

Suffering to Hope

Hosea 3/Romans 5:1-6

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Good Morning. This morning we are going to be talking about our response to suffering. In preparing this message it has not been easy. My heart has been on the verge of tears every time I sat down to write, because I know the suffering that many of you are enduring right now. And I have been praying for you and weeping with you. And I have been asking God for wisdom in how to share this without coming across as trite or insensitive. So please hear that is not my heart. But I do know that as I sat with my son in the hospital for the better part of a year, that the truths of God's word that I had learned, helped me a great deal in that time. It helped me to have hope and to worship God amidst the struggle. So while some of this may not help you in the midst of your pain, and may just feel like cold comfort, but it's my prayer that God's word might equip all of us for when we experience pain.

So back in 1999, my best friend and I moved from our small town to Edmonton, and it was late one night and he and I were sitting at a bus stop at the U of A. It was darker and there was only a few people around, and there was a man pacing the sidewalk slowly, smoking his cigarette. He was a tall gruff looking guy. And as he was walking, a middle aged woman was walking down the sidewalk and this man asked her what time it was. Well, without saying anything, she clutched her purse and immediately crossed the road to get away from this guy. And although he had asked really calmly and politely, he was really insulted, and started to curse kind of under his breath, but loud enough for us to hear, and starts grumbling about how insulted he was. And then he starts walking towards us. And my friend and I were quiet, just keeping to ourselves, and this guy comes right in front of us, stares at my best friend, and points at him with his cigarette and says "What's your shirt say?" Well, my friend just stammers out, "It says Newsboys. It's a band, a Christian band." And he says "Yeah, I know who they are. I have a bunch of their CD's" And we're like "Really? Are you a Christian?" and This guy proceeds to tell us how he came to faith in Jesus. So he was a cocaine addict, and at the end of his rope. He had no hope left and wanted to take his life. He was in an alley with a needle full of air, ready to take his life, and he was pleading with the universe, and he was saying "God, if you are real, you need to prove it because I am done". Meanwhile, walking down the street, he said were three Christian guys. As they are walking one of them stops and says, guys, we have to gown this alley. His friends are like "what?" and he says "I don't know, but I feel like God wants us to go down this alley." So they go down the alley and see this guy with a needle, and they ask him, "Hey, do you know God?" They talk, and these three guys help this man get into a drug rehab program. While at the program, he surrenders his live to Jesus. He meets a woman there who is brand new in her faith, and they end up getting married after they are out. And he says to us as he holds up his cigarette, "I still sin and I've still got my vices, but my life is completely different."

I share this story with you because I think that it illustrates how God sometimes asks us to do strange things sometimes. Often Christians are prompted to do things that we don't always understand why like praying for people we don't even know, talking to someone, sharing an encouragement or verse with them, being generous with money, loving our enemies, or extending forgiveness to someone who has hurt us. I mean the whole concept of grace can seem strange at times. Often we may not see a reason for doing something, but God uses what we do in greater ways than we understand. Sometimes God just prompts us and encourages us to show up to bible study, church, or a meeting, and then he uses us, or speaks through us without us even knowing it. And in scripture God often asks people to do odd things. Or at least they may seem odd to us when we don't see the whole picture. I mean imagine God telling the Israelite army to walk around Jericho seven times, or telling Elijah to pour water on the altar that he was hoping God would light on fire, or telling Moses to hit a rock to get water to come out, or telling Gideon to go into battle with only 300 people in his army, or as in our starting passage today: God telling Hosea, a godly man- a prophet, to marry a woman who would be adulterous and break his heart.

Last week Pastor Tom talked us through Hosea 1 and 2 laying out this incredible example and illustration of God's love for Israel, in that Hosea was commanded to marry this woman who would be unfaithful, and to name each of their children as reminders of Israel's unfaithfulness and God's grace and love as a greater response. This morning we are going to read Hosea chapter 3, you can turn there now, but I am going to go a different direction with this passage than where it clearly goes, and we will end up in Romans 5. So let's read Hosea chapter 3 together.

"And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." ²So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a leathick^[a] of barley. ³And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." ⁴For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.⁵Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days."

