

## Denver Snuffer Podcast 189: Suffering, Part 6

This is part six of a series looking at the role of suffering in the life of the Savior, and how our own suffering brings us closer to Him.

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DENVER: Christ was essentially an Eastern mystical teacher with whose deepest teachings the Buddhists and the Hindus resonate. Because the kind of allegories He spoke with, the kind of similes He used, the language that He used, it's music in the ears of some of the Eastern cultures. And to us, we want to measure it, we want to define it, we want to put it on ourselves and we want to accomplish it. We're task oriented. We have a scientific approach. We are coarse, Christ was not. Christ dealt in hues, He dealt in feelings, He dealt in sentiments, He dealt in the heart. And it's very hard to take a faith that is grounded essentially in the heart of man and to make that something so outwardly visible that it is possible for you, as a wolf, to walk about in sheep's clothing because that's the kind of people we are. We need to be willing to accept truth from wherever it comes.

There's an incident. Boy, I really have to tell you, we have new scriptures. And when I say we I mean those that have been about trying to recover the original restoration, and I brought them with me. If you think you look like a pharisee carrying about a quadruple combination in the LDS Church, these new scriptures are -- well, they announce from at least two blocks away, "I'm devout. I'm religious. I don't have sticks, I have logs. Get back."

See:

*...there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias, and to him the Lord said in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for, behold, he prays, and has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on your name. But the Lord said unto him, Go your way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went his way and entered into the house, and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, ... Jesus, that appeared unto you in the way as you came, has sent me, that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes [as it were] scales, [they left out - There is a missing part. Ananias, when they finished talking, ran for the door.] and [immediately] he received his sight, ... and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples who were at Damascus. (Acts 5:9 RE)*

See, Ananias responded to the Lord's invitation to go minister to this fellow with the kind of healthy skepticism that comes whenever you're asked to go visit with people that are other, that are viewed as threatening. All of you probably come from congregations that suggest staying away and not cross pollinating is the best and most safe way in which to conduct a religious society. But Ananias went and did what the Lord told him that he needed to do, in any event. And when Saul was blessed, scales fell from his eyes. Now, I've always thought that the scales that fell from his eyes were like the scales that you see on a fish when you clean the scales off. But scales are also a balance that you use to wrongly apportion, wrongly measure, wrongly weigh the value of others. And I think the word scales is ambiguous precisely for that reason, to suggest to us that one of the impediments that Saul had was that he didn't have the right way of weighing things. Saul was always committed to God and dead wrong, and then God fixed him and he remained committed to God. There was no difference in the enthusiasm with which Saul, who became Paul, advocated for the purposes of what he believed to be the truth.

At the time when Jesus Christ had living officials administering rites of the gospel, Paul was able to wrestle from heaven a dispensation. Using that dispensation, Paul became a dispensation head who did more, worked harder, and labored more abundantly in ministering to Christ's sheep and spreading the gospel than any other man we know of. Paul was not jealous of the others who knew Christ and had been called by Him to the ministry. But there is some evidence of fear and jealousy towards Paul for his success in obtaining an independent dispensation of the gospel.

Paul explained his diligence in spreading the gospel:

*[I]n labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft; of the Jews, five times received I forty save one; three times was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; three times I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep; journeyings often, perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils by countrymen, perils by the heathen, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brethren; in weariness and labor, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; beside those things that are outside, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches. (NC 2 Cor. 1:39).*

Despite the opposition Paul experienced among believers and non-believers alike, he remained of a cheery disposition. "... I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content." (NC Phil. 1:6).

