

"The Mercy of God in Cancer"

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Hebrews 10.32-39

Sunday AM, November 30, 2008

Introduction

Please turn in your Bibles to a passage I preached from a year ago: Hebrews 10. Yes, I am counting on the fact that none of you will remember the two-part sermon that I spoke from this passage last November. I preached part one on a Sunday morning, then part two the next Sunday night. Together they took 89 minutes. So get comfortable!

Seriously, it is not my intention to re-preach those messages. What I want to do, however, is look again at this text and walk through the author's argument in order to set a biblical context and framework for what God has been doing in my life. **Let's read Hebrews 10 beginning at verse 32.** This is the word of our God. May he illumine our minds that we might understand it, incline our hearts that we might love it, and empower our wills that we might obey it.

Body of the Message

The author's argument

- God sovereignly determines the kind of suffering his children endure (32-34).
 - He sometimes calls us to undergo direct suffering. ("All suffering in the path of obedience to Christ is the fellowship of his sufferings." -Piper)
 - *sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction* (33).
 - *the plundering of your property* (34).
 - *you joyfully accepted [it] . . . because you knew that you yourselves had a better possession [existence] and an abiding one* (34).
 - God in his providence may take away your stuff in order to reveal what you value, to inspire repentance, and to increase your joy.
 - He sometimes calls us to share with those who suffer.
 - *sometimes being partners with those so treated* (33).
 - *you had compassion on those in prison* (34).
 - They entered into the others' suffering as if it were their own and lovingly met the needs of their fellows. "Truly, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Mt 25.36, 40).
- God graciously encourages the kind of endurance that his children need (35-39).
 - God values confident endurance (35-36a).
 - *do not throw away your confidence* (35) as if it were trash.
 - *you have need of endurance* (36). Confidence is the soil for endurance.
 - God brings suffering to change what we value.
 - God expects confident endurance (36b-38).
 - *the will of God* (36). God's sovereign will has determined your circumstances; now his moral will must govern your response.
 - *the promise* (36) = the hope of final salvation. Not salvation by works, but by a faith that works.

- Quotation of Hab 2.3-4 (37-38). Note contrast of faith and shrinking back, which shows the connection between faith and endurance.
- God authors confident endurance (39).
 - *confidence* (35) – *endurance* (36) – *faith* (38) – *faith* (39) – *assurance* (1). The author connects these terms to show that a faith that saves is a faith that endures. There follows example after example of saving faith (ch. 11).
 - His conclusion is to encourage us to *run with endurance* (12.1). But where does faith like this come from? *Jesus* (12.2).

My path of suffering

- Last November, I coughed all the way through those sermons. I didn't know then that God was sovereignly determining a kind of suffering for me to endure.
- September 2007: Brooklyn, persistent cough.
- November 2007: doctor's appt, initially diagnosed as allergies.
- Late winter/early spring 2008: began seeing a pulmonologist.
- May 5: coffee with Derek Anderson. May 7: fell 100-150 feet down a cliff in CO.
- May 17: my friend Ken died.
- May 22: the day after Ken's funeral, had a 2nd round of chest X-rays. A week later, we got the results. Something was there. A CT scan for the following week (June 4). Blew out a tire, delayed the scan for one more week (June 9).
- Tuesday, June 17: Dr. Abreu had the results and began asking me a number of questions. His determination: I have lymphoma.
- Wednesday, June 18: we invited, Josh and JoyBeth, to tell them the news.
- Thursday, June 19: I had a PET scan in preparation for my biopsy.
- Friday, June 20: Josh and JoyBeth at the Target in Greer, phone call from Lisa, my friend James had died. We all raced down to Greenville Memorial.
- Monday, June 23: met surgical oncologist, James' visitation.
- Tuesday, June 24: James' funeral, had pre-op.
- Thursday, June 26: biopsy (mediastinoscopy).
- Saturday, June 28: told the sponsors, then the church the next day.
- July 9: began chemo. Since then I've had ten treatments and (DV) have two more.

How God is Glorifying Himself through My Suffering

- Preface
 - I'm not sharing this because I have suffered as *much* as others have or because I have suffered as *well* as others have (e.g., Derek, Ruth, Lori, Jim Cook, Jonathan & Sarah Farmer, Brent & Wendy Turner).
 - I'm sharing this because God has been so gracious, so merciful, so loving, so sovereign, so almighty, that I cannot help but take the opportunity to tell you what this God is like.
 - Spurgeon: "Whitefield and Wesley might preach the gospel better than I do, but they cannot preach a better gospel."

