

No Turning Back- Living the surrendered life  
Lesson 20

This morning I want to begin with a prayer for God's blessing of preaching on me. I realize this morning more than most that my witness of the Word is heavily influenced from my own story. Preaching through my own story is the only way I know how to preach. It's just that today; I'm more aware of my own story as I come to you with God's most powerful Word!

Let us pray...

**Mark 15:21-32**

You know, the 12 followers of Jesus may not recognize it, but they are on a journey with Jesus. From the moment Jesus has come on the scene and into their life, he has brought them on a journey. And this journey has a good-bye to it. And this is the week where his good-bye comes.

We have seen Jesus go through incredible suffering. First, he suffers rejection from his own people. Second, Jesus experiences betrayal by his disciples. Third, He endures a trial. Fourth, He undergoes a physical beating. And now--now we come to the Cross. We come to the place of incredible suffering.

Suffering is a particularly painful subject. No one really wants to talk about it, especially go through it. My family and I continue to support my sister as she struggles with advanced metastatic breast cancer. My mom has taken a leave of absence in order to be with Kim in these final days and I am able to go down on a weekly basis to see Kim and try to be an encouragement to her and my family. Although she is heavily medicated, she knows who we are and still refers to me as "hey bro." But we are seeing her slip away. It's hard knowing that her time here with us is limited. Suffering--it's a painful subject and most of us would rather avoid talking about it.

But if you don't have a faith system to hold you up in times of suffering, too whom can you say, "Why did this happen to me?" If you struggle to believe in a God who creates, sustains, orders, and heals, then why on earth would you even ask that question? Who is going to be able to respond to the why--if you struggle to believe?

Even though it's hard to talk about suffering--for a believer in God--it is a different matter.

-In our times of inevitable suffering, we at least have someone we can address.

-We can at least say, "Why, GOD, did this happen?"

Theologian and author William Willimon tells of the time he spent with a member of his church who had ALS (a neuromuscular disease). He watched this disease slowly take this man's life. As he left the house, he found himself asking an unusual question.

**"Upon leaving his home, and his suffering wife and children, I asked not simply, "Why, God, did this happen to me, or to him, or to them?" I know. I know. We are all terminal. What I didn't know, and what I really needed to know was, "Why, GOD do you not do something?"**

**I had moved in my questioning beyond that primitive, "What did this man do to deserve this?" or "What could he have done to avoid this?" I know bad things happen to good people.**

**I had moved beyond all that to "What could GOD have DONE to avoid this?"**

I can see what he's trying to say here. If pain is potentially educational, there is that point in time when we get it and it's time for school to let out.

-When the pain turns to anguish, then the questions tend not to be about the pain, but about God.

-You cry, "I've had enough! I'm done learning lessons!"

-I've gotten the point, now let's move on shall we.

Life can be solitary and short. And we all know to well the feel of pain. We're wired that way.

-But wheel in someone whose body has been in pain with bone cancer for the last 18 months

-Invite in the mother of the young woman who died at her desk in the World Trade Center bombing

-or look at the drug addict who was slapped down every time he tried to stand up just because of the color of his skin

It's at times like this that I believe our hopeful "**Now, what can we learn from this**" can easily be transformed into "**Why, GOD, if you are good, do you not ACT?**"

This is sort of where I've been living in regards to my sister, Kim. In my own way, I've understood that there are no other lessons for me to learn here. I got it! Now--I'm not really concerned with what this says about her or me but I am wondering--what does this say about God? And I'm pretty convinced that when we all suffer, we wonder the same thing.

I know we want answers to these kinds of questions. And if you're like most people, you may be tempted to believe that God is very good--**but also very inactive.**

**Robert Capon** says that God is not like a wandering mechanic who roams around night and day ready to pounce upon us motorists in distress, fix the transmission and send us on our way. God, says Capon, is more the one who comes upon you on the side of the road and sits in your car with you through the night, weeping with you, and showing empathy for your plight.

This I suppose is helpful, isn't it?

- I want a God who is empathetic.
- I want a God who is loving.
- But...I also want to a God who will act.

**I want God to be the God I read about in Scripture.**

- I want my God to talk, disrupt, intrude, reach, and save.
- I want my God to raise the dead, punish the powerful, uplift the poor.
- I want God to do something about us and this world.

