

# Who says suffering is optional?

If you live, you will suffer. In fact, someone said that suffering is a way of knowing you are alive. If you numb yourself, I suppose you can avoid a lot of pain; unfortunately, you will also avoid a lot of life.

Who says suffering is optional? Perhaps the same *uninformed* person who said "Love means never having to say you're sorry." There's only one who got through life without ever sinning and needing to beg forgiveness. Ironically, he suffered far more than any of us sorry souls ever will. Throughout history the Suffering Servant has been called all sorts of names, some awesome, some just plain awful. For "that man," suffering was not optional.

**H**as anyone believed or seen the mighty power of the Lord in action? Like a young plant or a root that sprouts in dry ground, the servant grew up obeying the Lord. He wasn't some handsome king. Nothing about the way he looked made him attractive to us. He was hated and rejected; his life was filled with sorrow and terrible suffering. No one wanted to look at him. We despised him and said, "He is a nobody!" He suffered and endured great pain for us, but we thought his suffering was punishment from God. He was wounded and crushed because of our sins; by taking our punishment, he made us completely well. All of us were like sheep that had wandered off. We had each gone our own way, but the Lord gave him the punishment we deserved. He was painfully abused, but he did not complain. He was silent like a lamb being led to the butcher, as quiet as a sheep having its wool cut off. He was condemned to death without a fair trial. Who could have imagined what would happen to him? His life was taken away because of the sinful things the people had done. He wasn't dishonest or violent. He was buried in a tomb of cruel, rich people. The Lord decided his servant would suffer as a sacrifice to take away the sin and guilt of others. Now the servant will live to see his own descendants. He did everything the Lord had planned. By suffering, the servant will learn the true meaning of obeying the Lord. Although innocent, he will take the punishment for the sins of others, so that many of them will no longer be guilty. The Lord will reward him with honor and power for sacrificing his life. Others thought he was a sinner; [you could say ironically all this came about because] he suffered for our sins and asked God to forgive us.

## EXCERPTS ABOUT THAT MAN

There is nothing else in all literature quite like this. Here and here only *it's as if* the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man.

He was very very. And he still is very very. Full bodied. Real. Authentic. Truthful as no other. Strong. Fearsome. Tender. Compassionate. Not to be fooled; not to be bribed or duped. Yet everybody's ransom; everybody's way out; everybody's atonement.

God could, had He pleased, have been incarnate in a man of iron nerves, the Stoic sort who lets no sigh escape him. Of His great humility He chose to be incarnate in a man of delicate sensibilities who wept at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood in Gethsemane. He faced all that the weakest of us face, has shared not only the strength of our nature but every weakness of it *except sin*. If he had been incarnate in a superman, or a being possessed of immense raw courage, that wouldn't have been very useful. In our way of thinking, it would have been the same as not bothering to show up at all.

And what was "that man" all about?

He wrote no book. We have only reported sayings, most of them uttered in answer to questions...and when we have collected them all we cannot reduce them to a system. He preaches, but he does not lecture. He uses paradox, proverb, exaggeration, parable, irony; even (I mean no irreverence) the "wisecrack." He utters maxims which, like popular proverbs, if rigorously taken, may seem to contradict one another. His teachings therefore cannot be grasped by intellect alone, as if studying some subject. If we try to do that with it, we shall find Him the most elusive of teachers. He hardly ever gave a straightforward answer to a straight question. He will not be, in the way we want, "pinned down." The attempt is (again, I mean no irreverence) like trying to bottle a sunbeam. (C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*)

**I**n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. he was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it...He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-5; 10-14)

"You are right in saying I am a king," Jesus answered. "In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

"What is truth?" Pilate asked.

...he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Letter to the Hebrews 2:17, 18). For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.(Letter to the Hebrews 4:15)

**W**ho, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus the Lord), every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Letter to the Philippians 2:6-11).