

Why is This Happening

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Date: 29 March 2026

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[0 : 00] So, this is my sermon title, Why is this Happening? and making sense of suffering through the eyes of Jesus.!

Now, as we enter the final week of the Lenten season, we want to place ourselves into the story of Jesus, into the story of his suffering, and to remember that he died for us on the cross, he cleansed our sins, he paid the price so that we may live.

Now, this month hasn't been easy for my family, and sometimes Christians during this time practice fasting, praying, putting ourselves into some uncomfortable situations for the sake of spiritual growth.

But for our family, we were thrust into a situation we never wanted to be in. Now, as many of you have heard, our third child, Xavi, who is only two years old, has been in and out of the hospital for the past few weeks.

And there is a strange illness in his body that the doctors are still trying to figure out. So, today's sermon isn't your normal, beautiful, expository sermon we usually get from Pastor William, you know, about like a specific passage.

[1 : 54] It is a sermon that comes from my own wrestling with the scripture, you know, in the midst of my son's illness. It is more like a theological reflection.

So, I'll be weaving together the story of Job, the story of Jesus healing a blind man in John 9, and also Jesus explaining two tragedies in Luke 13.

Now, in fact, March hasn't been a great month for PCPC Church. There have been at least three families with someone experiencing serious illness and being hospitalized, and Heiken was one of them.

And many among us have also been asking, why, why, Lord? I hope today's message will help us navigate life's many sufferings as well. So, let me tell you the story from the very beginning.

In January, we started to notice Xavier has a little bump, you know, near his nose. At first, we thought it was just, you know, nothing serious. It probably will go away by itself, but it stays, and it grows.

[3 : 02] So, we went to see our family doctor, went to emergency care, and they reckoned it's probably just a blocked or infected, you know, tear ducts. No big deal. No big deal.

It's called blockage or inflammation. So, he wrote a letter, sent us back to Starship to see the ENT team, the ear, nose, and throat. So, they ordered a CD scan, and what they found was a tumor-like thing, you know, developing just behind his nose.

And they knew it was something serious. So, they had him hospitalized and ran more x-rays and ultrasounds. and the next day was a real shocker.

The oncology team took over. The oncologist came to see Jenny and asked her, do you know why we're here? And of course we knew.

We'd been fearing for the worst. We knew there was a chance the tumor could turn out to be a cancer and when they saw the scans, they spotted something else around the body.

[4 : 38] So the possibility that cancer has already spread to other parts of the body. And that weekend was truly the lowest point in our lives.

Why on earth is this happening? That my healthy two-year-old son could have cancer? And because the tumor sits right behind his nose, what happens if the doctors want to remove it? Do they need to cut open his face? That can be something absolutely horrid to happen to my little boy. So Jenny broke down.

We don't remember over that weekend how many tears we've shed. I was the one trying to be strong to comfort her, but in the end I also broke down.

So we were given a weekend pass so he could come home. I was helping him to take a shower. And he's laughing, he's playing with water.

[5 : 44] And on the shower wall we use some washable crayon to draw little moons and trucks. I was helping him first, right? But then he starts to draw very cute little circles by himself.

And it was very cute. It was like, God, at that moment, truly grounds me at the present. I wanted this moment to live forever.

Because I don't know whether this will be the last shower I'll take with him. We'll be heading back to the hospital the next day, right? And we also don't know, when he comes back from the hospital again, whether his face will look the same.

So I broke down entirely. I couldn't help it. He had no idea I was crying so bitterly. I was looking at the little drawings he made on the shower wall.

I would never want to wash them away because I don't know whether he'll be able to make drawings again. And you know what?

[6 : 56] When I felt weak, Jenny was the one comforting me. And at that moment, death felt so close, so tangible.

I'd rather me suffering, I wanted to die for my son. I didn't want him to go through the suffering. I felt something inside me is being cut off if I ever had to lose him.

And that very night, I knelt down and I asked God, why is this happening to us? What have I done wrong?

Is this some kind of punishment? My son is certainly innocent, so it must be me. So I prayed to God to reveal to me the things that I need to repent on.

And there was a calm silence. I was hoping God would reveal something I didn't know, something new about my own spiritual depravity.

[8 : 00] But that night, there was nothing new. So in my mind, I was playing two roles. On one hand, I felt like Job.

Even though I was nowhere near as righteous as Job. I was asking God, why the family is suffering? And on the other hand, I was playing the role of Job's friends.

You know, people watching from the outside, trying to understand why someone is suffering. Now for those of you who haven't heard about the story of Job, many years ago, even before the time of Jesus, there was a wealthy man called Job.

He has ten children, many cattle and possessions. Long story short, God allows calamity to fall on him. He lost everything. He lost his ten children.

