

Speaker : Associate Pastor David Seah
Title : The God of the Suffering
Text : Philippians 2:5 – 11

Introduction

Suffering is inevitable. The first quarter of 2010 has been marked with suffering. Global calamities, national catastrophes and perhaps personal setbacks.

The danger for the believer is to find quick answers & superficial responses. The invitation however, is to re-discover the God of the suffering.

1. God's Incarnation

- The Jews had the notion that God cannot suffer and be hurt. This notion created an incomplete image that Israel's deliverer is always strong and impeccable.
- But Jesus came as the Lamb that was to be slain and offered his life as a ransom for many.

"Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage" (Mark 10: 44, 45, (The Message))

- God's incarnation proves that He longed to touch His people and be touched by them. God subjected Himself to vulnerability and suffering when He became flesh and dwelt among men.

"Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process" (Philippians 2:5-7 (The Message))

- Jesus was well acquainted with the feelings of our infirmities. He was familiar with all forms of emotions that come from the unavoidable tragedies of life.

2. Christ's Crucifixion

"Who believes what we've heard and seen? Who would have thought God's saving power would look like this? ²⁻⁶The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum" (Isaiah 53:1-6, (The Message))

But the fact is, it was our pains he carried— our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed. We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him.

Christ's crucifixion showed that He was not afraid of suffering.

What did God suffer? How did He suffer?

The physical trauma was great. But the most excruciating pain was for the triune God to experience divine separation. God the Father was torn from the Son in ways that human words can never fully describe.

“From noon to three, the whole earth was dark. Around mid-afternoon Jesus groaned out of the depths, crying loudly, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matthew 27:45&46 (The Message)

Think of the analogy of a Siamese twin being ripped apart. Multiply the obscenity of that pain a million times. If we could imagine that, we have only caught a glimpse of the divine suffering!

He is not only the God of the Suffering, He is the Suffering God!

That is why when children suddenly become fatherless and wives turned widows, and families are separated from their loved ones during a calamity, God is nearest to them. God understands fully.

The God of the Cross is not far. He is near. The Suffering God is near.

3. Man's Redemption

God subjects Himself to suffering so that He can redeem it.

“Christ redeemed us from that self-defeating, cursed life by absorbing it completely into himself. Do you remember the Scripture that says, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"? That is what happened when Jesus was nailed to the cross: He became a curse, and at the same time dissolved the curse” (Galatians 3:13 (The Message)

At the cross, God brought the greatest good for mankind through the worst kind of suffering. Our Living Redeemer redeems suffering. If God can redeem us from sin, which is man's ultimate enemy, wouldn't He be able to redeem our painful experiences?

“He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. ⁹⁻¹¹Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so

that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father” (Philippians 2: 8 – 11 (The Message)

- The Messiah who suffered, ultimately triumphed.
- The Son of Man who was bruised, conquered sin and death.
- The God who died on the cross, lived forevermore!

He is near and He is able to turn unavoidable suffering for good.

Conclusion

He is the God whom we can bow and worship.
At the end of the time of mourning, there can be great rejoicing!