*Introduction*

We have been looking over the last 2 weeks at adversity. We have seen that adversity is not linked to sin specifically and that we as Christians are not exempt from suffering, in fact James says WE WILL have suffering and when we do to count is as ‘pure joy’.

We saw how James told us not only to count it as Joy, but to take our adversity to God in prayer, tell Him about it and then to Honour Him in it.

It’s actually easier to be a moaner in suffering than it is to Honour Him in suffering.

The other thing we saw last week was how we have a Saviour, a High Priest, one who petitions the Father on our behalf, in the heavenlies, at the right hand of God the Father.

We saw how he had been through everything we go through. He knew rejection on the cross, shouting “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

He had been beaten and persecuted but had done nothing to deserve it. He knows all that you are going through.

Does he understand your bad back? – on the cross every bone was aching and out of joint, Yes He understands.

Does He understand when people at work are on your case? – the Pharisees were always on his case, Yes He understands.

Does he understand your pain and loss of a loved one? – Jesus lost Lazarus, he wept, Yes He understands.

In concluding this mini series on adversity, I believe that God would have us look at the bigger picture and Himself.

Therefore we are going to look at the fact that:

1. God is Love
2. There is no situation where God cannot work, if we let him.
3. God works for our good – always.

**God is love.**

What a statement!

The question that comes back from that is the same one we looked at briefly on week one – If God is Love then why do all these bad things happen? Or If God is love, where is He when I am suffering?

In looking at the bigger picture, we have to remember that in the beginning, BEFORE God created anything He had our good in mind.

When God made you and me – man!, He did so in His image. And in so doing also gave us FREEDOM.

Freedom to choose to go God’s way or another way.

When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God’s instruction not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, they chose to go their way.

This act did not catch God out, far from it, He had planned for it.

We read:

***EPH 1:3-6 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.***

***1PETER 1:18-20 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.***

The way of suffering started through disobedience. But God in His love, did not abandon us but had put in place, beforehand, a plan to save us by the giving of His one and only Son – Jesus Christ.

What does that tell you about God – He is LOVE and He LOVES YOU.

**There is no situation where God cannot work, if we let him.**

If you are a parent then you know what it means to love your child, despite what they do. You also know that by saying Yes to everything they want is not the best thing for the child.

Let me in humerous fashion try and illustrate that point.

A child comes in and says to mum (could also be dad) MUM can I have £5 please?

MUM: Of course you can dear. But why do you want the money?

CHILD: I want to buy some cigarettes.

MUM: Cigarettes, but your only 13 years old, they are not good for you.

CHILD: I know Mum, but everyone at school smokes, so I do to.

MUM: Okay, here’s the money. I just want you to be happy.

IS THAT LOVE?

NO! Having everything we ask for so that we might be happy, is not good for us.

Saying no to this child would probably cause a ‘scene’ at home, that child will say things that are hurtful because they can’t have their own way. But even though you are hurt by what has been said, and for a time you perhaps do not like the child they have become – you still love them, because they are your child.

In the same way, God loves us. Although we may be disobedient, go away from him, throw the odd tantrum..... God still loves You and Me.

Love sometimes means being tough

Love sometimes means allowing us to make mistakes

Love sometimes means stopping us in our tracks.

Paul says

***ROM 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."***

***No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.***

**God works for our good - always**

Because God is a God of Love, it underpins his purposes. Paul tells us what Gods purpose is:

***RO 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.***

In everything that happens in this sin-stained planet, God continues to interact with unimaginable good, a good that overwhelms evil by springing out of the devil’s attempts to deny the good.

He invites us to co-operate with Him by loving Him and trusting Him, and through a co-operative effort to continue to turn all that was meant for evil into good.

Let us look at the life of Joseph.

Joseph was a man who was greatly loved by his father to the detriment of the other brothers. Joseph had a lovely coat and had visions that unfortunately made his brothers despise him.

The brothers wanted to kill him, but due to the intervention of the eldest, he was thrown into a cistern, but he was eventually sold as a slave into Egypt.

His father was distraught at being told he had been killed by a wild animal.

Some time later, a famine occurred in the land and the brothers were sent to Egypt to buy food.

Who was in charge? – Joseph, and what did he way to his brothers

***GE 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.***

You may not understand why you are going through what you are going through, but the purpose of God is to bring good out of it.

*Conclusion*

**The bigger picture**

God’s bigger picture is this – to restore the world, ALL His creation, back into its original state. – PERFECT.

We may have lost sight of that but Gods creation hasn’t, Paul says

***ROM 8:19-21 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.***

He then goes on to say

***23-25 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.***

Paul the Apostle was a man, who we have said in the past was not the person you wanted to be with. To be with Paul meant you were in for a troubled ride.

***2 COR 11:23-29 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?***

And yet Paul says

***RO 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.***

Paul says in effect, don’t worry about what you are going through, it may be painful and neverending at this time, but compared to what is coming in CHRIST. Its not even worth a comparison check. It pales into insignificance.

But Paul doesn’t end there, for he gives us some encouragement and excitement!

***RO 8:31-38 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."***

***No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.***

The key to being able to deal with the adversity that comes into our life is this:

KNOWING JESUS.

With Christ we can handle it all because He is in charge and He wants our good. We are not on our own, even when we feel lonely. He is there, even in the most unlikely of places.

Without Christ – you are on your own.

The Good news is that he does not want you to be on your own. He WANTS an intimate relationship with you.

When I say its about KNOWING JESUS, I do not mean its about coming to Church, being with Church people (Christians), or knowing about Christ.

KNOWING JESUS is believing that He is the Son of God, that He came from heaven and walked this earth, born of a virgin and died in your place upon the cross for YOUR SINS, YOUR DISOBEDIENCE.

KNOWING JESUS is, having believed that, you REPENT, turn away from all your sinful life and walk His way.

KNOWING JESUS means to ask Him to come into your life and take over, putting Him number one.

Have you done that?

Or perhaps you did at some point, but since then you have gone off in your own direction, got involved in things you should not have.

You need to REPENT and turn back to him.

You either know Jesus this morning or you do not, there is no sitting on the fence.

He is knocking at the door of your heart, Will you let Him in?

Let us pray.