

The Supremacy of Christ in Suffering

by John Piper

The universe exists to display the glory of the grace of God in the sufferings of Christ, and the cross is the ultimate display of God's grace.

Duration: 52:20

Scripture: Ephesians 2:6-7, Ephesians 5:9

Topics: "Supremacy Of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that the purpose of the universe and everything outside of God is to display the glory of God's grace in the sufferings of Christ for sinners. The goal of God in creating the world is the praise of His glory, specifically the glory of His grace. The speaker contrasts his message with the book '90 Minutes in Heaven,' highlighting the importance of aligning personal experiences with biblical truth. The sermon also explores the nature of worship in heaven, drawing from Philippians and Revelation to emphasize the lavish grace of God and the ultimate goal of salvation history.

Transcript

Thank you, John, Kathy, the whole team here. It's easy to come home when you get an introduction like that, because if you're at home with Edwards then I'm at home with you. So it's wonderful to be here, and the songs make me feel at home, I especially appreciated that line that when our shame is deep, his grace is deeper still.

That's a good line, his grace is deeper still. So we have a great gospel, and a great friend, and a great Savior, and we want to talk about suffering, but before I do, I was reflecting on the plane coming out, the context in which I'll put this, and it goes something like this. The older I get, the more I feel the need to have a simple, that is not easy, but a single, decisive, clear, ultimate meaning to everything I do.

Clear, decisive, ultimate, single meaning to everything I do, and I put the word simple over that, not because it's the opposite of difficult, because it is difficult to live life, but because it's the opposite of complex, and yet I know that life is complex, and theology is complex, and what I'm going to talk about tonight has roots that are complex, and yet the older I get, the more I yearn for simplicity, simplicity in life, and simplicity in relationships, and simplicity in convictions, because I don't think as your mind matures and then eventually weakens, and we move from childhood to adulthood, you'll be able to hold on to much complexity at the end. You're going to have to have a few things that are just rock, solid, and simple in the sense of single, clear, decisive, ultimate, just a few, and you're going to take them, and you're never ever

going to let them go, and they've got to be really sure. When I think about complexity, and some of you are going to come away from this message and I think, that was complex, but I mean to work through it out to the other side of simplicity.

I think when you're young, you look at complexity like a very ornate spider's web. It's just beautiful. It's just magnificent, and you want to study it.

And it feels like a challenge when you're young, want to trace out every one of those fibers and see how that's constructed, and that's true. That's true. Theology is like that, and God in a sense is like that.

It's a beautiful thing, but as you get older, you also have enough experiences to know that it's sticky, and it's dangerous, and you can get so mired in complexity that suddenly you realize, I may never get out of this thing, and you can panic and feel like, will anything be clear ever again? Will anything be simple, and plain, and solid, and sure again when I think of five problems with everything I think about, and then five about those, and five about those, and pretty soon, this is not pretty anymore. This is a spider's web, and I'm caught. As you get older, complexity has that dimension to it because you've felt your hand stuck before, and you pull back, and you say, I don't want to be trapped, I don't want to be paralyzed, I don't want to be ruined by being sucked into the complexities of life, or relationships, or church, or theology.

I have to keep my bearings, and my brain simply can't live forever in ever-deepening and ever-dividing complexities. Life becomes unlivable, and you go crazy if you don't work your way out through, around to some great, solid, clear, decisive, single, ultimate truths. So let me tell you what mine is.

God is, there is one, and it's Paul's, and I'm figuring that's a good place to be. So this is all introduction, okay? This is setting of the table. Paul's writing in Philippians, and he's in prison, and he says, I want you to know that this is all working together for the advancement of the gospel.

Remember that part? Chapter 1, verse 12. And the reason is because my imprisonment here is known throughout the whole imperial guard as being for Christ, and so, yep, I'm in prison, and oh, is it turning out for good? And then he says, and the brothers have been all made more confident, and they're preaching the gospel. Yes, what a way to go to jail, kind of.

God is in charge. He's trying to encourage this church with, don't worry, I'm in prison, but the word is not bound. And then he says, even the brothers that are preaching out of envy and strife and rivalry, at least Christ is being preached.