So Hosea has married Gomer, had a child with her. She has two more children, and it's unclear if they are Hosea's or not, but then in chapter 3 Gomer leaves. She takes off and gets involved with another man. This time however, it seems that she is being sold, and Hosea purchases his wife. Now this passage is very clear on how it relates to Israel's unfaithfulness. Verse 1 says [And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.](#) As a quick side note, For those of you who are raisin haters, and don't like raisins in your cookies, this passage is not justification for you. The cakes of raisins, or sometimes

translated as ‘flagins of wine’ were a food used in various rituals and ceremonies. The words literally mean flattened grapes so some translators have taken that to mean referring to wine, but it was something they were using in inappropriate idol worship. So I just want to advocate for raisin cookies. But in verse 1 we see clearly that what Hosea was asked to do was an illustration of God’s love for the Israelite people and their constant cycle of disobedience. They disobey, and God redeems, they are faithful for a bit then fall away, and God redeems. And here in chapter 3, God points out that Israel will be like Gomer, and become a slave, needing to be redeemed again and they will return to King David. King David is a metaphor – Hosea was written long after King David had died, but he was referring to the hope of one day Israel returning to the Lord. Which of course this was all fulfilled later on as Israel was exiled by the Babylonians, and later return, then the temple is rebuilt by Nehemiah.

But where I want to go with this passage is to consider what Hosea was asked to go through. I cannot imagine what it would have been like, to be searching for his wife, find her in this adulterous relationship, try to take her home and discover, that she is actually for sale – she is now a slave. Imagine Hosea – **BUT THAT’S MY WIFE!!** But he pays. He pays the price for her injustice. A significant price. He buys her back. Then he pleads with her: “you must dwell as mine for many days, you shall not be a whore, or belong to another man, so I will be to you.” Stay with me. I don’t want you to go back to that life of slavery. Be faithful to me. And I will be faithful and stay with you. That would be incredibly difficult.

Why would God ask someone to endure suffering? It seems unfair that God would ask someone to endure that heartache. This leads us to other bigger questions like ‘Why does God allow suffering at all?’ And while we do not know why exactly God has chosen to allow suffering, we can know some truths from scripture that should help us make it through the most difficult times, and I would argue, even be able to worship and rejoice as a response to suffering.

One thing that we need to consider is that God loves symbols. I’ve said this before, but symbols are really important to God. And I use the illustration of Moses to highlight it. Moses was leading the people out of Egypt toward the Promised Land. The people become thirsty and start to complain. So God tells Moses to go to a rock and strike it with his staff. Moses goes to the rock and hits it with his staff and water comes out. It’s amazing. Then later on the people are complaining again and God tells Moses to go and speak to a rock, but instead of speaking to it, he instead strikes it with his staff. Water comes out, it’s amazing, but God is mad that Moses did not obey him and wrecked the image he was setting up. The image of the rock is that of Christ. Jesus was to be struck down and after produce living water. He is our rock, and he was crucified, and rose from the grave so we might live forever. He is our living water. So when Moses struck the second rock, this throws God’s illustration down the drain. First, Moses hits two rocks, but there aren’t two messiahs, and second the messiah wasn’t to be struck twice- only once. So it

wrecked the picture God had set up. And that made God so mad that he told Moses that he wasn't allowed to go into the Promised Land—that he would die out in the dessert. Now God still loved Moses, and he went to heaven, but he was denied the Promised land – because he wrecked a picture. There are lots of important symbols and pictures throughout the scriptures – many of them pointing to Jesus. **David and Goliath**. David is the king who defeats evil with a single blow. We are like the Israelites who are cowering on top of the hill, unable to do anything. **The Passover** –where Israelites covered their doors with the blood of the lamb to protect them – Jesus is the lamb who has covered us by his blood. The entire **sacrificial system** the Jews followed, pointing towards the ultimate sacrifice Jesus paid on the cross, even **marriage** is an illustration of how Christ loves the church, and even here again **in Hosea 3** is another symbol of what Christ would do for us. We are slaves to our sin and cannot escape this slavery on our own, and like Gomer, we walk away from our first love into unfaithfulness, and yet, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us –paying the price for us that we could not pay, and we are invited back as the bride of Christ and restored in our relationship with him.

So God has a bigger picture in mind. He lets Hosea go through this difficult situation to not only speak a message to the Israelites, but to us today.

(Just as Peter talked about in Kids time) - just because we can't see a good reason for God to allow suffering, it doesn't mean that there isn't one. Apologist Alvin Plantinga uses an illustration of a pup tent and no-see-ums. No-see-ums are tiny flies that are small enough to go through a screen mesh and they bite you. He says that if you were asked to look in a pup tent and say if there were any St. Bernards, you would be able to look in and clearly see and say if there are any St. Bernards in the tent. If however, you were asked to look into the tent and declare if you see any no-see-ums, and you say "no I don't see any", that doesn't mean there aren't any no-see-ums – because you can't see them. And in the same way, just because you or I can't see a good reason why God would continue to allow evil and suffering to continue, it doesn't mean that there isn't one. **But this is cold comfort** without the **Gospel**, because it's in and thought the gospel that we see hope in God's grace. And because of that grace, we can even boast or rejoice in our suffering.