And as he's sitting in the ashes, crying out to God, look, I've been doing the right thing. Why does God allow this? And his friends came to visit him, to try to comfort him, but it turns out that they also debated with him.

[9 : 17] The three friends were basically telling him, Job, the reason why you're suffering is that you must have sinned against God. God is just.

He blesses the righteous and curses the unrighteous. And there must be some hidden sins. You haven't confessed. You should repent. And Job was like, no, you don't understand.

I haven't done anything wrong. Stop accusing me. So, in my head, I've got Job and his friends arguing with each other.

on one side, I'm telling my conscience, no, I haven't done anything that deserves my son being taken away from me. But on the other hand, I'm also second-guessing myself.

Well, unless I've done something terribly wrong, otherwise God would not punish me like this. But then, I was reminded of what God says to the three friends in the end.

[10 : 17] I am angry with you because you have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has. But surely, they've spoken some kind of truth, haven't they?

Right? One of them says, consider now, who, being innocent, has ever perished? Who were the upright ever destroyed? You know, God is just. Look, their version of truth is very one-dimensional. is very black and white. If you're morally righteous, you get blessings. If you're morally wicked, you get calamities. But here is the logical, I mean, serious logical flaw they made.

They flipped the logic. If your life is full of blessings, you must be righteous. If your life is full of calamities, you must be wicked. Do you see how they assume it works both ways?

But it certainly doesn't. This is why God is angry. What they say is only a partial truth with a logical flaw. Now, let me use an analogy.

[11 : 30] When we catch a cold, you get a fever. That makes sense, right? But what if I say, because you have a fever, you must have a cold? Well, that would be ridiculous because a fever can have multiple causes like a heat stroke.

So a cause may lead to certain effects, but an effect does not necessarily point back to one specific cause. The backward reasoning doesn't work here.

Now, since Job's three friends didn't get it right, let's look to Jesus. What does Jesus say about sin and suffering?

So let's turn to John chapter 9 again. Jesus' disciples think very much like Job's friends.

They weren't asking whether sin was involved. They assumed it. They were actually asking, who? Who's the culprit? But Jesus says, neither of them.

[12 : 41] The health condition of this man is not related to his moral behavior nor his parents' behavior. And you think illness must be caused by sin? Not necessarily.

Instead of dwelling on a cause, Jesus redirects our attention. It happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Jesus wants us to focus on the purpose. And we know from the rest of the chapter the blind man was healed miraculously. His blindness was about displaying the mission of Jesus, showing that he comes from the Father and that he is God himself.

And that makes me ponder in Xavier's illness, what is the greater purpose of God? I think for one thing he wants to train my families to become more patient.

Patient. Now healing rarely happens in the snap of the fingers. Even with this blind man, there is a process. So Jesus put something on his eyes, the man had to go to somewhere to wash it off.

[13 : 52] it wasn't instantaneous. God initiates the healing then humans take the responsibility to work with God. It's not unlike God healing sick people using doctors, nurses, and hospitals.

And we may say, hey, these are only natural processes. But God oversees everything, including the natural. So why do we always have to box God in, insisting he must act supernaturally and not through human efforts?

Anyway, is it okay to ask why and to think about what causes the illness? Sure, but let's not forget about the purpose.

However, there is a big caveat. Jesus never said illness is not related to sin either. In John 5, 14, Jesus healed a man who couldn't walk and then said to him, see, you're well again.

Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. So here, the man's condition is indeed related to his sin. It feels like we're back to square one, right?

[15 : 12] But we're not. God wants us to understand that suffering can also serve as a warning and to keep us holy. Now, let's turn to Luke chapter 13.

So here, Jesus is saying it's wrong to think some people are worse than others because they experience worse suffering, whether it is from human evil or natural disasters.

Now, in the first instance, Pilate ordered the slaughter of the Galileans while they were offering sacrifices. That's why the scripture says it was mixed with the blood.

It is absolute horror. It's a little bit like sometimes the unfortunate church shootings that we hear around the world today.

now, Jesus is saying, you think they deserve to die because they were worse sinners? Absolutely not. And in the second instance, a tower collapsed and killed 18 people.

[16 : 32] And again, are they worse than the others? Jesus says, no. Here is the bottom line. we are all under the curse of fallenness since sin entered this world.

And death is the natural consequence and no one is exempt. While some people die out of the blue, some experience a slow dying process.

But the deal is, we all die regardless of how good or how bad we are. So Jesus is saying, you don't need to be the judge.

You can't see the full picture like God can. The real question is, have we turned to God? If yes, there is an escape from the second death.

And if not, it will be truly game over. Now let's go back to the bigger idea here. Suffering doesn't necessarily tell us why.

