

Daily Devotional Thought  
3/23/2020

This past week has not gone like I planned and I fear this week won't follow my plans either.

You see, I was supposed to have been in Tanzania last week speaking at a conference and working with a mission hospital in that country. Then I would come back home to work at the hospital for a couple of days before on to Florida to speak at another conference. My kind of whirlwind schedule! Filled with busy-ness.

God, however, had other plans and within a couple of hours all was cancelled and since I wasn't scheduled to work, I was forced to be still. Not something I enjoy.

I don't know about you, but the last several days have felt a bit like a whirlwind. The rapidity of news and the inundation of information have at times been overwhelming and sometimes downright terrifying.

Someone in our own community and within our larger church family became our area's first critically ill victim on Saturday. It will only get worse and I fear this past week was that eerie calm before the whirlwind really hits.

Does anybody else wonder why God is allowing this to happen?

What is God doing in this global pandemic?

I think one of the biggest lies we believe is that: "I love Jesus, so nothing bad will happen to me."

That's what we expect. We work hard, expect good health, build our nest egg, and hope to enjoy it.

Job did. "So I thought, "I will die in my own nest and multiply my days as the sand" (Job 29:18 CSB). Just like us, he worked hard building his nest and just wanted to enjoy it.

God had other plans. "Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil." (Job 1:8 CSB)

Then the whirlwind that destroyed his family, his health, and his wealth came and Job was forced to be still and contemplate, why. An answer, however, arose from the whirlwind.

"Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind" (Job 38:1 CSB).

What is God doing in the whirlwind?

What is He doing unleashing pain and suffering?

The problem of pain and suffering has been used as an argument against the existence of God. It is a difficult one to answer, but there is an explanation.

We live in a fallen world that is groaning for the promised restoration.

“Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” (Romans 8:20-22 NLT)

Notice who cursed it.

“But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things. Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets.” (Acts of the Apostles 3:18-21 NLT)

Notice the promise of a restoration of all things.

It will be made right.

But how did this happen?

Notice the suffering involved. In this case, the suffering of the Messiah. Suffering had to happen, so that restoration could occur

And therein lies an odd and painful paradigm, restoration comes through suffering.

Think of some of the great stories of suffering in the Bible.

The Flood: “Then God said to Noah, “I have decided to put an end to every creature, for the earth is filled with wickedness because of them; therefore I am going to destroy them along with the earth.” (Genesis 6:13 CSB)

The Ten Plagues that struck Egypt: “The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!” (Exodus 16:3 CSB)

General unpleasantries: “I may shut the sky so that there is no rain, or command grasshoppers to devour the countryside, or send an epidemic among my people.” (2 Chronicles 7:13 GW)

The destruction of countries: “The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will never leave the guilty unpunished. His path is in the whirlwind and storm, and clouds are the dust beneath his feet.”(Nahum 1:3 CSB)

His path is in the whirlwind.

He is in the pain.

He is in the suffering.

The question is, what do we do with Him?

How do we respond to Him?

Jesus prophecies in Matthew 24:10 that when pain and suffering comes at the end of the age: "Many will lose faith."

Having faith in times like this is difficult if you don't understand what God is doing in the whirlwind and will continue to do after it has passed.

We don't study suffering much. It isn't a fun subject to think about, but the New Testament writers certainly thought a lot about it.

"And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:3-5 CSB)

"After they had preached the gospel in that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, strengthening the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith and by telling them, "It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21-22 CSB)

"Resist him [the devil], firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world. The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while."  
(1 Peter 5:9-10 CSB)

"The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, and if children, also heirs — heirs of God and coheirs with Christ — if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:16-18 CSB)

Suffering in this age is normal, it should be expected.

Suffering should be endured with patience. It cannot be completely eliminated in this age.

Suffering is not wasted. It prepares us for our inheritance in the kingdom of God.

In light of God's eternal reward, suffering in this age is relatively brief.

Suffering will come to an end at God's appointed time when He takes action, brings his judgments, and restores all things.

In the meantime, we have an opportunity.

“However, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, pray, search for me, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear [their prayer] from heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their country. My eyes will be open, and my ears will pay attention to those prayers at this place.” (2 Chronicles 7:14-15 GW)

In Hosea 6:1, a promise of healing is made when a return occurs: “Come, let’s return to the Lord. For he has torn us, and he will heal us; he has wounded us, and he will bind up our wounds.”

Throughout history, we see God’s primary method for waking up the nations to repentance is through man-made and natural disasters. It is God’s primary method for bringing lost people into the path of His people and into relationship with Him.

There will be opportunity in the whirlwind.

It is also because of man’s very rejection of God that He sometimes must bring about large scale calamity to turn man’s heart back to Him. Like a father, He loves us and sometimes needs to get our attention.

In the stillness I experienced this week due to the expectation of the looming whirlwind, I had a lot of time to think about this. Like Job, I was building my nest by my plans. This week has given me the opportunity to fall face down with arms outstretched in prayer. It has given me the opportunity to spend time with the ones I love the most. It has given me the opportunity to refocus on what’s important.

The whirlwind is coming.

-----

We will all have a good bit of extra time on our hands in the coming weeks. It has been quite cathartic for me to have had the opportunity to share with you some things I have had on my heart and have been learning through all of this. I bet a lot of you are having the same thoughts and fears and are digging into scripture to find peace in the newfound stillness we are experiencing as we undergo “lock-down.”

As a way to help each other over the coming weeks, I want to encourage you to do the same. It would be great to get this organized in such a way where we could have a daily devotional prepared by those in our family who have the gift of writing and are willing to share their thoughts on this experience and lessons learning along the way. It is also a great way to get to know each other better as we are apart. If you are willing to do this, please let Danny know and this can get organized and begin soon.

Stay healthy and God bless you,  
Scott