It is this kind of contentment that should be seen among people today. When God's people are stirred to anger with each other, then even God is against them. After the spot for a temple in Missouri was revealed, the people who went there polluted it by their jealousies and fighting. The unbelieving Missourians were used by God to expel them from the place they had hoped to build a temple. They were surprised the holy spot could be taken from them. After it was taken God explained why:

*Verily I say unto you, concerning your brethren who have been afflicted and persecuted and cast out from the land of their inheritances, I the Lord have suffered the affliction to come upon them wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgressions, yet I will own them, and they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels. Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son, for all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified. Behold, I say unto you, There were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them, therefore, by these things they polluted their inheritances. They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God, therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble. In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel, but in the day of their trouble, of necessity, they feel after me. (NC T&C 101:1-2.)*

If the covenant with God is kept, then He will allow His house to be built. The covenant cannot be kept if there is jarring, contention, envy, strife, lustful and covetous desires. If we do the same as those who went before, we would pollute the ground again. I am thankful we do not yet have a place to pollute. It would be better to never gain a promised place for God's house than to take possession and pollute it.

The content Apostle Paul taught the believers of his day:

*Let your consecrations be without covetousness, and be content with giving such things as you have; for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you, so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (Heb. 1:58 RE)*

Alma taught a lesson that we accepted by covenant as a statement of our faith:

*And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God after which ye have been received. And now I would that ye should be humble and be submissive and gentle, easy to be entreated, full of patience and longsuffering, being temperate in all things, being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times, asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal, always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive. (Alma 5:6 RE)*

The greatness of a soul is defined by how easily they are entreated to follow the truth. The greatest of those who have ever lived have been submissive and gentle souls. In a day when Satan accuses and rages in the hearts of men, it requires extraordinary will and steely determination to remain easily entreated by truth.

I have pondered how much more ought to have been accomplished during Joseph Smith's lifetime? Joseph was only able to accomplish a fraction of what needs to be restored. Joseph faced continuing troubles because of the ambition of the believers. Too many of the saints

aspired to lead. They wanted control over others. It hindered the work. Joseph was not able to finish the restoration. Our hearts must turn to the fathers in heaven, and we cannot ignore that duty because of any other vain ambition here and now. We should be less astonished by the earlier failure and far more astonished at how little we have learned from their failure.

In a letter written in July 1840 Joseph explained:

In order to conduct the affairs of the kingdom in righteousness it is all important, that the most perfect harmony kind feeling, good understanding and confidence should exist in the hearts of all the brethren. And that true Charity—love one towards one another, should characterize all their proceedings. If there are any uncharitable feelings, any lack of confidence, then pride and arrogance and envy will soon be manifested and confusion must inevitably prevail... (JSP Documents Vol. 7, p. 362, as in original.)

In that same letter Joseph said he wished the people would progress, but did not see that possible until a different spirit led them:

It would be gratifying to my mind to see the saints in Kirtland flourish, but think the time has not yet come and I assure you it never will until a different order of things be established and a different spirit be manifested. (JSP Documents Vol. 7, p. 363.)

It is in consequence of aspiring men that Kirtland has been forsaken. (JSP Documents Vol. 7, p. 364.)

After nearly a half-year of imprisonment, Joseph described the importance of a calm mind in order to hear the still small voice of God. His mind was afire with all the distractions of being in prison, and his family and friends expelled from Missouri at gunpoint. Friends had been killed. Church members had betrayed him. God spoke to Joseph when he freed his mind of these concerns and quietly pondered, opening himself up to inspiration.

Learn from these words Joseph wrote while in Liberty Jail about how to set aside all that distracts us to hear God's voice:

*We received some letters last evening: one from Emma, one from Don C[arlos] Smith, and one from bishop Partridge, all breathing a kind and consoling spirit. We were much gratified with their contents. We had been a long time without information, and when we read those letters, they were to our souls as the gentle air is refreshing. But our joy was mingled with grief because of the suffering of the poor and much injured saints, and we need not say to you that the floodgates of our hearts were hoisted, and our eyes were a fountain of tears. But those who have not been enclosed in the walls of a prison without cause or provocation can have but a little idea how sweet the voice of a friend is. One token of friendship from any source whatever awakens and calls into action every sympathetic feeling. It brings up in an instant everything that is passed. It seizes the present with a vivacity of lightning. It grasps after the future with the*

*fierceness of a tiger. It retrogrades from one thing to another, until finally all enmity, malice, and hatred, and past differences, misunderstandings, and mismanagements, lie slain victims at the feet of hope. And when the heart is sufficiently contrite, then the Voice of inspiration steals along and whispers, My son, peace be unto your soul, your adversity and your afflictions shall be but a small moment, and then, if you endure it well, God shall exalt you on high[.]* (T&C 138:11).