And he rejoices, and then he says, and yes, I will rejoice, for I'm sure that this is all going to work out for my deliverance and my salvation through your prayers. And then he says this, as it is my eager expectation that I will not at all be ashamed, but that now, as always, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. I think that's his charter and mine.

I want everything, whether it's living, whether it's dying, to do one thing, make Christ look magnificent. That Christ might be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to remain in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, which I shall choose.

I cannot tell. I'm torn. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

So convinced of this, I'm sure that I will remain and continue with you all. So he has two options. I could leave and go to be with Jesus and have no more pain, no more suffering, all pleasure, or I could remain for you and not have only pleasure, but some pain.

And in both, Christ will be magnified. If I die and count it gain, Christ is shown to be magnificent. If I live and live for Christ and minister and build your faith and endure that suffering, then Christ will be shown to be magnificent.

So I'm holding on to this single, simple, clear, decisive, ultimate meaning of life, that Christ be magnified in everything, everything. That's the sieve. You put everything through that sieve.

Everything goes through that sieve, including this message and this opportunity to speak to you. Practically, I hope that we'll do this in a way that we'll talk about suffering in a way that will deliver you from the discouragement, the self-pity, the fear, the pride of being entangled in a morass of life. I would like you to be emboldened by this message and set free by this message and empowered and encouraged and lifted up, no matter how hard your circumstances are right now.

So let me give you my conclusion first, the conclusion of the whole talk that I'm going to give now. Conclusion first, and then we'll go to the Bible and see where it's coming from. I would like to show you that the universe, everything that is outside God, exists to display that, namely, the glory of the grace of God in the sufferings of Christ in the place of sinners.

That's the reason everything exists, to display the glory of the grace of God, which reaches its apex in the sufferings of Christ for sinners. Now, I might have said, and it would be true, that the goal of the universe, the goal of God in all that he does and in making the world is the praise of his glory, period. Instead of saying the praise of the glory of his grace, I might have said that.

But the Bible is more specific than that. It does say, and we'll see it in just a minute in Ephesians 1, it does say that his ultimate goal is the praise of the glory of his grace. God decreed from all eternity to display the greatness of the glory of his grace for the enjoyment of his people.

The enjoyment of seeing it and the enjoyment of being changed by it and swept up into it and reflecting it and being transformed by it. And the Bible makes very clear that the ultimate aim of God in displaying the glory of his grace is that he would do it through the sufferings of Jesus. Grace reaches its apex, its high point in the cross, in Christ suffering in our place.

In other words, the aim of the universe necessitates that there be suffering so that the Son of God can suffer for sinners and thus display the greatness of the glory of the grace of God. I would put it very starkly, the ultimate reason that suffering exists, which is the question I'm trying to answer. The ultimate reason, there are other reasons, numerous ones in the Bible.

The ultimate reason that suffering exists in this universe is so that Christ might suffer for sinners and thus display the magnificence of the grace of God. So, in conceiving of a universe that he would create in which to display the glory of his grace, he did not choose plan B. He chose plan A, and plan A was Good Friday. It's really quite an understatement to call it good.

It is the greatest day that ever was or ever will be. And it will be the centerpiece of all other days from here on out, as we will see clearly from Revelation shortly. So, suffering is in the world so that Good Friday can exist.

Everything leads to it, everything flows from it. So, my conclusion, and then now we'll go into the Bible and see if these things are so, is that the ultimate reason for suffering in the universe is because there could have been no cross without suffering. And if there had been no cross, no infinitely perfect Christ dying for infinitely deserving, undeserving sinners, if that couldn't have happened, grace would not have existed for sinners.

And the whole purpose of the universe was to display the glory of grace, and therefore, suffering was planned, built in, designed, conceived from the beginning so that there could be the infinite display of the beauty and majesty of the glory of the grace of God in the suffering of Christ for sinners. So, I invite you to open your Bible, or you just listen if you want to follow along with me, to Revelation Chapter 13. We'll just move around in a few texts to show you where in the world did you get this idea.

It sounds really heavy, and it is. John writes in Revelation 13, 8, all who dwell on the earth will worship the beast, will worship the beast, worship him, except some. Who's that? Everyone whose name has not.

