

International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: Jesus' Attitude About Suffering

There are lots of kinds of suffering. Some suffering is caused by our own choices involving drugs, lying, gossiping, and laziness. Some suffering comes from our own inexperience. Car accidents, personal relationships can fall in this category. Other suffering comes from natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis or disease. Perhaps the worst suffering comes from evil people who have power over us. Political situations where certain people are persecuted or children living with abusive parents would be an example of suffering from an evil authority.

Where is God in suffering? What does he think? What does he feel? So much has been written about this subject that all there is to be said cannot be said on one discussion. Knowing this conversation will continue long after this session, we would like to look at how Jesus felt toward those who suffer. We will also consider a promise he gives us today.

Jesus was a close friend to a family of two sisters and a brother. Mary and Martha asked Jesus to come to their brother Lazarus who was sick. However, Jesus did not come and heal him and the sisters were disappointed. In the end, Jesus more than healed Lazarus and the sisters realized Jesus' plan was better than their own plan.

As you read the passage, note Jesus' emotions and promises.

²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "I wish you had been here! Then my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you anything you ask for."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again. This will happen when people are raised from the dead on the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even if he dies. ²⁶ And those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. I believe that you are the One who was supposed to come into the world."

³² Mary reached the place where Jesus was. When she saw him, she fell at his feet. She said, "Lord, I wish you had been here! Then my brother would not have died."

³³ Jesus saw her crying. He saw that the Jews who had come along with her were crying also. His spirit became very sad, and he was troubled.

³⁴ "Where have you put him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus sobbed.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how much he loved him!"

³⁷ But some of them said, "He opened the eyes of the blind man. Couldn't he have kept this man from dying?"



Gogh, Vincent van. The Raising of Lazarus (after Rembrandt). May 1890, Saint-Remy. Oil on canvas, 49 x63 cm. Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam

Retell the story to this point. How did Jesus describe himself in verse 25 and what was the promise he gave to Mary and Martha? What do you think it means?

Why do you think Jesus wept? How do you think Jesus feels when you suffer a loss?

³⁸ Once more Jesus felt very sad. He came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone in front of the entrance.

³⁹ "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad smell. Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days."

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see God's glory?"

⁴¹ So they took away the stone.

Then Jesus looked up. He said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. ⁴² I know that you always hear me. But I said this for the benefit of the people standing here. I said it so they will believe that you sent me."

⁴³ Then Jesus called in a loud voice. He said, "Lazarus, come out!"

⁴⁴ The dead man came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of linen. A cloth was around his face.

Jesus did not heal Lazarus when he was sick, but he did raise him from the dead. What does this story teach us about Jesus and his compassion and his plan?

Jesus still has compassion on people who are suffering. That is why we can turn to him and find his help.

Hebrews 4: 16

¹⁵ We have a high priest (a person who is close to God) who can feel it when we are weak and hurting. We have a high priest who has been tempted in every way, just as we are. But he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us boldly approach the throne of grace. Then we will receive mercy. We will find grace to help us when we need it.

1. Who is our high priest?
2. How does Jesus know our feelings?
3. What is the significance of the term, "throne of grace?"
4. What is the promise given?
5. How do you think this promise could help you?