This world is a place of trial and testing. Before creation it was planned that when we came here we would be “proven” by what we experience. That happens now. Prove yourself by listening to God, hearing His voice, and obeying. Sometimes we are like Alma and want to do greater things to help God’s work, but the greatest work of all is to respond to God’s voice and prove you are willing to listen and obey Him.

The oldest, Old Testament scripture is the Book of Job. It's older than even the Pentateuch. There are three Old Testament texts in the King James Version of the Bible that are universally regarded as Wisdom texts: Job and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. A total of seven Old Testament texts have been regarded as Wisdom literature, some of which are not in the King James Version.

Wisdom literature is about mature faith, where disappointments and difficulties are accepted and anger against God for life's setbacks is exposed as foolishness. Wisdom literature teaches about enduring, patient, determined, and resilient faith. Job's friends mistook his suffering with divine disfavor. One of the major themes is faithfulness through adversity and trials.

The first verse of the Book of Mormon echoes with Wisdom. It contains a profound lesson learned over a lifetime. Nephi explained: *Having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days* (1 Nephi 1:1 RE). He saw many afflictions. He was highly favored of the Lord in **all** his days, including those in which the affliction was visited on him.

How can one suffer many afflictions and be highly favored of the Lord? Wisdom literature would suggest that perhaps they are related to one another. Do those who are highly favored need to encounter afflictions to understand God's grace and favor toward them? That is a Wisdom theme.

When we say life should be easier, we are foolish. We're not wise.

In his final blessing to his son Helaman, Alma says something similar: *I...know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions* (Alma 17:1 RE). Trusting God does not remove life's trials. Trusting God will not keep afflictions from you. Trusting God will not prevent troubles in your life.

The Book of Mormon explains a mature form of faith in God: resilient in the face of difficulty, enduring in the day of trouble, comforting in the moment of affliction. The faith of

the Book of Mormon writers is not superficial, conditional, and weak. It bears up under trial; it is proven in troubles; it accompanies during afflictions.

The Book of Mormon is, among other things, a Wisdom text. What if trials, afflictions, and troubles are not negative? What if they are gifts provided as an opportunity to prove us therewith so that we and God may show what is in our heart?

Job asks: *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* (Job 2:3 RE). Christ taught: *In this world there are difficult trials to be faced by my followers, but those who remain devoted will, like me, finish the path and experience the fullness of joy* (Testimony of St. John 10:29 RE).

*The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.* (Romans 1:34 RE)

Perhaps the Book of Mormon contains one account to give us hope. Following conversion, one group of Lamanites were led by a king who encouraged them to lay down their un-bloodied weapons rather than ever shed blood again. This meant they could not defend themselves. After their king finished his proposal this took place:

*And now it came to pass that when the king had made an end of these sayings, and all the people were assembled together, they took their swords and all [their] weapons which were used for the shedding of man's blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth. And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man's blood. And this they did vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren, they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother, they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness, they would labor abundantly with their hands. And thus we see that when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, [that] they were firm and would suffer, even unto death, rather than commit sin; and thus we see that they buried the weapons of peace, or they buried [their] weapons of war for peace.* (Alma 14:9 RE)

When their resolve was tested, they passed. Rather than take up arms they laid down their lives:

*Now when the people saw that they were coming against them, they went out to meet them and prostrated themselves before them to the earth, and began to call on the name of the Lord; and thus they were in [the] attitude when the Lamanites began to fall upon them and began to slay them with the sword... Thus without meeting any resistance, they did slay a thousand and five of them; and we know that they are blessed, for they have gone to dwell with their God. Now when the Lamanites saw that their brethren would not flee from the sword, neither would they turn aside to the right...or...the left, but that they would lie down and perish, and praised God even in the very act of perishing under the sword—now when the Lamanites saw this, they did*

*forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen in them for those of their brethren who had fallen under the sword, for they repented of the thing which they had done.*

*And it came to pass that they threw down their weapons of war, and they would not take them again, for they were stung for the murders which they had committed. And they came down even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted [up] to slay them.*

*And it came to pass that the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain.... (Alma 14:10-12 RE)*

This event is astonishing and many have been shocked by the extreme behavior of these believers. *We* are not being asked to lay down our weapons and be killed. *We* are only being asked to lay down our hostility, slander, and abuse of one another to become peaceful and loving. This is a good thing that benefits everybody. Despite this, we keep our pride, ambition, jealousy, envy, strife, and lusts. These destructive desires are preferred over forgiving offenses in meekness, love, and kindness. None of us are asked to die for a covenant, but are only asked to be more like Christ and forgive and love one another. This seems so difficult a challenge that we quarrel and dispute among ourselves. We remain haughty and self-righteous and fail to realize self-righteousness is a lie, a mirage, utterly untrue. We must trade our pride for humility, or we will never be able to keep the covenant. Remember, it is a group who must keep the covenant, not individuals. Together we must act consistent with the obligation we agreed to perform before God.

The path to Zion is so far beyond the reach of mankind that we know of only two successful times in scripture where heaven and earth united in Zion. One was at the time of Enoch; the other, the city of Melchizedek. In Eden, heaven and earth were united—but Eden fell. Following the visit of Christ to the Nephites, there were several hundred years of peace. But Christ's visit was temporary, and they did not reunite with heaven as a people.

We face a challenge to become something very rare, godly—even holy. It's perplexing how people were able to lay aside all envy, strife, ambition, selfishness, and enmity between one another—yet that is exactly what **we** are asked to do.

We cannot obtain land without purchasing it. We have revelations that command us:

*"Behold, the land of Zion; I, the Lord, hold it in [mine] own hands. Nevertheless, I, the Lord, render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. Wherefore, I, the Lord, will that you should purchase the lands, that you may have advantage of the world, that you may have claim on the world, that they may not be stirred up unto anger. For Satan puts it into their hearts to anger against you and to the shedding of blood. Wherefore, the land of Zion shall not be obtained but by **purchase** or by blood; otherwise, there is no inheritance for you. And if by **purchase**, behold, you are blessed, and if by blood, as you are forbidden to shed blood, lo, your enemies are upon you and you shall be*

*scourged from city to city, and from synagogue to synagogue, and but few shall stand to receive an inheritance." (T&C 50:7, emphasis added)(D&C 63:25-31)*

The saints in Joseph Smith's day failed. The Lord, speaking of that, said:

*"Behold, I say unto you, were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed, even now. But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I require at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance, as becomes saints, to the poor and afflicted among them, and are not united according to the union required by the law of the Celestial Kingdom. And Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the Celestial Kingdom, otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself. And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be by the things which they suffer." (T&C 107:1)(D&C 105:2)*

This building up of Zion, according to the principles of the law of the Celestial Kingdom, does not initially involve the law of consecration. Joseph Smith ended that practice. He said, "...that the law of consecration could not be kept here and that it was the will of the Lord that we should desist from trying to keep it, and if persisted in, it would produce a perfect abortion, and that he assumed the whole responsibility of not keeping it until proposed by himself" (*History of the Church*, 4:93; cf. 105:34). And Joseph died, of course, without ever proposing again the keeping of that law, although there were subsequent attempts made which proved to be a perfect abortion.

Consecration will eventually follow, but like everything that is distant and above this fallen world, it is not a single step. It is a stepped-process and cannot be done in haste nor in a single instant. We have to grow, degree by degree, measure by measure, in order to attempt.

