

Hope

The news, Chick Fil-A and my rights!

When I think about suffering, I think about Job. When the name of Job is mentioned the following verse comes to mind: **Job 5:7** Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

How encouraging! Life is just wonderful, isn't it? Guaranteed trouble for all.

Suffering is characteristic for humanity.

- I have suffered much. (**Psalm 119:107**)
- I have become like broken pottery. (**Psalm 31:12**)
 - Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. (**Psalm 25:18**)
 - Preserve my life, O LORD... (**Psalm 119:107a**)
 - Look upon my suffering and deliver me, for I have not forgotten your law. (**Psalm 119:153**)
 - You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry. (**Psalm 10:17**)
 - In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free. (**Psalm 118:5**)
 - I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. (**Psalm 31:7**)
 - For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. (**Psalm 22:24**)
 - My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. (**Psalm 119:50**)
 - For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (**2 Corinthians 1:5**)
 - He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. (Isaiah 53:3)
 - Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. (**1 Peter 4:1**)
 - Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. (**Psalm 90:15**)
 - Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. (**Isaiah 38:17**)
 - It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. (**Psalm 119:71**)
 - I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. (**Isaiah 48:10**)
 - We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. (**Romans 5:3-4**)
 - I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be joy revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)
 - And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (1 Peter 5:10)

Suffering is a big part of being human. And suffering can cause some people to wonder if they have been discarded. To wonder if they are rejects in the universe because our bodies' degenerate, or our families find fault in us, or society avoids us. The truth is that any one of these things, or what ends up being true in most cases, a combination of these things can put us in the state of Psalm 130.

Read Psalm 130

The state of Psalm 130 is verse 1: Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD

[MSG] Help, God – the bottom has fallen out of my life!

I'm convinced that the Christian is a person who decides to face up to and live through suffering. I'm also convinced that if we don't make that decision regarding suffering, we are open to despair on all sides of our life.

And Psalm 130 knows about despair. Psalm 130 wrestles with suffering and it sings its way through it. Psalm 130 gives us usable experience for those committed to walking closer to God in faith.

The thing about Psalm 130 is that it begins with this anguished prayer that reflects pain. **Vv. 1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD 2 O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.**

The Psalm gives dignity to our prayer. The Psalm does not stuff our situation into a closet where we can hide from the embarrassment of suffering or better stated... so that we can hide from what caused our suffering. The Psalm doesn't see suffering as something that should never happen to a person of faith. The Psalm simply acknowledges and expresses suffering.

Now this is relevant for us to know. We know that we live in a time where suffering is to be avoided at all costs. The American myth is there's no value in pain. In fact it acts as if there should never be suffering and pain. But this myth denies our encounter with real life.

Look--the good news of God is the cross of Christ. The good news gives us a different view of suffering. In suffering we enter into the depths--the deepest parts of our humanity. In suffering we are at the heart of things. In suffering we are near to where Jesus was on the cross. The truth is God is deeper than the deepest depths of mankind. The truth is, God is holier than our deepest sin is deep. This helps us to think more of the depth of God than the depth of our own cry for help.

Psalm 130 is a beautiful song of suffering! It like having the Hebrew Blues! **"Nobody knows the trouble that I've seen"**

What we learn from Israel in this Psalm is how they responded to suffering--as reality. Israel did not deny suffering. Israel helps us to face our suffering--with faith, and not avoid it out of complete fear.

Psalm 130 doesn't enable us to somehow escape the reality of our suffering. It does not rob us of our humanity. This psalm does not give us smart sounding, shallow answers. It does not lecture on our misfortunes, nor does it offer Band-Aid treatments to cover up our trouble. Neither do the prophets, nor the priest, nor the psalmists offer a quick fix for our sufferings. Instead the Psalmist holds up the suffering, proclaims it and then--prays.

Don't hear me say that Christians should desire and relish misery and suffering. Listen carefully: The Christian doesn't make a religion out of their suffering. Christians are not masochists thinking that we gain holiness or righteousness through suffering.

