

Good News – After the Fact!
[2 Kings 22:1-20](#); [Luke 24:30-32](#)

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Socrates is one of one of those people I really admire. The Athenians had lost a long and difficult war and they needed someone to lash out at. They chose Socrates not because he was a traitor but because he was always questioning things. What are the gods like? What is the nature of reality? How do we really know what we know? According to his enemies he was an atheist, stirring up the youth, causing them to question their elders and the ancient ways. And so, Socrates was tried and condemned to death.

He had the chance to escape. He had plenty of friends who wanted to help him get away. In fact, the death sentence was delayed, in part, to give him time to flee the country.

But he didn't. He had followed the laws of Athens all his life and wasn't about to go against them now, just because they didn't suit him. And that's why we remember him today. In the face of unjust suffering, he remained firm and true to his convictions. Plato, his most famous pupil, wrote about him at length.

Suffering comes to all of us. We live in a fallen, sinful world. Suffering happens. The question is what are we going to do with it? Socrates turned his suffering into a chance to show the world what true integrity and character look like. He's a lesson to us all. Suffering comes to us all. But can we turn it into good news, even if only after the fact?

When I was seeking my first position as an interim pastor, times were hard. There weren't a lot of interim jobs open just then. I was interviewed and turned down several times. (I was brand new and didn't have a track record.) I had been unemployed for several months. We were trying to sell our home and move somewhere cheaper. I was getting desperate.

Finally, I found a position at a little church in West Virginia. They paid what they could, but it wasn't much, and I had a Nashville mortgage to pay. Elizabeth did what she could, but a lot of her effort was going into selling the house. It was the most broke I've ever been.

In fact, I was so broke, I ate as many meals as I could at the local soup kitchen. Whenever they gave away food, I was right there with my hands out. And God help me, on the way home I would stop and look through the dumpsters behind the local restaurants. Times were tough. I was a grown man with two Masters degrees and a full-time job but I was living hand-to-mouth in a converted motel and eating at a soup kitchen.

But out of that I learned a lot about the homeless and indigent. Had some good conversations with them. Learned about the realities of their lives. In the moment it was hard, absolutely. But looking back, I realize I learned a lot. I learned about the importance of checking your dignity at the door and taking what you're given. I learned which volunteers were in it for the ministry and which were there for the power trip. I learned how hard it is to cook raw vegetables with a dorm-size microwave and an electric hotplate.

I'm not bragging. And I'm not seeking sympathy. I'm just saying there was a time in my life when suffering was a reality and I could either sink under it, or I could turn it to my advantage. I could make it good news, after the fact. I think, I hope, I did.

Let's look at Josiah. Josiah is King of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The time is about 630 BC. The Temple in Jerusalem has fallen into disrepair and Josiah is determined to fix it. He empties out the treasury, hires workmen and tells them to give the Temple a makeover. In the course of repairing the Temple they find an old book full of laws, probably part of Deuteronomy. When they read it, they're scared to death. Oh my gosh. Look at all these laws we haven't been following. What are we going to do?

They do what any good civil servant would do, they kick the problem upstairs. They take it to the king.

The king is beside himself but before he gets too carried away, he makes sure to have it authenticated by the local wisewoman. She authenticates it and gives him the bad news about what's going to happen to the kingdom.

Now what? Josiah didn't want this. He wasn't the one who turned away from God. He's trying to follow God! What's Josiah going to do?

He can give up. 'Oh well. Too late to do anything now.' But he doesn't. If you read on to the next chapter, you'll find Josiah repairs the Temple. He removes all the altars and idols of the pagan gods. He destroys the hillside shrines. He commits the people to following God's law. At least for a little while, the people become more the way God wants them to be. Josiah is in a bad situation, but he does what he can. He tries to find some good after the fact.

Look at our New Testament Lesson. The two men realize, just a little too late, that it's Jesus there with them. What are they going to do now? Go to bed? 'Gosh darn, it was him and we missed it. Oh, well.' Maybe go back to Jerusalem in the morning? They can't go back now. It's pitch dark. Only the moon and stars to light the way. Who knows what kind of bandits are out there. 'Guess we'll go to bed.'

No. They get up and go back to Jerusalem. They find the other disciples. It's never too late to celebrate Jesus, even if you didn't know he was there until after the fact.

Yes, we all have down times. We all suffer. After all, we live in a sinful, fallen world. Sometimes suffering is forced on us. We're fired unjustly. A drunk driver comes out of nowhere and hits us. Our beloved goes all middle-aged crazy and gambles away our retirement.

Sometimes we bring suffering on ourselves. We have too many drinks before we get behind the wheel. We let our anger get the best of us and quit our job in a huff. We pine so much for what could have been we end up losing what we have now.

But when it's brought to our attention. When we realize what's happening. When we find the book of the law hidden behind all the rubble. When we realize our hearts were strangely warmed as we walked along the way. When we face the choice of running and hiding or standing up and facing our troubles head-on. What are we going to do?

Will we give in? Give up? 'It's too late, now. God, why have you left me in all this suffering and trouble?'

Or will we use it well? Will we be like Josiah and take advantage of the time we have? Will we be like the disciples, and get up and go back to our friends? Will we take this downturn in our lives and make it into good news after-the-fact? Will we use our suffering as a chance for growing in faith? Will we use our suffering as a chance for growing in faith?

A lot of life, maybe most of life, is beyond our control. In a life of faith, seasons of struggle are going to happen. When we're in the midst of one, make no mistake, it's hard. Suffering, no matter how righteous the cause, is always hard.

But can we turn it into good news after the fact? Can we use our suffering as a chance to learn some important life lessons? Can we use our suffering as a chance to look back and see how God was with us? Can we use our suffering as a chance to grow in faith? After the fact, can we use our suffering as an opportunity for becoming more and more the people God wants us to be?

Socrates was a good and righteous man. But he died 400 years before Jesus was born. He had no concept of a loving God, no concept of living after death in God's eternal embrace. But we do! You and I, we know whatever the cause of our suffering, God is with us. God is with us.

We know suffering and death are not the end. We know how much God loves us. Knowing it in the moment may be hard. But if we look back, we'll surely know it after the fact. Past, present, and future, God loves us. Thanks be to God. Amen.