So, everybody's going to worship the beast unless their name is somewhere, and having their name there will keep them from worshipping the beast. That's the implication. All who dwell on the earth will worship the beast.

Everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of the life, the book of life of the lamb that was slain. I think that's a very careful, accurate translation. The ordering of the words in the Old King James could go elsewhere, but this is the best, I think.

So, there's a book, right? There's a book in heaven. The book existed before the foundation of the world. And there are names in the book that were there before the foundation of the world, and the book has a name, and it's the book of life.

But it's more specific than that. It's the book of life of the lamb that was slain. That's the name of the book before the world was created.

Are you with me? You see where that's going? The implications of that are absolutely gargantuan theologically, and they're confirmed all over the Bible. The implications are that God planned a slaying of the lamb before the world was made, before there was any sin in any body. There would be a death for sinners, was planned.

So, now, we have one evidence that the suffering of the lamb was contemplated before the foundation of the world. Now, turn to 2 Timothy 1, verse 9. 2 Timothy 1, verse 9, God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which, the which refers to grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. Now, what is grace? Well, the grace that is in Christ Jesus is undeserved blessing, undeserved favor.

In Christ Jesus, we get grace because we don't deserve anything as sinners, and we need grace. Grace is deeper still. And that grace we received before the foundation of the world.

You got that? Verse 9 of 2 Timothy 1, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. We didn't exist, sin didn't exist, and God gave sin-demeriting grace to us before we existed or sin existed. Let's not pass over too quickly something that I passed over back in Revelation.

We have two things now. We have Revelation 13, 8, and we have 2 Timothy 1, 9, a book called The Book of the Life of the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world and grace given in Christ Jesus to sinners before they existed. This word, slain, that's just too clean.

It's just too slick in English. Sphagizomai is an ugly word. It has an ugly sound even.

I don't like it. Sphagizomai, bleh. And that's really good that it has an ugly sound because it was an ugly event.

The word is slaughter. It's not what you do to a human. It's what you do to a cow or a sheep.

You slit its throat. You slaughter it. It's the word slaughter.

Slain cleans it up. So, the Book of the Life of the Lamb that was slaughtered before the foundation of the world, a slaughter was planned. A slaughter of the Son of God was planned before the foundation of the world because it is the apex of the grace of God and the aim of the universe is the praise of the glory of the grace of God.

Why was he slaughtered? Now, let's go to Ephesians 1. I'm saying it, but I want you to see it in the text. Ephesians 1. Here's the biblical support. First, from Ephesians 1 and 2, and then from Revelation 5 for saying that the slaughter of Christ, the slaughter of the Messiah, the slaughter of the Son of Man, Son of God was the planned centerpiece of the praise of the glory of the grace of God.

So, Ephesians 1, verse 4, I'm sure you looked at this with Bruce. Let me just draw out the goal. God chose us in him, that is in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love, he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, and here's the goal, to the praise of the glory of his grace. If yours says glorious grace, that's fine. It is a noun.

It's to the praise of the glory of his grace. Now, notice these two qualifying phrases. We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and it is through Christ that we are destined for adoption.

So, what's the point of saying that? In Christ chosen, through Christ adopted or planned to be adopted. And in Paul's thinking, you know what those phrases mean. To be in Christ elect and through Christ adopted means that because of what he did and because of who he is, this can happen.

If he hadn't died, if he hadn't risen, if he weren't son of God, being in him wouldn't do anything for that. I would not be in the family of God through Christ, through Christ, if Christ hadn't paid for my sins, if Christ hadn't risen for my justification, if his perfection had not been counted to me. It's all that he did in his life and suffering that enables Paul to say, through him, I am adopted, which is exactly what Galatians 4 and 5 says.

So, what we see, I think, is pretty plain. The goal of the universe, according to verse 6 of Ephesians 1 is, it is all unto the praise of the glory of his grace through him, through him, because what he did was the uppermost display, the highest display, the clearest decisive display of God's grace because he, in his perfection, died in the place of infinitely undeserving people like me. It's confirmed also in Chapter 2, if you let your eyes drop down into Ephesians 2, 5 to 7, these magnificent words about, in his great love, he made us alive together with Christ.

So, our regeneration is owing to the prevenient great love of God. We're dead. Great love moves him in power to make us alive.

