

Day 9

Coach

One of my favorite children's stories is Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible No Good Very Bad Day. Alexander's day started badly and grew worse. By evening, he is saying, *"There were lima beans for dinner and I hate limas. There was kissing on TV and I hate kissing. My bath was too hot, I got soap in my eyes, my marble went down the drain, and I had to wear my railroad--train pajamas. I hate my railroad-train pajamas.*

When I went to bed, Nick took back the pillow he said I could keep and the Mickey Mouse night light burned out and I bit my tongue. The cat wants to sleep with Anthony not with me. It's been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. My mom says some days are like that."

Every one of us has days like Alexander's. As Christians, we realize that God is sovereign; he has ordained whatsoever comes to pass. We can't escape God's role in taking us through painful, difficult, sometimes crushing experiences of life. The trials and pain God has placed on our path can make us doubt his love, eroding our relationship with him.

Read Romans 8:28. *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.*

If we are honest, we must admit it is hard to actually believe this verse. In **all things** God works for the good? What about being raped? What about having your child killed by a drunk driver? What about getting terminal cancer?

I believe it is very hard to understand Romans 8:28, unless we continue reading.

Read Romans 8:29-30. *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.*

What does this verse say is the goal of God's predestination? We are predestined to what?

God's goal is for us to be conformed to the likeness of his son, which will end in our glory. The Father wants to gaze into our hearts and see the attitudes of his Son. Jesus wants to so purify our hearts that he can gaze into them and see his own reflection. These Christ-like attitudes are only formed through painful trials.

Read James 1:2-4. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Define “perseverance.” What is the opposite?
Why is perseverance necessary to build character?

A good coach makes his team persevere in running hills and wind sprints all week long. He has to get them into shape (mature and complete), so in the last quarter they can overpower their opponents and win. He knows the truth of the saying, “no pain, no gain.”

Our God is a superb coach. His focus is the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed—a day that will continue into eternity. We cannot become like Christ in our character without enduring pain. Pain is the fire that refines our inner attitudes. We hate pain because we focus on right now instead of game day. God loves us too much to do that.

We are deluded if we think there is any way in this life to avoid pain, or if we expect to understand how tragedy and death can be part of God’s perfect plan. God is weaving our lives into a tapestry that includes dark hues of difficulty and pain. We view the tapestry from underneath where the dark threads seem like a bunch of ugly knots. But from the perspective of eternity, we will see how the dark threads were necessary to accomplish God’s perfect design of our life.

God’s love for us does not cause him to wrap us up in a protective bubble so we can be “safe.” That is not what is best for us. So, it is precisely because he loves us that he is **not** safe, in the way we would like him to be. I think of Lucy’s question to Mr. Beaver, in The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, about whether Aslan was a safe lion. Mr. Beaver answered, “Who said anything about safe. ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he is good.”

The purpose of these studies is to help build a foundation for allegiance to your King and Lord, even when it feels like he is doing everything he can to make your life difficult. Allegiance doesn’t mean pretending trials don’t hurt; they do. Tell God that. He can handle it. But when your side aches, you are gasping for air, and your coach keeps blowing the whistle to run hills, remember that his eye is on game day. **He loves you too much to have any other focus.**

Day 20

The Confrontational Jesus

Dorothy Sayers wrote that the church has *“very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild,' and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.”*

Read John 18:1-8.

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.

Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

"I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go."

In the dead of night cowardly soldiers and religious officials came to take Jesus away. They were too afraid to do it in the daylight in the middle of Jerusalem. Jesus faces them head on. Notice verse 6. The sheer force of Jesus' bold presence knocks the entire posse to the ground. How would you contrast Jesus and the guards?

Read Mark 3:1-6. *Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."*

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

If you had been one of the twelve, what do you think you would have been feeling inside when Jesus put it to the Pharisees?

Have you ever heard a sermon entitled, "Be Like Jesus And Get Mad?"

Read Mathew 23:15, 25-28, 33. *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.*

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

Exactly how do these verses fit in with the notion of Jesus being meek and mild?

What do you think would happen in a boy's heart, if his Sunday school used this text in a study of Jesus' fierce confrontation of evil, entitling it, "The Dangerous Jesus"?

Wouldn't you have loved to be with Jesus when he stood up to the hypocrisy of the religious leaders? Do you think you might have said, "*Jesus you've got to lighten up. You're making these guys mad?*"

"How would telling people to be nice to one another get a man crucified? What government would execute Mister Rogers or Captain Kangaroo?" Philip Yancey

Our leader stood fearlessly for truth and righteousness. He never backed down. What a privilege it must have been to know Jesus and to be invited to be his follower.

It still is. You might want to tell Him that.