This is another revelation:

*"Therefore, in consequence of the transgression of my people, it is expedient in me that my elders should wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion that they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, and have experience, and **know** more perfectly concerning their **duty** and the things which I require at their hands. And this cannot be brought to pass until my elders are endowed with power from on high, for behold, I have prepared a great endowment and [the] blessing to be poured out upon them, inasmuch as they are faithful and continue in humility before me. Therefore, it is expedient in me that my elders should wait a little season for the redemption of Zion." (T&C 107:3)(D&C 105:9)*

It is clear, at least to me, that the temple is where the Lord intends for people to be taught more perfectly and have experience and know more perfectly concerning their duty and the things which He requires at our hands. He calls that an endowment with power. Knowledge is power, but to qualify to receive that endowment, we're required to be like Abraham, who described himself in these words:



*"Having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge..." (Abraham 1:1 RE)(Abraham 1:2)*

All of those things go together. These are not disconnected thoughts. They are also not thoughts that are unrelated to "returning knowledge and understanding that reaches back into the creation itself, and before the creation," and then goes forward to the end of this cycle of creation. So, he desired to possess:

*"...great knowledge...to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge [those things go together], ...to be a Father of many nations [he was situated at a time where that was **necessarily** one of the things that followed from obtaining what he sought after], a prince of peace, and desiring to **receive instructions** and to keep the commandments of God [We tend to think that instructions and commandments from God can be burdensome. Abraham viewed it as an opportunity to gain greater knowledge, greater understanding, and therefore, with a better perspective and understanding of what God expected of us, to be a greater follower of righteousness, to fit into a pattern], "I became a rightful heir, a high priest, holding the right belonging to the Fathers. It was conferred upon me from the fathers: it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning (or before the foundations of the earth) to the present time, even the right of the firstborn (or the first man — who is Adam — or [the] first Father) through the Fathers unto me." (Abraham 1:1 RE)(Abraham 1:2-3)*

This is what God has in mind for the Restoration to be completed. This is what God intended for us to inherit as our endowment, as our greater knowledge, and enabling us to be greater followers of righteousness.

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi gives us an account of their journey—after they had been delivered from Jerusalem which was about to be destroyed and they were migrating—here are some comments that he makes about their experience:

- *"We have suffered much afflictions, hunger, thirst, and fatigue" (1 Nephi 16:35; see also 1 Nephi 5:10 RE);*
- *"...we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 17:1; see also 1 Nephi 5:11 RE);*
- *"...we had suffered many afflictions and much difficulty, yea even so much that we cannot write them all" (1 Nephi 17:6; see also 1 Nephi 5:14 RE).*

This is Nephi explaining his experience in the wilderness. Afflictions, hunger, thirst, fatigue—so many afflictions that they can't even talk about 'em. We don't look at those words; we pass over them as if Nephi were somehow being modest, or Nephi were being self-deprecating. We pass over what Moses says when he's getting the responsibilities imposed upon him by the Lord, as if it's just common sense that he's heroic and larger than life and greater than the common man. When you read his reaction, he sounds like us: he

sounds common, he sounds ordinary. And when you read the lamentation—we suffer because we are... because we're mortal, because we're here, because that's the common lot that is designed to be experienced as a consequence of the fall. And there's no escaping that.

The question isn't: Are we going to suffer while we are here? The only question is: To what degree do we bear up under the troubles of this life, graciously and humbly—and acknowledging that God rules in the heavens above; He rules in the earth beneath; and He rules in your life, too. And that everything that you experience is designed to make you be added upon by the things that you suffer and the things that you experience here.

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The foregoing excerpts were taken from:

- Denver's remarks given at the First Annual Joseph Smith Restoration Conference in Boise, ID on June 24, 2018
- Denver's remarks titled "Keep the Covenant: Do the Work" given at the Remembering the Covenants Conference in Layton, UT on September 30, 2018
- Denver's lecture titled "Signs Follow Faith" given in Centerville, UT on March 3, 2019
- Denver's conference talk titled "Civilization", given in Grand Junction, CO on April 21, 2019; and
- The Q&A Session following Denver's conference talk given in Grand Junction, CO on April 21, 2019