And then, by grace, we are saved and we are raised with him. You see that? Raised with him, verse 6, into heavenly places so that, now, verse 7 takes us back to the level of Chapter 1, verse 6, this great goal. So that, in the coming ages, he might show us the, what? Surpassing greatness of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. I'm tempted to stop and meditate on toward us because it's Ephemas. It's not your Aeschemas, which I might have expected.

It's Ephemas, and I just wonder on, in, hmm, what does he mean here? That he's going to lavish, for all the ages to come, he's going to lavish the kindness of his grace on us, in us, through us, in Christ Jesus. Which is why I mentioned a little while ago that we don't just see the glory of God's grace, we will be drenched by it, transformed by it, so that we are like him when we see him as he is. But the point I'm drawing out of verse 7 right now is the ultimate goal of being born again and being raised up with God into the heavenly places is so that, in the coming ages, he might display his lavish grace in Christ.

So the whole point of salvation, history, the universe, everything, the point of everything is to make God's grace visible, magnificent, beautiful, wonderful, great for everybody to see and enjoy and be changed by. Now, let's go to Revelation 5. And here, I'm tempted to contrast what I have to say with the book, 90 Minutes in Heaven. And you can make that out for yourself here if you've looked at it.

We contacted the author of that book and suggested he change something in his book since he saw something in heaven that's different from the Bible, and that's a problem for him, not the Bible. I think that's a dangerous thing to do to make your personal experience such a prominent feature of commending something rather than making this the really dominant, prominent feature of commending something. But I'm going to commend to you the nature of the worship that will be and is in heaven.

What will it be like? And you get a glimpse of it in Chapter 5, verses 9 through 12. Let's read part of that. And they sang a new song saying, worthy are you, you, lion of Judah, lamb of God, worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slaughtered.

And by your blood, you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, verse 11. Then I looked and I heard around the throne, at the end of verse 11, myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. You see the implication of this? The centerpiece of everlasting worship in heaven will be the celebration of a slaughter.

So anybody that writes a book and says, all the songs in heaven were about happy things, were about glad things, there was no mention of suffering in any of the songs, you say, wrong. That's the center of our singing, forever. The goriest, most sinful, most horrible act of suffering that ever happened will be remembered as the centerpiece of the grace of God forever.

Good Friday did not happen to be forgotten. It happened in order to become the center of worship forever. This is why I presume it was the center of worship here as we rehearse for that day.

It's an awesome thing that suffering has such a central role. Awesome thing, just amazing. The greatest suffering that ever was will be the center of our worship and our wonder forever.

This is not an afterthought. God is not figuring out how to manage suffering through the cross. The cross was the plan and everything was means, including the fall and all sin.

Everything is subordinate to this plan. Everything else is put in place for the sake of this plan, to display the greatness of the glory of the grace of God in the suffering of the beloved. That's the goal of creation.

And now, the stark, shaking implications begin to unfold, don't they? God, now let's choose our words, permits, ordains. To me, they're both right and both fine. Sin, Satan's fall, Adam's fall, because without it, there'd be no suffering.

Without suffering, there'd be no cross. Without cross, there'd be no ultimate display of grace. Everything is put in place for a good Friday.

If you use the word permit, just keep in mind this. God, who knows all things and operates by plan, permits by design. He doesn't permit willy-nilly.

And so, a permission by a design for an omniscient God is an ordination. So, you can choose either one you want. To permit by design or to ordain, in my head, mean the same thing.

God ordained that what he hates come to pass, namely sin. God permitted by design that what he abominates come to pass, namely sin and unbelief. It's a great mystery, and you don't have to figure this out.

You don't have to stay in this spider's web. You can just stand back and admire the sun shining on it from a safe distance because the Bible helps you get perspective here. You know the sentence that I would write over the Garden of Eden after the fall, over Adam and Eve now shamed, covering themselves, blaming each other, blaming God, unleashing untold misery upon the world.

You know what I would write over that? I would write Genesis chapter 50, verse 20, Joseph, after being sold into Egypt and having been messed around with for 13 years by sinful people, finally makes his way to the glory of the vice presidency of Egypt. And now he understands what in the world that slavery and that abuse in Potiphar's house and that prison, what was that all about? What's this world about? And he said to his brothers, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good to save a lot of people. That's what I would write.

