

Paul writes to the Christians in Rome

The early Christian writer Paul experienced many different types of sufferings himself, including beatings, shipwreck and a long term physical ailment that he called 'a thorn in the flesh'.

Paul communicated with Christians in different locations by letter. The following passage comes from a letter to the Christians at Rome, which Paul probably wrote sometime between AD 55 and 58.

I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us.

We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him.

I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love – not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Romans chapter 8 verses 18, 28 and 38-39 (CEV)

Put into your own words what Paul said to the Christians in Rome about suffering.

What do you think his purpose was for including this in his letter?

Choose three adjectives to describe how reading this passage might change how Christians feel about any suffering they are going through.

Jesus heals a deaf and mute man

The Gospels contain many accounts in which Jesus heals different types of people, including people with disabilities, people who had leprosy and people who were mentally unwell.

One of these stories about healing is in chapter 7 of Mark's Gospel. Here are the different parts of the story, but after the first sentence the rest has been mixed up.

Rearrange the parts of the story into the correct order.

Jesus left the region around Tyre and went by way of Sidon towards Lake Galilee. He went through the land near the ten cities known as Decapolis.

At once the man could hear, and he had no more trouble talking clearly.

After Jesus had taken him aside from the crowd, he stuck his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spat and put the spit on the man's tongue.

Jesus told the people not to say anything about what he had done. But the more he told them, the more they talked about it.

Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. They begged Jesus to touch him.

Jesus looked up towards heaven, and with a groan he said "Effatha!" which means "open up!"

They were completely amazed and said, "Everything he does is good! He even heals people who cannot hear or talk."

Mark chapter 7 verses 31-37 (CEV)

Most Christians believe that these miracle stories are principally about showing that Jesus was the Son of God, but they also see them as showing Jesus' love and compassion for those who are suffering.

How might Jesus' healing miracles influence how Christians think about other people who are experiencing suffering, and any actions they take?

The crucifixion

Perhaps the most important part of the New Testament that deals with the existence of suffering is the story of Jesus' crucifixion.

The soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross, and gambled to see who would get his clothes. Then they sat down to guard him.

Matthew chapter 27 verses 35-6 (CEV)

It was about nine o'clock in the morning when they nailed him to the cross.

Mark chapter 15 verse 25 (CEV)

When the soldiers came to the place called, "The Skull", they nailed Jesus to a cross.

Luke chapter 23 verse 33 (CEV)

After the soldiers had nailed Jesus to the cross ...

John chapter 19 verse 23 (CEV)

None of the Gospels go into detail about what happened when someone was crucified, because their readers would have known what it involved. Jesus was first beaten, then whipped, and then nailed to a cross and left to die. Crucifixion was a very cruel way to kill someone which involved great physical pain and suffering, leading to a slow death. It was also a humiliating way to die, because it was carried out in public.

Christians believe that Jesus was divine (which means that he was God), and that by dying for the sins of humanity he removed the consequences of human evil. In addition, because Jesus experienced extreme suffering, Christians believe that the crucifixion shows that God is not a distant observer of human suffering. The resurrection of Jesus shows that death and evil can be defeated, and can be seen as an inspiration for Christians who are struggling with difficult situations.

How might belief that Jesus knew what suffering was like help a Christian to deal with their own suffering?