# THE NEW SHOFAR

**A home, and not a grave, is the true ending of our earthly life; we depart, not to be, as we say, 'dead', but really to live – P B Power**

**July 12th, 2026** **Who/What will separate us from the love of Christ?**

Recently I was asked to celebrate a funeral for a lady who is not yet dead. She was putting her life in order as cancer overtakes her. Here is the real challenge that I now face. She has chosen to take up the option of euthanasia and has the date of her death written into her calendar. This is my challenge as I minister to her: What can I be offering this lady who is in such pain that she chooses death over life? What would you do?

### But God Laments Suffering

Just because God causes suffering does not mean he enjoys it. Scripture is always clear that God would rather bless than curse; and when he does curse—though justice demands it—he would still rather not. *As surely as I live," declares the Lord, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live* (**Ezekiel 33:11**).

That is why our first response to suffering should always be lament and not try to give the "correct" answers. When something bad happens—like her cancer —our natural first reaction as believers is often to try and explain why it's happening and then to look for all the way in which God might be using this suffering for our benefit and for the blessing of others. That is a good thing to do—in time. But it is not the first thing we should do when helping suffering people. The first thing we should do is lament that we live in a world where suffering happens. We are to put our arm round those people and say, 'That sucks,' and then say nothing more for a long, long time. Because that is how God feels about suffering: it sucks, and he would rather not have to bring it. The psalms are full of lament: people crying out to God in a suffering world. The first thing we should say to suffering people is: 'Suffering sucks.' Suffering can be redemptive when we persevere in faithfulness.

### But God Knows How We Feel

God, in Jesus, stepped into the world he was punishing for sin and, on the cross, took that punishment on himself so we could be forgiven. That is the core of Christianity. That means God knows how we feel when we suffer. He is not aloof, like Allah, who cannot suffer, or Buddha, who says that suffering is an illusion. Rather, he knows suffering, first-hand, in Jesus. And that is a great comfort. Because when we are suffering, it is important to know that the person dishing out instructions in life knows what it is like to suffer, too.

What is God doing while this lady (and millions of others) suffers "unfairly"? Sitting up in his heaven, looking down on us as we suffer, clueless?

No. He's been through it, even more than we have. On the cross, God felt the total suffering of pouring all of his wrath for sin out on himself. He knows how we feel. And that is comforting good to know for those times when we ourselves are suffering so dreadfully. It is by taking our sufferings to the foot of the cross that we find the grace to persevere.

## God Is Bringing Suffering to an End

But Jesus did not just die to identify with our suffering, so that he could know how we feel. He did it to do something—pay for the cause of our suffering, sin. Because he paid for it, we no longer have to suffer for our sin ourselves in eternity. We can have, as Paul puts it, '*eternal glory*.' God will one day bring suffering to an end.

What does this mean? It means that one day he will raise us to life, and creation will follow suit. **Romans 8:22-23** '*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves… groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies*.' The hope of the gospel is not just a disembodied hope, of heaven, or of souls floating on clouds. It is of physical suffering ending—for us and for the world—by the world being remade. A new creation. How comforting! Reassuring! God at this very moment is already bringing our suffering to an end. If only we could see it and feel it.

## God Helps us Cope with Suffering in the Meantime

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans… (**Romans 8:26-27).** Our suffering sometimes is so bad we do not even know what to pray, let alone do. But God gives us his Spirit, who prays for us when our words have dried up. And he knows exactly what the Spirit is saying—and so how to answer.

**To sum up**: can an all-powerful, all-good God allow suffering? Yes, that is not inconsistent, as he may have a good reason to do it and we are not born into perfection. We are weak and fragile moving towards death. What is that good reason? Justice. When humanity sins, God's goodness demands that he punish us and suffering is that punishment. But: he laments that he must do it; he knows what suffering feels like; he has done something about it on the cross so that he can end suffering; and he helps us in the meantime while we wait.

What God wants is to make us more like Jesus. He wants a whole world of people who look like his Son, many *brothers and sisters*. And he uses suffering—and the ways it makes us depend on him, trust him, cry out to him—to do it. Why is there still suffering in the world when God is all-powerful and all-good? There must be: God's justice demands it (all have sinned). But this side of the cross, suffering does not have to be a knife. For everyone who trusts in Jesus, it can also be a chisel, one that God wields to make us look more like the One we will one day join in glory. And there is no more loving thing God can do for us.

The world is hard. Suffering is awful. But God still loves us. He must do. He would not have suffered for sins if he had no love for us. He would not have promised us glory if he didn't. He would not use our suffering to make us look more like Jesus if he did not. So: who then can separate us from a love like that? According to Paul … nothing: *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (**Romans 8:38-39**). That is the greatest most comforting hope my friend can hold onto as she approaches the reality of standing face to face with her Loving Heavenly Father. God loves her.