

## Community Group Notes for Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2009

“In”

### **Suffering and an All Powerful God of Love – Peter Vincent**

#### **Group Questions**

What did you find challenging about this message? You might like to consider this in the light of these statements:

1. All suffering has ultimately been caused by man's sin.
2. Even acute suffering must be a price worth paying as an un avoidable journey to eternal glory (see 2 Cor 4:17)
3. The coming of the Kingdom is a process not an event.
4. We need to lay down our “right” to understand, but hold to our trust in a God who is good and who is love in every circumstance.
5. Suffering is sometimes allowed and included within God's will for us even though it is never what He wanted for us – We value painlessness more than Christlikeness – God doesn't....1Peter 1:6-9 . We think love and pain are mutually exclusive – God doesn't..... Heb 12:5>

When are you most tempted to fight suffering rather than to embrace it or to find yourself offering conditional worship rather than unconditional?

“Out”

Our Christmas Carol happens on 20th December. Christmas is easy because in this nation people still like to go to church at Christmas. How about making a giant list now of people you want to invite to our Christmas Carol and then start praying they would say yes and come.

On Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December we are in Jackson Square with the choir and the drama team and I would love some of you to join me (Melanie) and hand out Christmas Carol fliers – ask your small group and let me know if you want to join me!!!

I would love to know what you are getting up to so please text: 07929791382 or mail [melanie@thecommunitychurch.org.uk](mailto:melanie@thecommunitychurch.org.uk)

#### **Events Coming Up...**

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December – **On the Streets in Jackson Square** 10-12pm in Jackson Square

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December - **Christmas Carol Services** 3:30pm, 6:00pm or 8:00pm @ The Charis Centre

See next pages for a summary of this week's message.....

## **Suffering and an All Powerful God of Love – Peter Vincent**

Everything was perfect when God made it. We live in a world full of suffering of all sorts.

### **Why is there suffering?**

1. Mankind is infected and corrupted by sin – the door has been opened to sin and its consequences through the fall of mankind. One of the consequences of the fall is the corruption of our whole being making us subject to sickness (both physical & mental) disability, decay and death “to dust you will return” Gen 3:19. None of this was what God wanted – he made everything perfect and will restore everything to perfection.
2. The whole of man’s domain is corrupted “cursed is the ground because of you” Gen 3:17. Man was given authority by God to fill the Earth and subdue it to rule over every living creature on the earth, in the sea and in the sky and His whole domain has been infected and corrupted as a result of sin. “Creation is subjected to frustration in its bondage to decay”.. Rom 8:19-21. The instability of the Earth itself is the result of Man’s sin with the consequent earthquakes, tsunamis, floods etc. None of this was what God wanted. As Bruce Milne says “Sin, evil and suffering are temporary intrusions into the perfect life intended by God for mankind.” See Rev 2:7 & Rev 21:4. Therefore all suffering has ultimately been caused by man’s sin – it is our responsibility we opened the door to sin and Satan. Therefore it makes no sense for us to blame God for our sin and its consequences, which includes suffering.
3. Surely God knew this would happen and therefore He is responsible. Yes in that He set the World into motion knowing that we would sin. No in that you cannot hold God responsible for your sin. God chose to go ahead and make the World and Mankind knowing the consequences, pain and suffering. He also knew that choice was essential to meaningful and fulfilling relationships and eternal life. This choice resulted in the possibility of sin, rebellion, evil and suffering. God also knew in His complete wisdom that the suffering of this life does not compare to the eternal glory that awaits – if there had been a better way God would have made it. We have a totally inadequate grasp of eternity and eternal glory whereas God has all wisdom and eternal perspective. Our choice is to trust Him and trust His character that He is good and that He knows what He is doing. Paul suffered immensely (see 2 Cor 11) and yet despite all of that he can say “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” 2 Cor 4:17. He can say that because he had been “caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things” in other words he had been given revelation of the eternal glory that far outweighs what he refers to as his light and momentary troubles. In other words Paul knew that the pain was worth it – it was worth it for the eternal joy, total harmony, total pleasures for evermore, total knowing God face to face, total fulfilment, total feast, no pain, no tears, no mourning, no death, in short total perfection for eternity.

### **If God is all powerful and all loving why does he allow all this suffering?**

Ultimately it is because He knows that the price of His suffering and ours will be far outweighed by the eternal weight of glory. Meanwhile He delays the end to allow more people more time to repent, 1Peter 3:9

### **Why does He sometimes intervene and sometimes not?**

The coming of the Kingdom is a process rather than an event. Although Jesus came to destroy the works of the evil one he did not do that all at once. He healed everyone that came to Him and commissioned His church to carry on this ministry until He returns. The remaining mystery is that only some are healed today. Nobody knows the reason for this except God. We need to lay down “our right” to understand and to let Him be God. We need to avoid falling into the same trap as Adam & Eve by trying to be “like God”. We may need to repent of demanding an explanation from God or of accusing Him of injustice. Instead we need to choose to trust Him in His wisdom and His goodness and His love.

### **Is it ever God's will for Christians to suffer?**

Suffering is sometimes allowed and included within God's will for us even though it is never what He wanted. No one is immune from the effects of the fall – we are all subject to decay, sickness and death in the end. The bible allows for suffering within the will of God; Job's experience, Jesus words that "the world hates you because I have chosen you", Paul's assertion that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God and Peter's advice that "those that suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19) all affirm this fact of suffering being within the will of God. Nevertheless we should always remember that it is not what He wanted. There can be value in suffering see 1 Peter 1:6-9. Suffering produces a quality of faith that nothing else could. We value painlessness more than Christlikeness – God doesn't. We think love and pain are mutually exclusive – God doesn't see Heb 12:5>. No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful. Suffering is a key to sanctification and a deepened devotion – to the "proving" of our faith like pure gold. We need to remember that we are here to be prepared for eternity. It is an error to assume that life with God will never include suffering.

### **How do we respond to suffering?** Read 2 Cor 12:7-9.

Paul found grace to live through it. We have two main choices – to fight it or to embrace it. To fight it is to accuse God, to kick against it, to become bitter and to stop worshiping. To embrace it is to affirm the goodness and love of God, to turn to the God of all comfort, 2 Cor 1:3 and to be trained by it, grown through it and to keep worshiping. Worship is to fix our eyes on eternity, the eternal glory that far outweighs all the suffering. Suffering actually gives opportunity for us to display God's splendour whether in receipt of healing or worship despite the ongoing suffering. Our call is to unconditional worship with no agenda. Conditional worship (I'll worship you as long as you do as I want) is not really worship at all. He is worthy of our unconditional worship.