

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Psalm 25

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

Grief and Loss, Part 3

We've spent the last two weeks looking at grief, loss, and death from the biblical perspective of the person who dies—in other words, what happens to our loved ones as they pass from this mortal phase of their lives into the immortal phase of their lives; trusting that as we see what happens to them from God's vantage point, we will have a deep source of hope and encouragement to draw from as we walk without them.

Not the source of hope we get from Hallmark sympathy cards. And absolutely not the source of hope we get from Facebook memes where every shared post of care and encouragement borders on humanism, New Age philosophy, eastern mysticism, or even Hindu theology! And yet we eat those memes up because they say exactly the things we want to hear. Not the things we need to hear, not even the things the Bible would say, but the things we want to hear.

Isn't it interesting that you never see a Facebook sympathy meme that focuses on our hope through Christ's victory over death? Never! And yet His suffering and resurrection is the ONLY hope we have—and it's the ONLY thing we can believe in.

Now I said on the first week of this series that some of the things I share might not match up with other sources you're exposed to. In fact, some things I say might be completely opposite of what you've already been told by others. All I can do is say what God says—even if it feels and sounds challenging. All I can promise is that it will be true; truth that comes from God, not the truth of the world. And the truth I want to share today is the truth that speaks to our hearts when we cry out, "But God, You don't understand how I feel! You don't know what I'm going through!"

Oh, God knows. Even more, God understands. And why is that important? Because at the most tragic and stressful times in our lives, we crave the empathy of someone who can walk beside us, especially the empathy of someone who has travelled this road. Let me tell you about God's broken heart.

It begins all the way back before creation; back even before there was heaven and angels; back before there was time and space; back beyond what physicists and cosmologists can even imagine; back when there was nothing else except God—this triune God in perfect relationship, giving and receiving in perfect delight and joy. Within this God there was a uniqueness of three personalities, a similarity of natures, and absolutely no distinction of substance.

And somewhere within these indefinable stretches of timelessness, the First Member of the Trinity wanted something more for the Second Member of the Trinity—the Father wanting to bless the Son beyond measure. The Father wanted His Son to have a companion, a bride. And later like Adam for whom there could be no equal found and God created Eve, God was going to do whatever it took to present to His Son an immortal equal in His nature and likeness. And the joy of that new relationship would make the Father’s heart complete.

But since there was nothing in all of existence except the Trinity, they had to begin by creating a universe of time, space, and matter. And within this universe God would create a planet with people from which this companion for His Son would grow and make an everlasting choice for Him. And that was the key: a people within whom He would plant the gift of choice and freewill. The Father could’ve have created them like automatons, robots hardwired with no choice except to love His Son, but that’s not love; that’s programming. And for that choice to be made, a set of options needed to be available—including the temptation to turn away and reject the offer.

And do you know what the most remarkable thing was? God, Who knows everything within and outside of time, knew that we would take the option that rejected Him. Even before the first day of creation, God knew His Son’s Bride would choose a lie over truth and life. But that didn’t stop the plan because He believed His love could overwhelm the lie and the death that came with it.

That means one of the first things done within the order of creation was to was put in place everything needed for the plan of atonement—the death of the perfect One to cover the curse of death that would be executed over all; and there was no one or nothing in all of space and time that was perfect...except for the triune God. So God Himself would pay the bill! But it had to be accomplished in real time; a real death with real blood to wash the souls of real people.

All of this was realized within the Trinity before the first day of creation and the Son, the Second Member of the Trinity, offered to take it upon Himself to be the death sacrifice to win back His own future Bride—to make spiritually perfect in the eternal what would eventually be accomplished in the physical. Listen to these verses:

Revelation 13:8, “The book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”

Matthew 25:34, “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Ephesians 1:4, “For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world...”

2 Timothy 1:9, “This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,...”

Titus 1:2, “A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, Who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,...”

1 Peter 1:19-20, “But with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for you sake.”

Imagine the significance of this! Even before God said, **“Let there be light”** (Genesis 1:3), the eternal sacrifice was agreed to and made!

And then it happened. As a part of creation, the Son was ripped away from the Father in substance and birthed into tangible flesh. Although He was still God in nature and personality, He would now breath and groan and suffer and hunger in a real human body. Why? So that His promised companion, birthed in earthly mortality, could eventually take on the nature of His own divine immortality.

And so, the Father caused the Holy Spirit to hover over Mary and spark into her body what she needed to give birth to Jesus. And on that day the perfect eternal union experienced by the Trinity beyond all space and time came to an end and the Father lost that absolutely unique relationship with His Son; the only union He ever knew was now gone, cast down to earth—a small rock in the middle of His infinite creation. And what’s more, the Son left knowing that this relationship, this substance that they perfectly shared across timelessness, could never ever be restored.

Can you imagine losing a relationship that was perfect? Not one that was tolerated. Not one that might have made you happy on good days. Not one that everyone else looked at and said, “Oh, you two are perfect for each other,” or, “What a great family you make,” but an absolutely, infinitely, eternally perfect relationship, never experienced by anyone else, never to be had again. In fact, as Jesus walked the earth on His journey to the cross, the crucifixion must’ve been one of the hardest things the Father had to deal with.

Now remember, the offering of Christ’s sacrifice was already complete across eternity, but now it was being worked out in the stuff of clay in a human existence. And as Christ hung on the cross beaten and bleeding and dying, I can only imagine that God was in tears. When Jesus finally said, **“It is finished, into Your hands I commend my spirit”** (John 19:30; Luke 23:46), God let everything in His heart burst out: the veil in the Temple was shredded from top to bottom, the ground shook in an earthquake and the rocks split apart (Matthew 27:51), and the sun was darkened and thick clouds were drawn across the horror of the scene (Luke 23:45). Oh, God understands. And there’s a little more to this story that we often fail to realize.

Of course, Jesus is the firstborn of the resurrection; He came back to life on the third day. But did you know that all the physical punishment He endured is still a part of His glorified body? It’s not just that Jesus proved Himself alive to the Apostles by having them examine His hands and side (John 20:24-29), but He took those wounds with Him when He ascended up into heaven (Acts 1:9).

And when John was given a view of the Last Days in the Book of Revelation, even at the end of time, Jesus was still in His glorified, physical body. He didn’t revert back to the spiritual nature He had before He became flesh. A part of His sacrifice was to be forever in a physical body, meaning that He and the Father would never have the relationship they used to have, and all for the love of us, His Bride, us. Listen to how John describes Jesus in Revelation 5:6-12:

“And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain,... Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.... And they sang a new song, saying, “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood,... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

Jesus will, for all eternity, spend His time with us not only in a body that will forever bear the marks of His torture, but in a body that will forever keep Him from having the life He had with His Father. Sacrifice, loss, grief, love. Oh, God understands what has been taken from us. He knows what we bear. He knows how it feels.

When each day is filled with anger, fear, remorse; when every hour points to what has been ripped away; when tomorrow looks just as bleak and heartbreaking as yesterday and all we want to do is curl up in a ball while our emotions rage inside of us, the only one who understands is the Father...who gave up His Son...Who died...that we might have hope beyond these days of sadness and despair. Facebook can't do it. Those cute memes might be the new gospel of a fallen world, but they can't touch or heal what is broken inside a heart that's designed for immortality in one place only. Only the crucified King of Heaven can be what you need: empathy, understanding, hope, and healing.

Next week we'll look at the tools and promises that God gives us to walk this road until we are finally joined with the company already in heaven.