[17 : 39] We love to connect suffering with how morally good or bad someone is. But Jesus is saying it is not necessarily related. And only God sees the whole picture.

So instead, Jesus wants us to see three things in suffering. First, the purpose. What purpose does the suffering serve?

When we are in the thick of it, it's almost impossible to read the situation from outside. But at the very least, we can create that little space in our heart to receive grace and hope.

Maybe when we look back one day, we'll appreciate why God allowed it. And second, it could be a warning.

Sometimes suffering serves as a warning to something far worse down the road. God. In Luke 13, Jesus reminds us of the ultimate judgment. So, pick your side.

[18 : 44] In John 5, Jesus warns that if we continue sinning, something worse will happen. So, make the right choices. And third, our limited knowledge.

It's almost pointless to keep asking why. we're not God. We don't have the complete knowledge of how everything connects behind the scene. In Job's story, God never directly answered him why. He had to suffer. But God revealed himself to Job, and that satisfies him. He said, I know that you can do all things.

No purpose of yours can be thwarted. My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

I'm not Job. My suffering is peanuts compared to his. But this month, I feel something similar. I feel the need to repent.

[19 : 55] And here are a few lessons I've learned, and I want to share my heart with you. First, I came to realize I have very limited capacity.

So when sudden illness hits your family, it consumes you. You have to post everything less important. Your goals, your ambitions, your dreams, your plans have to be set aside.

So I had to take many sick leaves, dropping meetings, and plans that I thought are very important, even to the church. Family's needs suddenly become first and non-negotiable.

And at the same time, I had to sharpen my focus on God and keep asking, Lord, I'll change my heart. Help me accept what I'm given.

And second, I need to change my mindset from independence to interdependence. I used to think that I need to stand on my own feet before I can give to the church.

[20 : 59] And very wrong. Giving and receiving is a two-way street. And this month, my family received so much love and support from the church.

That is totally beyond our wildest imagination. People send meals, gifts, people visit us, you know, in the hospital and at home. And some of the best conversations Jenny and I had with our brothers and sisters happened this month.

So God is definitely using this time to connect us with the brothers and sisters. And it looks like Xavier's situation drew us even closer to everyone in the church.

And it's been very humbling. It's like God was saying to me, so you're learning the trade to become a better pastor, right? And I'm going to place you at the receiving end.

So you can experience how it feels like to be pastored and cared by other people, including your own sheep. So that was my second lesson.

[22 : 11] My third lesson, cherish every moment with family and friends. You just don't know when they'll be taken away. And don't take things for granted.

Be grateful. And for my family, we can't imagine life without Xavier. Now in the next few moments, I would like to invite you to close your eyes for a moment.

Let's do that, shall we? Who are the most important people in your life? hold them close in your thoughts and may you pray for them silently, for their health, for their well-being.

Let's spend a moment praying for them. Lord, may you hear our silent prayer.

prayer as we love and think of our families and friends. So next, I would like to invite you to reflect on the recent hardship or suffering you went through or have been going through.

[23 : 46] Maybe you are in the midst of immense pain and loss. God's and it's okay not being able to see God's purpose right away. We are not him.

But would you consider leaving a space in your heart to see how God is working through your predicament? Maybe it will click one day. Maybe it's already making sense now as you reflect. and why don't we spend a moment and pray to acknowledge him working in our discomfort, hardship, and pain. Let's do that for a moment.

moment. You see, church, our God is a God who is willing to enter into our suffering.

good Friday is coming up and Jesus willingly walks into the place of execution to bear the consequence of sin, which is death, for us so that we may live an eternal life.

[25 : 42] And even in this moment, he knows our deepest pain and he's willing to walk with us and eventually turn our pain into a blessing for others.

And yes, he's willing. Are you willing to follow him? Let's continue to pray together.

Dear Lord Jesus, as you entered gloriously into Jerusalem many years ago, no one expected what would happen in the next few days. No one would expect you to bear the consequence of death of all humankind on the cross.

But this is the way you show your love to us. And even now, may you hold us close. You see our pain and our yearning for relief.

May you heal those who are sick and unwell. Some of us are feeling constant ache in our body or in our mind. May your powerful healing hand come upon them and as they become well again, they would see your glorious purpose in their lives.

[27 : 08] grace. And Lord, we pray for those who need a gentle reminder. May the suffering become a sign of grace to remind them to take you seriously.

And may the pain remind us that you are watching and you are giving us time to repent. And Lord, for those who are still asking questions about faith, may you shed light on us so that we see our own limitless.

And there's just no way we can fathom your boundless wisdom and infinite glory. Help us to accept our limitations as humans and let you be God.

And finally, may we be encouraged by your words. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, so you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we pray.

[28 : 29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.