**God is not some empathetic but disengaged therapist. God has not just set up the world and then left it to run on its own.**

Honestly, I feel this is probably the way most North Americans practically live. Our country tends to have a Deism kind of faith--that says: **God set up the world and then left.**

This kind of faith exists because it sort of helps make belief easier. It's easier because it rescues us from the dilemma of having to make excuses for God's apparent lack of engagement with us and our suffering. God doesn't heal, save, rescue, or reach in, not because God is unconcerned, (after all we know that God is love)--but rather because God is uninvolved.

This Deistic faith has also allowed us to remove God from our world so that we can be free to run things as we want. This has proved to be a move that led to lots of belief in, adoration of, and service on behalf of God who is empathetic--but not meddlesome. Having God safely filed away as some vague spiritual feeling, we were free to go ahead and give ourselves to what we want.

But then, despite our situation God comes anyway. Somebody gets a miracle. Someone comes away healed. A life gets uplifted. A person gets changed. A future gets rearranged. And we realize that God is not as inactive and disengaged as we thought he was. Then we realize that maybe our great challenge with God is not that God doesn't care, doesn't heal, or doesn't act, but rather that God doesn't care, heal or act WHEN we want. Jesus, God in the flesh, was this way.

Jesus came and he acted, but also remained sovereign, free to come and free to go, free to speak and free to be silent.

**I know what many of us want:**

- We want Jesus to ride into town on a warhorse--instead he rode in on a donkey.
- We want Jesus to go to the statehouse to fix the problems--But we see Jesus going to the temple to pray.
- We want Jesus to mobilize the forces for the revolution--rather, Jesus gathers his friends for the Last Supper.
- We want Jesus to go head-to-head with the powers that be--Jesus just hangs there on the Cross-, from 9am until 3pm with hardly a word.

We see in Mark 15 that Jesus goes silent before Pilate and then hangs on the Cross. But when I read this passage I'm struck not only by the silence of Jesus--but by the silence of God.

- I want God to act.
- I want God to intervene.
- I want God to answer the question of Suffering.
- I want God to do something.

But as I see Jesus hanging on the Cross-, I come to realize that I must also face this challenge.

In my struggles w/ God, it's often His silence that can put my relationship w/ him to the greatest test. And I know I'm not alone in this. Look at Job...

**Job 2:11-13** When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. 12 When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. 13 Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

**3:11** "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?"

**3: 23** Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? 24 For sighing comes to me instead of food; groans pour out like water. 25 What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. 26 I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

**7:20** If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your

target? Have I become a burden to you?

**7:21** Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more."

**10:18** "Why then did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before any eye saw me.

**13:24** Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy?

**21:7** Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?

**24:1** "Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain for such days?

**30:20 20** "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me.

Job, in his misery, cries out to God asking, "Why?"

- Through more than thirty chapters of the Book of Job, Job demands an explanation for his suffering.
- Job begs God to meet him in court, to come down and explain to him the point and purpose of his suffering.
- Through thirty chapters of Job, God is mostly silent.

I want to share with you some of what I was thinking about last Wednesday afternoon.

**Show the video:**

Here's something to consider: I discovered with Helen a few weeks ago when we were traveling down to Connecticut to visit my sister (a two hour drive)--we hardly spoke a word to each other. There comes a time in relationship--intimate relationship when we can be with our loved one and not need to constantly talk. It is simply enough to be with them. We don't have to have constant reasons or answers. Presence is enough.

Perhaps this ought to be our goal with God--to come to that point where we can endure the silence, perhaps even relish it--because we have the presence of God.

Perhaps God wants to be known more for his presence in your life than for his action.

Perhaps what really should matter more to us is **Who God Is**, not so much **What God Does**.

I know one thing is for sure: Kim, who has been here for close to 42 years has been able to do a lot. She's even done things for me over the years, but now--is pretty limited as to what she can even do for herself, let alone anything she can do for me. I can tell you confidently that my relationship with Kim is not based on her actions. In fact, in her most limited state ever, she is more valuable to me now than ever before. I'll take her presence over her action any day.

Listen--This morning as we look at the suffering of Jesus, let us not forget where God is leading us.

- God is always leading us to surrender.
- God is always leading us to our own crosses by leading us to the cross of Jesus.
- God is always inviting us to come and live in His presence.

Do not determine your relationship with God on what He does and doesn't do. Rather, determine your relationship with God by accepting the invitation to live in His presence and to let God be God of your life.

Let us be still and know that He is God!

Song# 701 "My Jesus, I Love Thee"

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