

Faith in the Dark – Suffering Alone

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Readings prior to sermon: Psalm 143:1 – 12; Romans 8:18 – 21

[Other references: Eph 2:8-9; Jas 1:2-3; 2 Tim 4:17; Heb 13:5-6; Job 19:25-27]

Introduction

We live in a world where so much is very dark and it's affecting us all. Our times are now labelled "*The Age of Anxiety*".

I have addressed this in the last two of my messages here –

Hope in the Dark: We Live in a Dark World, and Light in the Dark – Shining for Jesus by being who you are.

Today is the third in my "*In the Dark*" series, and you may say this topic is not for you, because today my focus is - "Faith in the Dark – Suffering Alone".

This is a tough *topic* because it is a tough *reality* – for all of us at some point.

Rather than seeing life as a series of mountain tops and valleys, retired church leader Rick Warren describes life as being more like two railway tracks with good and bad circumstances running parallel.

That has been his experience: the church he led and the book he wrote have been hugely effective and rewarding. On the "other track" his wife battled cancer and they lost their son in a tragic accident.

This idea is summed-up by the title of a movie I watched recently: "*Life Changes Everything*".

For example: a phone call from your doctor, an unexpected interview with your boss.....

A. Suffering Alone – famous Bible Characters who suffered alone

There are many: We've read about King David's experience in Psalm 143.

Others who suffered alone include: Elijah, Joseph, Jonah, Job, Paul, Apostle John, and then there is of course the Lord Jesus.

B. Suffering Alone - Today

There is a difference between "aloneness" and "loneliness". *Aloneness* is good for us – we need time alone.

Most people value "having their own space", "me time". Even Jesus snuck away to remote places to be alone.

But "loneliness" is something else, and the ways we can be alone and suffering are many. Suffering in the dark.

For **example**:

Prisoners enduring solitary confinement,

Relationships: abusive, emotionally detached, spiritually divided

Depression, physical illness

Being "solo" – for whatever reason.

Suffering alone because of **a disability**

Having **little English**

Being "**lost**" - people who **don't conform** and **can't relate**, "**different**", **shunned** -

many of these can be seen **on the streets** – **suffering alone**.

Whatever the back-story may be - how big an issue *is* suffering alone?

A March 18, 2023 *Listener* article, referring to the 2013 New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study, says that from the 18,000 people surveyed, 6% were "high loneliness" folk who strongly feel like outsiders.

That's 1100 people, in the study, or applying the 6% to the current NZ population over the age of 15, that would be 240,000 people suffering from loneliness!

A friend of mine described the feeling as "**aching loneliness**" – which tells us that **feeling lonely isn't nice**.

"Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been, Lives in a dream.

Waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door, Who is it for?

All the lonely people, Where do they all come from? All the lonely people, Where do they all belong?"

Those words are lyrics from a famous 1960's song by the Beatles.

"Ah, look at all the lonely people" – maybe that's the dark parallel track of life you are on right now? As you've heard - even pastors like Rick Warren travel on that track at times, as does Eleanor Rigby's minister:

Father McKenzie writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear, No one comes near.
Look at him working, darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there, What does he care?
All the lonely people, Where do they all come from? All the lonely people, Where do they all belong?

How does King David handle suffering alone?

Psalm 143v8 – David says:

*"Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for **I have put my trust in you.**
Show me the way I should go, for to **you I entrust my life.**"*

In the dark, David places his trust in God – J.G. Whittier quote:

"Nothing before, nothing behind; the step of faith falls on the seeming void, and finds the Rock beneath"

The prophet Isaiah also gives us a clear connection to Whittier's thought – he has been prophesying about the Lord punishing the sinful, but in chapters 25 and 26 he switches to worship and praise of the Lord.

In chapter 26v4 he says:

*"Trust in the LORD for ever, for the LORD,
the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal." - The Lord God is Whittier's Rock!*

That is faith in the dark – *"Stepping into the seeming void and finding the Rock beneath"*.

Now let's extend our understanding of what faith looks like on the dark track of life – *suffering alone*.

C. Suffering Alone – Bible Guidelines to Suffering Alone –

So **how** does Scripture **guide** us to **having faith** in the **dark**?

1. Faith in God's Provision – by faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour

Ephesians 2:8 – 9 NLT

⁸ *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.*

⁹ *Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.*

Faith in Jesus provides us with so much! To start with there's the indwelling *Holy Spirit* with all he will do, and you have a new *identity* as a new *creation* in God's family and Kingdom.

And there's so much more! Like access to the "throne of God" for help in time of need, Hebrews 4:16.

2. Faith in God's Purposes - by faith believing that God is good – always!

You know, Romans 8:28 – *"All things work together for good"*,

and Nahum 1:7 *"The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him"*

So suffering is a *good* thing?? Well, in the New Testament we are warned to expect tough times.

James in James 1:2 – 3

² *"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.*

³ *For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow" - there is a God's purpose*

Example: Take the Apostle **Paul** writing in 2 Timothy 4:16 – 17 -

¹⁶ *At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me.*

¹⁷ *“But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength,
so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it”.*

And there is God’s purpose – that the Gospel will be proclaimed beyond Jews.

3. Faith in God’s **Presence** - by faith remember you are **not alone**

Paul: 2 Timothy 4 ^{17a} *But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength”*

Hebrews 13:5 & 6 God has said,

⁵ *‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’*

⁶ *So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.’*

[**Link to 4. Faith in God’s Perspective**]:

Eleanor Rigby, died in the church, and was buried along with her name, Nobody came.

Father McKenzie wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave, No one was saved.

All the lonely people, Ah, look at all the lonely people, Where do they all belong?

This is sad – no one at the funeral, no one saved. Sad.

4. Faith in God’s **Perspective** - By faith look forward to heaven

Paul in Romans 8:18 [NLT]

¹⁸ *Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.*

Job, who suffered so much, can say in his book chapter 19 -

²⁵ *“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last.*

²⁶ *And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God!*

²⁷ *I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!*

God’s perspective is **eternal** – this world is **not** my home. Then the **dark track** disappears, suffering is **over**.

D. **Take-away Ideas for your reality:**

Takeaway **1. Ask God for more faith** – faith in:

faith in his Provision – salvation through Jesus and life to the full

faith in his Purposes – he always has a plan

faith in his Presence – you are not alone

faith in his Perspective – the best is yet to come

Takeaway **2. By Faith** – commit to **Loving in the Dark** –

see my **Good Samaritan** message 27 August 2023 on Northgate Community Church website.

Even as you suffer alone, ask God to help you **reach-out** to suffering, lonely people with **care** and **love**.

Takeaway **3. By Faith - Worship God** - whichever track you are on:

The deepest level of worship is praising God through the pain -

thanking God when you are on the parallel track of suffering,

trusting him when we’re tempted to lose hope, and loving him - even when he seems distant.

At my **lowest**, God is my **hope**.

At my **darkest**, God is my **light**.

At my **weakest**, God is my **strength**.

At my **saddest**, God is my **comforter** - **That is faith in the dark**.