

Romans 5:3-5 - When praise meets pain

The Already and Not Yet

This is one of our favourite aphorisms to describe Vineyard kingdom theology.

God's love has transformed our whole disposition by grace. We have every reason for celebration and rejoice in hope. This is the "already" of the "already and not yet".

But we live in a fallen world where trials and tribulations continue. This is not paradise, this is the "not yet" of the "already and not yet".

Jesus too rejoiced in his relationship with His Father God. Nothing could change that. But the path to the resurrection led through Gethsemane. As he faced the crucifixion and cried out to God, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me", the posture of his life was still, "Yet not my will but yours be done."

What does Romans say about how we approach suffering? What happens when praise meets pain?

ROMANS 5:1-11

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

3. but we also glory in our sufferings

This text is sometimes mis-understood and mis-applied.

It does not mean that we should take a masochistic delight in pain & suffering. We are not looking around for something that hurts and then glorying in it in the expectation that it will grow us into spiritual giants.

Rejoicing in suffering is not meritorious. The pain is not good. It is not the trouble that produces perseverance and character and hope. Often it breaks people.

We don't glory because of our tribulations but we do need an encounter with God in the midst of them.

Pain only achieves something good when it is confronted by faith in God.

When we know that we are saved, that we have been rescued, our posture is one of praise and rejoicing. We celebrate our access into the grace in which we now stand.

We also glory/rejoice in our sufferings – means we continue to celebrate what Jesus has done for us even, or especially, during those times when we are suffering and in pain.

Message translation: *We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles....*

You see, being blessed is not measured by the troubles we avoid nor, conversely, by the troubles we endure.

This is not a competition! "I've had a harder time than you." So what ...? I'm better? I'm worse? I am okay to have doubts but you're not?

We are not to look for pain, nor celebrate suffering. The issue is, what do we do when trouble comes, as it inevitably will?

...suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Let's examine this verse a bit more closely.

Suffering: means tribulation, troubles, hostility in the world. It includes physical suffering, loss, pain.

Suffering is not the work of God. When he created the world it had no suffering or pain. Pain arrives through the work of the enemy, Satan. And one day his influence will be broken forever and then the promise is for a new creation with no pain,

Revelation 21:4

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Produces: results in, leads to. To say that suffering results in anything good is not true as a general statement. Pain hurts and suffering breaks people. And our understandable reaction is usually to complain to God and about God. *Why me? How could you do this?*

But when praise meets pain, when faith in God confronts suffering it can trigger a process with a good result. It's your choice. If you choose to "continue to shout your praise" (Message) it can lead to:

Perseverance: a disciplined patience, an endurance. Whereas we would expect pain and hostility to break and traumatise us – so much so that we do everything we can to minimise anything unpleasant in our lives – when trouble meets faith in our lives it can produce perseverance.

There's a choice when I experience pain and trouble.

I can choose to look into the darkness and turn my back on the one who has saved me by grace.

Or I choose to continue to look toward the light, I continue to hope and seek him in the darkness that surrounds me.

Character: a quality of provedness possessed by faith when it has been through a time of testing. A good analogy is what happens when metal ores are heated in a furnace and all the base metals have been refined away to leave pure gold. A refined faith – one that has been tested and has come through.

Hope: We started with a hope of glory which sets the trajectory and disposition of a disciple's life. When the disciple goes through pain – is the hope still there? Is it worth it? What about my fears and doubts?

When you decided to follow Jesus and God poured out his lavish grace on you and filled you with his Spirit your life was transformed, saved, rescued. It happened.

Paul is saying that the tried and tested character finds that the hope of glory really is proven in their life. Their experience of the saving love of God in the past is tried and tested in the present and points toward a certain hope of salvation to come.

The response of the person in pain

What happens when praise meets pain, when the disciple of Jesus comes into a time of trouble?

Have you ever poured cold water into a tea pot and tried to drink what comes out. It's just water. A tea bag only ever produces tea when it is dropped in boiling water. It is in the "suffering" of hot water that it produces "character" – a flavoured tea.

Testimony after testimony declares that when we go through pain with an intention to continue in praise, something amazing and fruitful occurs in our soul and in our relationship with God. The disciple chooses to continue to praise, to glory in the hope that's been given whilst enduring the loss and suffering.

- The podcast of this sermon includes an interview with Cyndy Dowling about her journey through all sorts of difficulties culminating in being diagnosed with breast cancer.

As Alison has said about her tribulation last year when we lost a precious member of our congregation, two close members of the family (niece and mother) and she suffered illness - in quick succession, *"I determined to be found in a place of worship, whatever state I was in, even if I could only collapse on the floor in tears."*

You may not feel able to pray. When you turn to God your natural impulse may be to shout and scream (just like Job and David in the Psalms) – perhaps it's all you can do to get into a place of worship – of acknowledging God as your Lord whatever it feels like, whatever the circumstances.

The response of the rest of us

We all go through troubles and pain. But there are times when we are observers. Or both. Alison and I were distraught to lose our niece at such a young age. That was our pain, but we are also heartbroken at watching the pain of her immediate family, and the suffering she endured herself.

But we do have a role to play. Especially within the family of the church. We thought a lot about this at Leeds Vineyard over the summer – how we can learn to love one another and support one another. We look left, look right, look around us to see, to support, to love and to pray for one another.

James 5:13-16 *Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray. ... Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.... Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed.*

The main response of the church is to pray. We believe in prayer. If you are in trouble, if you are in pain, then ask the church to pray for you. If this is your church family, look for the opportunity to pray for others.

You can meet up to pray for one another at any time. We also have two formal opportunities for prayer – your small group and here on Sundays. Please don't wait for people to guess or ask – if you have troubles, you ask! Come forward at the end of the service – we nearly always give an opportunity for prayer - or ask your small group to pray for you.

Prayer is not a slot machine – by asking for and receiving prayer you are not guaranteed the answer you want. It's a conversation with God part of which is making your requests known to him.

C.S.Lewis, Fern Seeds and Elephant Grass, *"The essence of request, as distinct from compulsion, is that it may or may not be granted. And if an infinitely wise Being listens to the requests of finite and foolish creatures, of course He will sometimes grant and sometimes refuse them."*

We have rejoiced when we have seen people healed and restored. We have wept when we have lost.

Conclusion

When praise meets pain

During the pain and suffering, somewhere in that choice to continue in praise, somewhere in that process and that conversation between us and God, somewhere between each other as we pray for each other; we enter into this place of grace with God. A place where we can persevere, grow in character and know the hope of glory because of God's love poured into our hearts.

Cyndy recommends:

- Arianna Walker (Mercy Ministries), From Pain to Pearls
- Karen Allen, Confronting Cancer with Faith

David recommends:

- C.S.Lewis, The Problem of Pain
- Philip Yancey, Where is God When it Hurts?

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