- God brought cancer to me.
 - *So it was not you who sent me here, but God (Ge 45.8).*
 - *Does disaster come to a city unless the LORD has done it? (Am 3.6).*
 - *I form light and create darkness. I make well-being and create calamity. I am the LORD who does all these things (Is 45.7).*
 - God accepts responsibility for the calamities in our lives. We aren't doing ourselves any favors for denying this. Worse, we risk robbing him of his glory if we do.
 - Facebook notes by Ruth Bartholomew and Lori Larsen on Thanksgiving.
 - *Ruth: Each second of my life has been orchestrated by the Heavenly Father! The only sour notes that have been heard have been of my own making! The crescendos and decrescendos are of His authorship! I am but His instrument! So, today, I will offer up my voice, my song, my tears in thanks to Him who has brought me to this place. With thanksgiving let me praise Him! He will not leave me comfortless! ("With thanks....").*
 - *Lori: What is there to be thankful for? For a God that is good. For knowing that He holds me by His righteous right hand (Is 41.10). For He knows the plans He has for me, plans for hope and for a future (Jer. 29.11). . . What is there to be thankful for? For a great God who is responsible for all of these people and things. For a God who gave His son for our sins. For a sinless Savior who died that I might be righteous through Him. For having assurance that James is in Heaven with Christ. For a God who is my refuge and my fortress. For a God in whom I can trust. For a God who loves me ("What is there to be thankful for?").*
 - **Application:** You are where you are by divine providence.
- God prepared me for cancer.
 - November 2002: Daniel Cruver's passing.
 - September 2006 through August 2007: SS emphasis on Lasting in Christ.
 - March 2007: Brad's sermon on the mercy of God in suffering.
 - April 2008: sermons by Piper and Mahaney at T4G.
 - **Application:** Give yourself to the Word, prayer, and fellowship so that you can prepare yourself for when suffering comes. *Recommendations.*
- God has revealed my weakness/finiteness/nothingness physically & spiritually.
 - *as though he needed anything (Ac 17.25).*
 - While I am laid out, the plan of God rolls on. He doesn't need me.
 - **Application:** Repent of your arrogance. It's manifested in your schedule.
- God has taken me through times of darkness and doubt in order to elicit cries of dependence (Ps 6.2-3).
 - *Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD – how long?*
 - **Application:** No one wants to admit dependence, but it is to the humble that God gives grace. So it is a good thing when God brings darkness and doubt in order to elicit a cry of dependence from you.

- God has intensified Kimberly’s and my conviction regarding the centrality of the glory of God in all things.
 - *Oh the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and who inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Ro 11.33-36).*
 - God has a right to do whatever he wants to do in order to bring the most glory to himself. The response of faith—the response that God is developing in you—is, “Lord, as long as you are glorified.”
 - **Application:** God has broadened my thinking on this very point. I used to think of this in terms of going to Mongolia or not having my dream car. But one way I’ve had to learn this is through surrendering my right to mental clarity, since chemo clouds my brain. As long as he is glorified!
- God has encouraged us through the ministry of the body of Christ.
 - *If one member suffers, all suffer together (1 Co 12.26).*
 - Babysitting, meals, cards, phone calls, e-mails, Facebook messages, gifts, a tote bag, the beach, a bucket of dollar bills, tender words, tears, prayers.
- God has brought about repentance from innumerable sins, particularly the sin of finding my identity in what I do.
 - I never realized how much stock I put in my own works until I was physically unable to perform a single one. And in God’s eyes, I am just as righteous as I’ve ever been—because of Christ.
 - *that I might . . . be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Ph 3.9).*
- God has given me a very small taste of what Christ suffered for me.
 - The taste of chemo.
 - Section from Sproul, *The Prince’s Poison Cup*, 24, 35.
- God has given us grace.
 - *Since we have this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart (2 Co 4.1).*
 - I don’t deserve cancer; I deserve far worse.

Conclusion

I don’t know what suffering you are enduring. But if you compare it with what you deserve, you will see suffering, not as opposed to God’s mercy, but as God’s mercy.

Benediction

After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Pe 5.10-11).