# Jesus - Our Hope in a Hopeless World

# Man of Sorrows, familiar with suffering – How Do you Reconcile this with our Theme?

# Introduction

Viktor Emil Frankil was born in 1905. 37 years later, just 9 months after he got married, Frankil was sent to the Nazi concentration camps with his wife, father, mother, and brother. He spent three years in four different camps, including Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and by the end of the war was the only one left alive.

Frankl was already a neurologist and psychiatrist when he entered the camps, and afterwards he reflected on his experiences in a book entitled *Man’s Search for Meaning.*

Professor T Muldoon, a theologian and author made the following comment on the book:

*“Frankl was a sober realist: he details the horrors of Auschwitz and the moral corruption of those who worked there. His philosophy was not about wishing away problems or pretending they do not exist, but rather to acknowledge them in their grim reality. Yet despite this realism, or rather because of it, he describes how holding onto hope was literally a life-or-death choice. Those who lost hope, he said, developed a certain look in their eye, a fatalism that inevitably ended in death.”*

In the words of Frankl, *“whoever was still alive, had reason for hope”.*

What is your reason for hope? Unless you have something to hope for, life is meaningless. Frankl said, *“when a person can’t find a deep sense of meaning, they distract themselves with pleasure”.* But what are we to do when life brings suffering; when we cannot afford pleasures; or when our bodies are not healthy enough to enjoy them?

Thank God that Christianity is not a frilly, fair-weather religion.

As Christians, we have a reason for hope. And because we have a reason for hope, we can find meaning in life even when we are suffering. In fact, it is the pursuit of a meaningful life that often leads to suffering. Why? Because to pursue meaning, we must follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We must live as Jesus did. And lived a life of self-denial for the sake of others. This is why he is described in the Bible as a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering. Which brings us to the title of this workshop: Man of sorrows, familiar with suffering – how do we reconcile this to the theme of the conference that Jesus is our hope in a hopeless world?

In other words: What is the relationship between Christ’s suffering and our hope? To explore this relationship, let’s begin by clarifying our thinking on hope.

# Christian Hope

* What are some of things we hope for in life?
* Does hope imply risk?
* Suppose we could talk of “Christian Hope”. Give me an example of a Christian hope.
* What makes a Christian hope different to other hopes?
* What is needed to make a hope a Christian one?

To hope, you must put your trust in a promise.

A promise is only as good as the person who makes it.

So, Christianity is unique because it offers hope that is not uncertain because our hopes are founded on the promises of a dependable, capable God.

Now, having set up the background, let’s re-state the question we want to answer: What is the relationship between Christ’s suffering and our hope, particularly when we are suffering as well.

So, we are going to the explore the question from two perspectives:

A. Christ’s Suffering, and

B. Our suffering.

# A. Christ’s suffering:

Here’s a road map of where we are going in section A:

1. Validates God’s promises.
2. Demonstrates God’s love for us.
3. Is an example to learn from.

## 1. Validates God’s promises.

### The promise

* What has God promised us?

Something I love to do is to read the Bible with my eyes open for God’s promises because the promises of God give me hope.

For example, let’s read:

**1 Peter 1:3-9.**

We have:

1. a living hope of resurrection.
2. an eternal inheritance.
3. a powerful protector.
4. a tested faith – with the result of praise, glory and honour, and salvation.

### The validation?

#### a. His death reconciles us to God.

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul makes it clear that every human:

* Has replaced God with other things and worshipped those instead.
* Is experiencing God’s wrath in the form of being handed over to a downward spiral of sin.
* Will be declared guilty on the Day of Judgement.

Use the illustration of a man who steals from his business partner.

So, something had to be done to reconcile us to God. The starting point was justification.

**Let’s read Romans 5:1-11.**

In the case of the man and his business partner, repentance and forgiveness would lead to reconciliation, but it might not lead to restoration of the relationship to what it was before. This is not the case for us as Christians because God both reconciles us and gives us the Holy Spirit.

#### b. His death gives us the Holy Spirit.

**God’s Love poured into our hearts.**

Suffering is the best context in which to become assured of God’s love.

Paul writes:

*5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

When we’re suffering and putting our hope in God, Satan will start whispering: why are you putting your hope in God? He isn’t good. He doesn’t love you. Your hope will be in vain. Your hope will put you to shame. Why trust in God?

But we put our hope in God’s promise of glory **because** He is a loving and dependable God. How do we know this?

**We experience it**

If your little child falls and hurts his knee, he doesn’t want to hear how much you love him. He wants to feel your love. He wants you to pick him up and give him a hug.

When you are suffering, you can feel the love of God at the centre of your being through His Holy Spirit – the very presence of God who has been given to you.

*“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.* (1 John 4:11-12)

So, suffering is the best context in which to become assured of God’s love. This is something to rejoice in because knowing God’s love is the greatest of all delights! And it gives meaning to our lives because if we know that we are loved by God, then we can love others. To fail to love is to live a meaningless life.

