



## ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

*we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him. The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us... Romans 8:16-18*

**June 19th**

### ***What is the cross we must carry if we are to be disciples of Christ?***

For Jesus, His cross was the instrument of our salvation. It was much more than just a device of suffering and death. He carried His cross, will all of the pain and suffering that accompanied it, out of love for us. It was love He carried, a total love for His Father and for us. For that love He paid an enormous price. Death.

That suffering He endured was not pointless. It achieved something. Out of what was a dark and evil action on the part of sinful men, something wonderful was emerging and growing. That suffering was not fruitless, was not meaningless because He bore it all for the love of someone (all of us) other than Himself. It was in no way meaningless or pointless.

It was in the transforming of His own suffering and death from an act of evil to a sacrificial offering of love that we have the chance to have our suffering and even our deaths elevated from being something terrible for us, into something gracious and powerful for the world. In the uniting of our own suffering to those of Jesus, God achieves great things.

### ***Sufferings taken to the cross of Jesus are purifying***

In a world promoting evils such as euthanasia as a way of avoiding suffering and prolonging life, the message of the Gospel stands in stark contrast. Everything done in Christ has meaning, achieves something because it is God who is bringing life out of death, hope out of darkness and pain. Through faith, not a single tear is wasted.

*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ...1 Peter 1:6-9*

For Peter, it is in our understanding of our suffering and pain that our faith and our hope is strengthened and refined. As we struggle to understand the “why” of what is happening, we turn to God and it is God who *makes our yoke easy and our burdens light*. Even in these terrible things that are going on in our lives, God is bringing salvation to others. Love is what transforms and grows our faith. We begin to understand better what is happening. God is not punishing us through suffering, but the suffering purifies us, perfects us and takes away our sins. But it does require faith and it is built on hope. In the midst of our suffering there is a hidden treasure that is ours to find, a treasure we are invited to discover.

### ***Suffering is an opportunity for healing through our suffering***

We might not want to accept it but we are sinners. All of us without exception – according to Jesus. None of us are perfect and we all fail, in some way, to meet the demands of the Gospel for living under the reign of God. But one of the great gifts of faith is the offer of forgiveness, the gift of being able to rise up and start all over again. This is where suffering

comes into play. *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*” **Hebrews 12:7, 11**. This wonderful text invites us to see our sufferings as a way of disciplining ourselves – not always easy to do! For Him it is “discipline” in the sense of someone going to the gym trying to tone up their bodies. It is not easy but the discipline of training and all that goes with it, brings about a transformation.

So too for our suffering (our cross). In it and through it we can begin to see ourselves in a different light, come to an understanding of the fullness of our humanity and our place in the saving works of God in creation. It is no longer for ourselves. In bringing our pain and uncertainties to the cross, and seeing in them a share in the sufferings of Jesus, they become something to be more than just terrible things to be endured. They are never good and often bring us to the edge through pain and fear, but they are renewing us and offering the gift of faith and hope to others who are alongside of us in our pain.

### *Suffering and pain can become a part of our prayer lives*

As we go through periods of great pain, grief and suffering, or struggle to find some light in a terrible darkness that seems likely to overwhelm us, prayer in the traditional sense can be all but impossible. But that does not mean we are not praying.

This is how we pray in and through our suffering. In faith and hope, every intentional act offered to God for the benefit of another “does” something. It is in the act of offering. The Holy Spirit takes what we are doing, purifies it and makes it acceptable to God. Our love-in-suffering is then showed back down upon the world in ways we do not understand, for the benefit and salvation of others. That is praying and we have not said a single word.

This kind of praying is much, much more than the reciting of familiar formulae, prayers we know by heart. Those prayers too can be comforting, uplifting and transformative, but the offering up of our sufferings for the good of others, that is where we are united to the suffering and saving death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is our comfort in times of trial.

### *We do not always hear God’s response to our prayers*

Jesus teaches us that when we call out to God and are not immediately rescued, are not healed; when we do not hear an immediate response from the clouds, God is still there and God is still trustworthy. In His agony on the cross, Jesus cried out to God in anger, frustration and pain...*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me...* Given his condition – nailed to a cross – it is not an unreasonable question to be asking. We have more than likely made that cry ourselves, either because of our own suffering or because of the suffering of others. But His prayer was not one of despair. After Jesus asked the Father why He had forsaken Him, He did not give up and curse His Father. Rather, He trusted God that His terrible death was achieving something and not wasted. And so, in His last breath as He cried out, *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.* (**Luke 23:46**). Despite the pain, His hope and His faith in His Father’s love prevailed and His dying became salvific or all of us.

Thus, when Jesus predicates discipleship on the taking up of our cross and following Him, He is offering us a formula for turning the entirety of our struggles of discipleship into acts He can use for the salvation of others. In our endurance we find hope.