

## **[Day #20] Sometimes Knowing What the Reason *Is Not* Is Enough**

### **Read: Jeremiah 31:20**

Yesterday we considered the first two lines of Amy Carmichael's poem, "These Strange Ashes"

*But these strange ashes, Lord, this nothingness,  
This baffling sense of loss?*

The next six lines are an answer to this question:

*Son, was the anguish of my stripping less  
Upon the torturing cross?  
Was I not brought into the dust of death,  
A worm and no man, I;  
Yea, turned to ashes by the vehement breath  
of fire, on Calvary?*

The full poem merits study, but we focus for now on the stunning truth of these six phrases. As it turns out, suffering is not limited to man; God also suffers.

### **GOD THE SON SUFFERS**

Jesus' suffering was not limited to His atoning *death* on the cross. He also suffered in His *incarnation*, when He forever altered His nature by adding "100-percent-man" to His 100-percent-God nature. He *wept* at Lazarus' tomb and *mourned* because of Israel's unbelief. He prayed with "fervent *cries and tears*."

### **GOD THE FATHER SUFFERS**

In the days of Noah, God the Father "*grieved* that He had made man...His heart was *filled with pain*." Later He would long for errant Israel: "Is not Ephraim my dear son?...My heart *yearns* for him..."

### **GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT SUFFERS**

God's Spirit can be grieved by disobedience and hardness of heart. Isaiah wrote, "[Israel] rebelled and grieved [God's] Holy Spirit," (Isaiah 63:10), and then the New Testament version, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." (Ephesians 4:30)

The truth that God can be trusted in suffering because He is a participant in it is a main premise of Timothy Keller's book, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. Keller identifies God's participation in suffering as the "counterweight and the complement to the teaching that God is sovereign and uses suffering as a part of his often inscrutable purposes" (p. 147). His conclusion is that, while we cannot fully understand why God allows suffering and evil, "at least we know what the reason is not. It *cannot be* that he does not love us. It cannot be that he does not care" (p 121, italics mine).

So while we walk here below, where reasons for suffering are often allusive, can it be enough for now to know what the reason *is not*, that it *is not* for a lack of our Father's love that we suffer?

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

How would you explain the suffering of God to someone else, whether to a believer or not-yet-believer?

Is the fact that God suffers a strength of God, or a weakness? Explain.

Which attributes of God listed below are evident in His willingness to suffer? Why?

Eternal	Good
Never changes	Just
All-powerful	Merciful
All-knowing	Gracious
All-wise	Loving and compassionate
Everywhere present	Holy
Self-existent	Glorious
Faithful and true	Immaterial