**Seal guaranteeing our inheritance.**

*“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, were sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of you inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”* (Ephesians 1:13-14)

#### c. Gives us the hope of glory

Let’s try and get our heads around this. In this context, the glory of God refers to the perfection of His character and attributes. God is glorious because He is perfectly loving, perfectly powerful, perfectly just, perfectly patient, perfectly healthy … and so on.

Now, we were originally created to reflect God’s glory accurately i.e. His patience, love, kindness etc. But Paul told us in chapter 3 that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We have a glory problem! We are no longer patient, loving etc in the way God is.

But one day, when we die or Christ returns – whichever comes first, we will see God in all His glory and we ourselves will perfectly reflect His glory. We will no longer be impatient or jealous or greedy or sick or weak, and we will be completely removed from the presence of sin and temptation.

Isn’t this something to rejoice in? This is the reason for our hope. And remember that it was a reason for hope that help people to endure the holocaust. And it will help you to endure your trials. In fact, Paul seems to think that we can experience joy during suffering.

#### d. His resurrection will Save us from God’s wrath.

It’s one thing to know that we have been justified – declared righteous in God’s eyes. But will this be enough to save us from God’s wrath on the day of judgement (something we’ve heard all about *ad nauseum*!) After all – it isn’t over till it’s over! Are we saved? Yes and no! We are in the sense that we are now in right standing with God. We have been declared innocent. But the process will not be complete until we have been saved from God’s wrath on the day of judgement and then given our new eternal, sin-free bodies.

The point Paul makes in verses 9 to 10 is this: If God has started the work by doing the most difficult thing, can we not trust Him to complete it? Look:

*9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

Justifying us was no mean feat. It came with the greatest price tag of all time: the blood of Christ! That was the hard part. If God could do that, *“much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God”.*

#### e. His resurrection guarantees ours.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 – the gospel message is that *“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared”* (empirical evidence) …

Verse 12 – *“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?...”* Read on …

Brothers and sisters, we have a living hope THROUGH the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

## 2. Demonstrates God’s love for us.

Earlier we discovered that God’s love can be experienced, and that suffering is the best context in which to become assured of God’s love. But our knowledge of God’s love is not only subjective. It is also objective because it has been proven to us:

*6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

So, Christ’s death on the cross is an objective demonstration of God’s love for you. But what do we learn about love from Christ’s example?

## 3. Provides an example to learn from.

### a. Love requires sacrifice - giving; therefore, suffering.

*“For God so loved the world, that he GAVE his only son…”* (John 3:26)

*“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8)

### b. Love requires obedience.

### c. Suffering is the only path to glorification.

Let’s set this up: we’ve said that our hope is that we will be like God one day i.e., glorious.

Now here’s the thing: suffering is the only path to glory. Even Jesus had to go through suffering before He was glorified. Paul says later in Romans that we are:

*heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:17).*

So, if suffering is the only path to glory and we are suffering, then we can rejoice because we are on the road to glory!

### d. Hope gets us through suffering

Jesus screamed … Jesus’ hope from Psalm 22.

Psalm 33 contrasts false hopes in time of trouble with the one and only true hope.

*“Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.”* (Psalm 33:18-19)

We hope in the steadfast love of God.

Take a break…

Summarise.

What is the relationship between Christ’s suffering and our hope, particularly when we are suffering as well.

We are exploring the question from two perspectives:

A. Christ’s Suffering, and

B. Our suffering.

Christ’s Suffering:

1. Validates God’s promises.
2. Demonstrates God’s love for us.
3. Is an example to learn from.

Let’s take a look now from the perspective of our suffering.

# B. Our suffering:

Our Suffering:

1. Leads to maturity
2. Leads to greater hope
3. Leads to joy

## 1. Leads to maturity.

If suffering leads to glory in the end, it leads to maturity in the meantime.

We rejoice over what our suffering is doing IN us.

*… knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,*

No runner is ready for the race until he has been trained and tested by his coach. Training and testing are uncomfortable – even painful. But the discomfort and pain are for a reason. They produce endurance. And the endurance required in training produces the kind of character needed to perform in the match. The coach would not be doing the runner a favour if he failed to prepare him properly for the race.

James puts it this way:

*2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Friends, we rejoice in the fact that suffering is perfecting and completing us. We rejoice because things we lack now will not be lacking once we get through the trial.

So, suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, but what does Paul mean when he says character produces hope?

## 2. Leads to greater hope.

Think of it this way: if each trial is to prepare you for the next trial – to make sure that you are mature enough to get through with your faith in God intact – then when we get through the latest trial stronger than before this gives us hope that God will get us safely across the finish line into glory.

## 3. Leads to joy

Remember that this “joy” is not an emotion but rather a settled conviction – a conviction arrived at by a mental process of accounting, a weighing up of the credits and debits.

*“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing.”*

Peter wrote:

*“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials…”*

What is the “this” that we rejoice in? Is it the trial? It is the fact that we have a living hope, an eternal inheritance, a powerful protector, and a proven faith.

Paul wrote:

*“We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope …”*

# Conclusion