On the other hand, to suffer is to be human. And we can suffer the wrong way. Henri Nouwen wrote:

Many people suffer because of the false supposition on which they have based their lives. That supposition is that there should be no fear of loneliness, no confusion or doubt. But these sufferings can only be dealt with creatively when they are understood as wounds integral to our human condition. Therefore ministry is a very confronting service. It does not allow people to live with illusions of immortality and wholeness. It keeps reminding others that they are mortal and broken, but also that with the recognition of this condition, liberation starts.¹

Not only does Psalm 130 not hide the reality of suffering, it highlights the immersion of our suffering in God. All of the suffering mentioned here is spoken in prayer. This means that God is taken seriously as one who is personally involved in our lives.

Here's some good news: God is personal so that we may have an intimate relationship with Him! God is redeemer so that we may be helped, by Him!

Eight times God is named in this Psalm. We easily find that God is understood as the One who

- Forgives sin
- Comes to those who wait
- Has unfailing love and redeems!

God makes a difference! God has the interest of His people. God does not act indifferent! God is not rejecting! God does not have mixed feelings about whether or not he loves us. God is not slow to respond. God does not act on a whim and a feeling. God is not ungenerous who only provides for the absolute necessity for life!

We can live through suffering because we know that God is a God of grace and mercy and that God is present in our lives. After all, if God were different than this, who could, ever, have a leg to stand on? **Psalm 130:3-4 [MSG]** If you, God, kept records on wrongdoings, who would stand a chance? As it turns out, forgiveness is your habit, and that's why you're worshiped.

NASB- 3If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? **4**But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.

So we have two great realities exposed in Psalm 130-- Suffering is real; God is real. We accept suffering and we believe in God.

Not only is there a description of these realities, there is also a procedure for participating in this reality. **We--wait and we--watch.** These words are seen in the middle of the Psalm. **Vv. 5-6** I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. **6** My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Waiting and watching add up to--hope!

We wait and watch because we have assurance that God is for us. The whole idea of the waiting and the watching (which is hoping) in this Psalm is tied to the assurance that God is active in his creation and in the lives of his people who he is redeeming.

Hoping is not passive. Hoping is about living our lives, confident that he will give the meaning and the conclusion to any matter we face in life. Hoping is not about looking right, or acting right. Hoping

¹ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction*, p. 140.

is not about dreaming. Hoping is about confidence. It is confidence in God. It is about expectation that God will do what he said he'd do. Hoping is a willingness to let God do whatever he needs to do with our lives--his way and in his timing. Hoping is opposite of the demands we often make on how and when we want God to make our plans. **Vv. 5-6 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. 6 My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.**

It's tempting--especially for me as a minister, and I suspect for Scott and Rich as Shepherds as well. It's tempting to offer some kind of remedy for what a person can do to get out of the trouble they find themselves in. Many times when people are suffering others offer all kinds advice about what a person needs and needs to do. For many they receive sympathy, then advice and when the situation doesn't change, it's easy to feel hopeless.

What we need is not a remedy--but hope! We need to know that God is for us. We need to know that suffering is part of what it means to be human and not something alien to humanity. We need to know where we are and where God is!

God sees the big picture. Our lives are seen more like a great tapestry. Some of the threads in the tapestry are the threads of our life. We know we're in the picture, but we can't always make it out. God is not only putting the tapestry together, he also sees the tapestry in its entirety.

For the Christian who suffers, has suffered and will suffer, Psalm 130 is essential to have. Psalm 130 convinces us that the big difference is not in what people suffer, but in how they suffer. Psalm 130 does not yell at us "suck it up!" It does not explain suffering or explain it away. Psalm 130 convinces us that whatever or whoever got us in this trouble cannot not, ever, separate us from God.

Vv. 7-8 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption [NASB- abundant redemption]. 8 He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

Psalm 130 persuades us that God's way with us is **REDEMPTION** and that the **REDEMPTION**--not the suffering, is ultimate! **Amen? Amen!**

So--we wait, we watch and we hope--letting God work out our salvation and form and shape our faith as we fix our eyes on Him!

I leave you with the words of the Hebrew writer: **Hebrews 12:2-3 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

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