you in the furnace of affliction". In tough times, we find out the things in our life that needs to be burned off. In tough times, we find out, do I have a problem with my temper? Do I have a problem with greed? Do I have a problem with bitterness, and anger at people? It is in hard times that God says, 'Here are the things in your life that need to be removed.'

By the way do you know what He did to Jesus? The Bible says in the Book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 5:8, the writer says that "Jesus although he was a Son, learned obedience from what He suffered." Now that doesn't mean that Jesus used to be disobedient, and had to be trained better, Jesus never sinned. But, what it does mean is, that Jesus loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength was proven by suffering. It was in the context of suffering that Jesus showed He was an obedient Son. It is when you are in pain that you find out if you are really faithful to God. So God can use pain to bless you by showing your faith and by using it to gage you.

And 4. God can use pain to guard me.

Pain can be a protective warning. There has been times when you were a child and touched the cooker, it was hot and so you pulled your hand back. And that pain actually warned you and protected you from a serious burn. God could do that in your spiritual life too. Pain can be great blessing, if it protects and guards you from a terrible evil or sin.

Let me show you this in the Bible.

**2 Corinthians 12** Paul was a blessed man; God had given him incredible insight into mysteries and eternal truths. So he says in **verses 7-10** “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelation, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Now that is a very difficult text, Paul says, ‘I am in physical pain, and Satan is doing it to me, but God is letting him do it.’ ‘I asked God to take the pain away and God has said, ‘No’. Why? What is God letting this happen for? Look at the 1<sup>st</sup> few words again in **verse 7**. “To keep me from becoming conceited”. God was doing preventive maintenance. God was saying, ‘Paul, I am going to allow some pain into your life, to teach you, not to depend on yourself but to depend on me.’ ‘The pain in your life actually guards you from pride and keeps you leaning on me.’

Sometimes God does that to me, to stop me from becoming proud. But I’m trying to learn that pain is something that God does **for** me and not something that God does **to** me. And there are some people in this room, who can tell you that they have learned to boast in their weakness. Because when they are weak, they feel the power of God, more than any time in their life. And pain guards them.

And finally **5. God can use pain to grow me.**

I remember when I was just a little boy and one day I said to my mum, ‘Mum, my legs hurt, they have been hurting all day’. My mum rubbed some kind of cream on my legs and said, ‘Michael, you’re having growing pains.’ And she told me that ‘even though it didn’t feel good, this was part of what it means to grow’. The pain is the cost of growth.

Are you going to let God bring into your life the kinds of things that can make you strong and make you grow? Or are you going to fight God and get bitter? Have you ever seen someone working at the wheel, and she’ll work with that clay, and suddenly she’ll take it and mash it back down and she’ll pull it back up? Why is she putting pressure on that clay? She’s trying to make an even more perfect work, that’s what God is trying to do.

So the very next word in **James 1** says in **verse 4**, “So don’t try to get out of anything prematurely, but let it, (the trial, the pain) let it do its work, so you become mature and well developed not deficient in any way”. I want to say this, if you don’t have much interest in growing as a believer, if you don’t want to have a strong faith, if you don’t want to have a strong character. Then you are going to resist and fight pain.

But, if your goal, is God’s goal, if your goal is to be a strong, developed, mature follower of Jesus, you will not waista growing pain. Now that doesn’t mean that you want pain to come, but when it does come, you won’t waista it, you’ll try to grow. Now I know lots of Christians who are practising everything I preach and maybe you do too.

But I want you to understand, that pain never leaves you, where it finds you. It will leave you bitter or better. You’ll get bitter, if you decide to play the victim and throw yourself a pity party. Or it will make you better, if you decide that I am going to trust God, He’s doing work in my life and I’m going to let Him finish what He started.

You see, the shocking thing is not that pain exists. The shocking thing is that Christ is willing to grow through that pain with us. You see loved ones, when you hold on to Jesus, you are holding on to hope. And He promises all of His children that when His children suffer, He too will suffer with them and go through the suffering with them.