Turn to Romans chapter 5 with me and see here Paul mentions, with regards to the gospel and to the fact that we have been justified by faith, a response that even pierces our suffering.

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

So we rejoice in the hope of the Glory of God. – He is saying that God’s glory, and our redemption that we share, is reason for us to hope – and we can rejoice in our hope of the Glory of God. Hope is powerful, and we have a great reason to have hope. But then the next verse says:

“³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

We can rejoice in our suffering because our suffering produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope. And our hope does not put us to shame, in other words it has validity to it, it’s not a distant hope or unrealistic hope, but rooted, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Like the down payment for the promise, to prove that he can deliver. And our suffering produces in us hope. When we endure through suffering we are made stronger, and we see the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and our hope is increased. And hope is a mighty thing to have. Hope drives people and encourages them to persevere when times are tough. When people lose hope, or they don’t see the hope that they have, they give up in their spirit, and life becomes very hard. And you can hope for a lot of things; like I can hope for a million dollars. But that hope isn’t rooted in anything. Whereas our hope IS rooted. It IS justified. The Holy Spirit in us testifies to us that we can have hope. And when your HOPE increases, your FAITH will also increase. [Hebrews 11:1 says that Faith is being SURE of what we HOPE for, certain of what we do not see.](#) How we can be sure of what we hope for, is that 1) we can see the Holy Spirit in our lives, 2) We know about the gracious glory of God, and 3) our suffering produces hope in us as we endure and grow because of that suffering.

It’s like learning to ride a bike. At first there is a fear of falling – you don’t want to get hurt. But your parents get you on the bike, and they are helping you. Then they let go and things are okay, but you have no confidence, and it doesn’t take long before you fall for the first time, and you feel the sting of pain. And it’s tragic. There are tears, you never want to ride again, you decide you are going to walk everywhere, and it takes a good amount of convincing for you to get back on. Soon you are back on your bike, trying again. And down you go again; scraping your hand or banging your knee, and it hurts. You decide that you are going to put the training wheels back on, and be the first kid to just keep your training wheels forever. **But you are not alone.** Your parent is there to help you and encourage you. Like the Holy Spirit, they help you with each fall to gain perspective on the pain, they help you see the great future you have of being able to ride your bike, and they help give you HOPE. And because of that hope you have faith in what they have said and you get back on the seat and try again. And you succeed for longer and longer. Each time you fall, you endure the pain and your spirit is not as easily broken, and back on you go. And then maybe you have been riding for years, capable of way more, and then BAM you take a fall, but this time it’s not just a scraped knee, but you have broken a bone. It’s far more

serious than the last time. And just like life can be sometimes, we go through trials that are so big to us at the time, and we endure, and grow, and our hope in the glory of God and his promises grows, and then BAM life hits you with something major that makes all of your previous suffering pale in comparison. And like breaking a bone, you need help. You can't do it on your own. People need to come along side you and help you; you still need the Holy Spirit. It feels like you may never get better. The healing process is long and more painful. But you know what? You have hope that healing is coming.

In the same way as Christians, we have hope that through our suffering, we will endure, we will grow, and our HOPE will increase! And for that reason, Paul says, we can rejoice or boast about our suffering – because it produces more hope in the Glory of God. We can rejoice and WORSHIP God through suffering because we can trust that his Purposes are bigger than what we can see. And when we see others going through trials, we weep with them and the Lord may use you to help them heal and trust God thorough your response of being silent with them, loving them, and speaking when spoken to. And though many tears we are able to worship and even experience joy through the pain. Not necessarily happiness, but deep joy in the Lord.

