



Lake Wales  
Church of Christ  
463 N. Buck Moore Rd.  
Lake Wales, FL 33898  
[www.lakewalescoc.com](http://www.lakewalescoc.com)  
(863) 676-4114

**VOL. XXX**  
**NO. 28**  
**July 12, 2015**

# Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

**—Proverbs 18:10**

## Don't Waste Your Suffering

The ninth chapter of John's gospel begins,

As [Jesus] passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?”

Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

It has always been a popular belief that sin causes suffering.

Now, certainly, that is a true statement! Spiritually speaking, it's very true. Jesus Himself said that an hour is approaching when “all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth, those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29). Our works matter! God's judgment will not be capricious. Virtually every book of the Bible reminds us that sin leads inexorably to eternal condemnation (Rom. 3:23, 2 Cor. 5:10, Rev. 20:12, etc.)

Physically speaking that's true, too. Sin does cause bodily suffering. Often, it is the natural consequence of bad behavior, what Paul calls in Romans 1:27 the "due penalty of error"—venereal disease, injuries in a drunken car accident, financial woes from credit card spending. Sometimes, it is handed down from God above. Sodom behaved wickedly, so God rained fire (Gen. 18). The Jews grumbled, so God punished them with forty years of wandering (Numbers 14:22–23). They engaged in idolatry, so God punished them with a plague (Numbers 25:1–9). Solomon allowed his wives to lead him astray, so God lifted up an adversary to strip away the majority of the kingdom "because they have forsaken Me" (1 Kings 11:29–33). Young men insulted the prophet Elisha, so they were attacked by bears (2 Kings 2:23–24). The northern tribes of Israel abandoned the Lord, so the king of Assyria carried them into exile (2 Kings 17). Uzziah entered the temple, so God infected him with leprosy on the forehead (2 Chron. 26:16–21). Herod exalted himself, so God Himself struck him dead (Acts 12:20–23). Need I continue? The disciples didn't make up their belief from thin air. They were on pretty safe scriptural footing to suggest that sin leads to suffering. We reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7).

What's more, sins often cause suffering for other people. The drunk driver may injure his body, or he may injure or kill others. The dopehead may not just poison his own mind and body, but consign his family to a life of poverty and difficulty. God declared in the Ten Commandments that He visits the "iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:5, 2 Sam. 12:14). Achan stole and lied, and not only did he and his own family suffer, but 36 other families whose husbands and fathers were lost in battle (Joshua 7:5). When the city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, there were countless innocent people who lost their homes and businesses and were marched into exile, too (Isa. 6:10–13).

But is it always a true statement? You see, here is where the rabbis strayed from the truth, in two ways. First, they concluded that *every* time a person sins, it always leads to physical suffering. If that were so,

none of us would be here because lightning bolts would have come out of the sky and smitten each and every one of us. Not just Las Vegas and New Orleans would be blasted off the map, but this very church building, for all who are in it have sinned. We should be careful to remember that when we call for God's judgment upon sinners, we call for God's judgment upon ourselves.

Second, the rabbis also concluded that *every* time a person suffers physically, it *must* be God's punishment for his personal sin. Job's friends thought so. When Job claimed "I suffer innocently" they felt that they had to defend God from charges of injustice, and insisted that Job was hiding some great sin (4:7–8, 8:20, 11:13–19, 15:20–35, 18:5–21, 20:5–29, 22:5). But God repudiates them in the end, and praises Job; he really was suffering innocently. Later in Scripture, Jesus confirms that suffering is not always traceable to personal sin (Luke 13:1–3). Sometimes suffering just happens. Sometimes God has a reason for our suffering that we don't see from our finite perspective.

But the converse is the most insidious part of this false conclusion. If every case of suffering must be linked to sin, then every case of comfort and privilege must be linked to righteousness. If God always punishes sin in the here and now, then God always rewards good behavior in the here and now. Thus, a charmed life becomes a fortress for the prideful to believe that God is pleased with him. But it's just not true (see Psalm 73). And what's more, becomes a reason to turn up his nose at others' suffering. It is easy to fall into this trap.

This man born blind presented an extra-baffling challenge to rabbinical beliefs. As an infant, he would be incapable of sin. Their minds had to find some other reason for his suffering, some other way to link it to sin. It had to have a reason! Someone was to blame! God wouldn't allow it if not!

Jesus, however, completely rejected the notion that blame had to be assigned somewhere. Why do our minds so quickly assume that sickness or accident must be linked to spiritual deficiency? Why do we make every physical problem a theological problem? Jesus says that sin

had nothing to do with his suffering. There was no course of action he could have followed to avoid it. There was no diet or exercise regimen that could have improved his health. He could not search his conscience or history and find a root cause.

But here is the best part of the passage: with the power of Jesus, suffering—whether deserved or undeserved, we may never know—can suddenly be given purpose. Jesus said “Don’t try to figure out who’s to blame; but rather know that I’m about to use this situation to demonstrate the glory of God.”

Don’t waste your suffering. Focus on God’s purpose rather than the suffering itself. Use it as an opportunity to testify to the great mercy of God, that “momentary, light affliction is producing an eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Don’t waste your suffering. Appreciate it as God’s way to teach us what is eternal in a sea of things that are temporary and distracting. When Paul suffered a debilitating thorn in the flesh, and God refused to fix it, Paul realized that “power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Don’t waste your suffering. Take the lessons learned during difficult years, whether brought on by your bad decisions or someone else’s bad decisions or no one’s bad decisions, to give you the strength and insight you need to help others facing similar circumstances (2 Cor. 1:3–7).

Suffering as a Christian may not be understandable, and it may not even be fair. But it never has to be in vain. It can always be used, by the power of Jesus, to improve ourselves or improve others. The man born blind suffered for 20 years so that he could prove that Jesus was the light to the world. I am willing to bet that he felt those years—begging, being ostracized, being blind—were years redeemed and well spent!

Certainly, that is what Jesus did. He did not suffer for His own sins. He suffered to save others (1 Peter 2:19–24)! Let us seek to follow in His footsteps.

—*John Guzzetta*

---

### **Quote of the Week:**

“If no one around you measures up, check your ruler.” —*Bill Lemley*