Adam and Eve, you meant it for evil. God meant it for good to save a people by displaying the infinite beauty of the grace of his glory on Good Friday, thousands of years from now. And, of course, you know that sin wasn't the only thing that entered the world when they fell.

Romans 8, 20 goes like this, the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the whole creation itself would be set free. So that's God. Satan doesn't design that the whole creation be set free, God does.

So the whole creation at the fall was subjected to futility by God, for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. You hear that? This is Paul helping the saints in Rome who wonder, where's the power? Where's the deliverance? Where's the healing? I'm dying.

My friends are dying. We're not being healed. We're dying.

We're being killed. Disease is wracking us, and persecution is destroying us. Where is your great God, Paul? And Paul says, even we, even we who have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit groan inwardly, waiting for what? For what? The redemption of these dying bodies, that's what.

That's one of the most important pastoral paragraphs in the Bible, brother pastors. One of the first sermons I preached when I came to Bethlehem was Christ and Cancer because I wanted to lay on the table real quick what my people could expect from me in a theology of disease and suffering. And this is a centerpiece.

Oh, God heals. He heals, and he doesn't. And we need a theology for the one and a theology for the other, and they're the same theology.

So, when they fell, sin entered the world and catastrophic horrors entered the world. Soldiers throwing babies into the sky and catching them on their bayonets. By the thousands, I could name the countries, but I don't want to offend, the atrocities that men do to men and that God does to man.

In Haiti, 250,000 people in a night, that's what came with sin. History is a conveyor belt of corpses. We Westerners, we live in such unbelievably posh circumstances.

We can scarcely imagine what two-thirds of the world deals with on the brink of existence, day in and day out, and surrounded by helplessness because of mobs and tyrannical governments. And what a mess, what a horror is this world that God and hates the sin. I wonder if you believe that.

Let me read you a few texts. God does not delight in this suffering. Listen to this verse from Ezekiel 33, 11.

As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Well, you just told us he ordained it. Yes, I did.

And he does not delight in it. Well, what? This is double talk. This is schizophrenia.

Well, let me read you a verse that you decide if it's divine schizophrenia. I don't think it is. This is Lamentations 3, verse 32, and it's one of the most important verses to help me come to terms with what I see in the Bible.

I want to be a Bible guy. My only hope is to keep it simple, just believe every verse, every verse. If they don't fit, I'm believing them, I'm believing the verses.

So, I want to understand them right, don't want to import anything in here, I'm just taking, I'm believing every verse with all of their sure implications. So, here's one, Lamentations 3, 32. Though he cause grief, it's talking about God, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love, for he does not, in all the English versions translate this willingly, he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.

So, I'm wondering what in the world does that mean? God doesn't afflict, he afflicts, but he doesn't afflict willingly. He brings grief, but he doesn't bring it willingly. Like somebody's got his arm behind his back, do it, I don't want to do it, do it, God, I don't want to do it.

Okay, I have to do it. What is that? Not my God, not the Bible God, what is that? So, you look it up in the Hebrew, and it's, I'll give you the Hebrews and check it out, those of you who poke around in these things. Melevo, it's three words in one word, me, from, leiv, heart, o, his, from his heart.

He does not do it from his heart. Huh, huh, that's just like Ezekiel. I do not delight in the death of the wicked, meaning I ordain the death of the wicked, but I don't do it because it's my front-burner delight.

I do it for wise and holy, loving purposes. He causes grief, but he doesn't do it, melevo, from his heart. There are things that lie on God's heart more prominently, more deeply than the suffering that he ordains when he brings the Babylonians against Jerusalem.

And the women eat their children, and he knew they would. He prophesied it. Pretty breathtaking when you believe all the Bible.

Suffering exists so that ultimately Christ might display the greatness of the glory of the grace of God by suffering in his infinitely perfect self to overcome our infinitely deserved suffering. We have infinitely deserved suffering. Yes, we have.

Yes, we have. That is clear in the Bible, whether God ordains it or not, we're guilty, we're responsible, we're accountable, we're hell-bound. That's taught.

