



December 2010 - *The Transformative Potential of Pain in Our Lives*

Pain and suffering are the tragic consequences of the fall and impact believers and non-believers alike. One would think that if God were loving and good, he would want to spare us from suffering. The fact that he doesn't raises doubts for some people about his very existence. How do we understand this puzzling reality? And what do we say to those who struggle with it? C.S. Lewis offers helpful insight:

The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word "love," and look on things as if man were the center of them. Man is not the center. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake. "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine love may rest "well pleased." To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled, by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us lovable. We cannot even wish, in our better moments, that he could reconcile Himself to our present impurities—no more than the beggar maid could wish that King Cophetua should be content with her rags and dirt, or a dog, once having learned to love man, could wish that man were such as to tolerate in his house the snapping, verminous, polluting creature of the wild pack. What we would here and now call our "happiness" is not the end God chiefly has in view: but when we are such as He can love without impediment, we shall in fact be happy.

Our tendency to look at life from a man-centered perspective must give way to looking at it from a God-centered perspective. God is holy love, and he intends that we become holy as he is holy - that we be conformed to the likeness of his Son, Jesus Christ. Only then can his love completely fill us, bringing the true happiness we are meant to enjoy. Thus, as Lewis says elsewhere, "pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." It is precisely because God does love us that he is more concerned with our holiness than our self-defined happiness. What an amazing God, who can use the brokenness of this world for our good and his glory. His holy love will be consummated in our lives when we see him face to face, and then we will realize that it was worth whatever pain we had to endure.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 8: 28-30 (NIV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), pp 574-75.