Pastor Timothy Keller wrote a book called “Walking with God through Pain and Suffering” and I came across a number of really good bits from it. He says that we should consider how Jesus responded: ***“Look at Jesus. He was perfect, right? And yet he goes around crying all the time. He is always weeping, a man of sorrows. Do you know why? Because he is perfect. Because when you are not all absorbed in yourself, you can feel the sadness of the world. And therefore, what you actually have is that the joy of the Lord happens inside the sorrow. It doesn't come after the sorrow. It doesn't come after the uncontrollable weeping. The weeping drives you into the joy, it enhances the joy, and then the joy enables you to actually feel your grief without its sinking you. In other words, you are finally emotionally healthy.”***

We have no idea the full extent of how God shapes us through various trials. The Bible often talks about persecution and suffering for Christ's sake in a way the seems unusual to us, that we should “Rejoice and be glad” Matt 5:12, to rejoice when we share in the sufferings of Christ, 1 Peter 4, and I read something many years ago, which I thought was by CS Lewis, but I can't find the reference, but it said that if we actually had the same perspective as God when it comes to suffering, and we actually knew how much God used it to draw people closer to him, we would pray for suffering more often. Now I'm not there yet, and that seems a bit horrible, but from God's perspective it's so much different. Like the parent who would let their kid fall on their bike. A child feels like that is such an injustice and horrible thing, but the parent realizes that although the suffering feels great, the end result is worth the struggle. And they know that the pain is small in comparison to other pain.

Timothy Keller also wrote in his book: ***“...suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine.”***

Suffering drives you right into the arms of Christ. You don't know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have.

And while God has some greater purposes to allow suffering and injustices for the time being, we know that it is not because he doesn't love us. No one can accurately say that because they are suffering, it means that God doesn't love them. Because of the gospel. What Christ did for humanity, the greatest act of love the world has ever seen, God becoming flesh, and enduring ridicule, loss, betrayal, physical suffering, and even death, - just so that he could love us; that he could pay the price for our sins even while we were still sinners.

And someday all will be infinitely restored. Our hope in the glory of God reaches to the coming time when Jesus will return and not pay us back for every bit of suffering, but restore all brokenness – bringing us into a place with no more tears and no more sorrows. And the fact that this future glory is going to be immeasurably greater and infinitely more wonderful, that it makes all the suffering on earth PALE in comparison. Because of that, we can worship, and rejoice in suffering, by Gods Grace, because it produces in us HOPE of the Glory of God.

Before we move to communion, I want to share one last Timothy Keller quote: ***“Jesus lost all his glory, so that we could be clothed in it. He was shut out, so we could get access. He was bound, nailed, - so that we could be free. He was cast out, so we could approach. And Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you: that is being cast away from God. He took, so that now all suffering that comes into your life will only make you great. A lump of coal under pressure becomes a diamond. And the suffering of a person in Christ only turns you into somebody gorgeous.”***

Let's pray together. God when we consider all the suffering we have endured, and the grievously difficult situations that many here find themselves in today. And when we consider the horrible injustice and suffering across the world. And when we hear about brothers and sisters in Christ being persecuted and put to death because of their faith in you, God it breaks us. To us it seems so big. We cannot comprehend it. But you can. God we are glad that you are bigger than us, because in our tiny minds we can only see the pain, and not the purpose. Thank you that you walk with us, and never leave us in our pain. Thank you that as believers we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that our pain and difficulties do not break us or callous us, but give us hope.

God we lift up all those who are suffering this morning, and we ask that you would give them a measure of your grace, and that you would be their strength. That you would bring selfless people alongside them and give them a peace that surpasses all understanding. And we give you all

praise and glory for what you do through suffering. And father if there are some who do not know you, and have not received the Holy Spirit, I pray father that you would reveal their brokenness and draw them to you, and that they would seek your forgiveness and grace and return to you. Amen

Benediction Romans 8

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Communion: **Invitation**

When we consider Hosea's story, and the reality that we are Gomer in that story, it changes us. Before we know Jesus as our savior, like Gomer, we are rebellious in our sinfulness, and we turn to other things to make us happy and satisfied, and we are stuck in our slavery to sin, brokenness, and heartache. And as much as we may try, we may feel like we don't deserve to be loved, or that we even unlovable. But like Hosea paid the price for his love, Jesus paid the price for you because he loves you. His forgiveness is available to you. Only ask him, turn from unfaithfulness to Jesus. And remain in his arms and he will remain with you. His body was broken, and he bled. He took all of our sin and shame, on himself so that we could take on his righteousness.

We take communion as a symbol to remember the great price Jesus paid on the cross for us. It is for believers, people who have turned from their sin and put their trust in Jesus as their savior. If you don't know Jesus but you want to begin a relationship with him this morning, would you take a step of boldness this morning, and talk to the person you came with, or myself, or we will have a couple people up front to talk with you after the service? And as communion passes you this morning consider the great price that was shed for you and your response to that gift.

Introduce the bread

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body,

--- I will ask _____ to **pray for the bread**

distribute the bread

²⁴and when he had given thanks [for the bread] he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Serge will Introduce the cup

²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

pray for the cup

Distribute the cup

²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

[drink]

²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.