We believe it, that God ordains all this because he planned a slaughter before the foundation of the world. We believe in it because he's God, and I'm a sinner, and I don't argue with him. I submit, and he sends his son to die for me in order that I might spend all eternity praising the glory of the grace manifest in the slaughtered lamb.

Now, let me draw this to a close with a quick summary of seven statements. They go by real fast, showing you that every grace, every blessing, every good thing you ever dreamed about having now or in eternity comes to you through suffering and only through suffering, namely the suffering of Jesus. And it wasn't an afterthought.

It was the name of the book before the foundation of the world, and it was the ground of grace before the foundation of the world. So I want you to feel I owe everything I ever dreamed of having to suffering. Number one, Christ absorbed the wrath of God on our behalf, and he did it by suffering, Galatians 3.13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, curse everyone who hangs on a tree.

Your deliverance from God's curse came through suffering. Number two, Christ bore our sins and purchased our forgiveness, and he did it by suffering, 1 Peter 2.24. He bore our sins in his body on the tree, or Isaiah 53.5. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities.

This is the glory of grace, and it only comes by suffering. Number three, Christ provided a perfect righteousness for us, and it becomes ours in him, and he did it by suffering, Philippians 2, verse 7 and 8. He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

Obedient to the point of death. Obedient to the point of death. If he had stopped short of the suffering and death, we would not have a righteousness.

By one man's obedience, many are accounted righteous. If this obedience had not been completed in suffering, there'd be none for us, and we would enter the judgment hall of heaven in our own obedience, and we would all perish. Suffering finished our righteousness.

Number four, Christ defeated death, and he did it by suffering, Hebrews 2, 14. Since, therefore, the children share in flesh and blood, he himself, likewise, partook of the same nature in order that through death, he might deliver those who've been held in lifelong bondage by the fear of death. You want to be free from the fear of death and know you can move right through it into paradise? Bank on suffering.

Number five, he disarmed Satan, and he did it by suffering, Colossians 2, verse 14. The record of our debts, he has set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to an open shame by triumphing over them in the cross, in him or in it, the cross.

When our sins were nailed to the cross, the one damning weapon that Satan had in his hand was yanked out of his hand. He was disarmed. And what is that one weapon with which he could have brought us to ruin? Unforgiven sin, that's the only one.

He has no other weapon with which to send us to hell. If God, by Christ, takes out of his hand the weapon of unforgiven sin, and that accusation, he can beat us up, he can kill us, but he can't damn us. And so, you're free from Satan powerfully because of suffering.

Number six, Christ purchased perfect final healing and holiness for all his people, and he did it by suffering, Isaiah 53, 4. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes, with his stripes, we are healed. That's going to happen. It happens partly now.

It's going to happen fully in the age to come. Last one, number seven, Christ secured for us eternal access to fellowship with God, eternal, sweet, enjoyable, friendly, intimate, admiring fellowship with Christ and with our Father in heaven. He secured that, and he did it by suffering, 1 Peter 3, 18.

Christ also suffered once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. I want to be brought there. I want to be brought there moment by moment, and I want to be brought there at the end of my life and at the coming of Christ.

So, I conclude, the ultimate purpose of the universe is to display the greatness of the glory of the grace of God, Ephesians 1, 6. The highest, clearest, surest display of that glory is in the suffering of the best person that the universe has ever known for millions of undeserving sinners. So, the ultimate reason that suffering exists in the universe is so that Christ might display the greatness of the glory of God's grace in his infinitely perfect self, dying for those who infinitely deserve suffering, and he takes our place. So, the older I get, the more desperately I need something simple, clear, decisive, ultimate, a high plateau where I can look down on all the tangled pathways of the world and hold fast, and this is it, the praise of the glory of the grace of God planned from the foundation of the world and reaching its climax on Good Friday for me.

Father in heaven, your word is precious to us. What would we do as pastors if we had to spin out things about weighty matters out of our own heads? We would be so foolish. We love your word and we are learning to love your plan and your greatness.

Oh, transform our hearts and our minds, we pray, that we might have clear conviction concerning the infinitely valuable suffering of the Son of God as the apex of the display of the glory of your grace. I ask

this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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