

The Son Suffers in Hope – Psalm 31

Introduction

Pain comes in many different shapes and sizes and suffering is recorded throughout the Bible and throughout many of our lives. We see Abraham weeping over the death of his wife Sarah in Genesis 23. The book of Job shows us Job weeping over the loss of his possessions and his children as he sits in ashes and covered in painful sores. In the beginning of 1 Samuel we see Hannah weeping over her inability to conceive a child.

Many of you can relate to these accounts because you have felt the bite of pain in your life. Whether the pain comes from the loss of a loved one or the abandonment of a parent; of a child who has walked away from their faith in God or of a spouse who has broken their marriage covenant; in our pain we can feel as though we have been abandoned, it can feel as though we are without hope.

But why do we feel hopeless? In the midst of our pain and suffering, we feel alone and distant. In our pain we feel as though no one can ever understand our heart's cry. It can feel like there is no one who can rescue us from this pain, from this grief. Often we feel unloved and unlovable. We can feel as if there is no purpose to our pain and suffering, no justice to our affliction, and that there is nothing to be gained by our pain.

Our passage today, Psalm 31, is the prayer of one who is enduring incredible suffering. As much as the Psalm writer reflects his own experience, we will see that through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author is writing a prayer of the Messiah. He was writing the prayer that Jesus would one day pray from the cross. The author most likely didn't know it at the time, but through the Holy Spirit, he was writing the prayer not so much to reflect himself or you and I, but of the true coming King, the Son of God.

Look at verse 5 of psalm 31. Luke 23:46 records that Jesus prayed these same words from the cross right before His death and in quoting these words from the psalmist, he was not only praying this one verse of the psalm; He was praying the entire Psalm in its context. And so, it is through the entire psalm that we see a picture of Christ in his suffering.

It is not hard for us to imagine Jesus hanging on the cross praying this prayer, look at verse 9,
Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also.

He was beaten and bruised, he was spit upon. His enemies stirred up the crowds against him. When the governor asked, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" either Jesus or a known murderer named Barabbas, the crowd said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!"

Look at this reflected in verse 11:

Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach,
especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.

On the previous night, one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas had betrayed him with a kiss, Peter denied him three times, and his disciples left him and fled. There was the trial where his enemies brought forward false witnesses to testify against him. Look at verse 12:

I have been forgotten like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
13 For I hear the whispering of many—terror on every side!—
as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

Even in verse 10, we are reminded that it was on the cross that Jesus took on the sins of the world. Just as we say that Jesus' righteousness becomes our righteousness; this verse is a reminder that our sins became His sins. And so, as he takes on the sin and shame of each of us, he prays verse 10:

For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my iniquity,
and my bones waste away.

There is no question that Jesus' suffering was real. There was physical pain as he was beaten and whipped; as he was nailed to the cross, but his pain was also emotional as he experienced the evil plotting of his enemies and the abandonment of his followers; as he experienced each one of our sins on himself as God the father turned his face away from his dying son. On the cross, Jesus experienced hell as He experiencing the reality of being abandoned by his father because our sins became his sins.

When we think of Jesus on the cross, we can easily see the suffering described in the psalm, but the point of this passage and the point of this message is not to simply see his suffering, but to see His hope in the midst of His suffering. As Jesus utters the first half of verse 5 before His dying breath, we see his prayer of hope in the midst of his suffering. The psalm draws out three ways in which Jesus suffers in hope.

MAIN POINT

Jesus suffers in hope by...

1. Trusting in God's deliverance (v.1-5)

We first see that **Jesus suffers in hope by trusting in God's deliverance**. The psalm begins with multiple statements of his confidence in God's ability to protect him, hold him, and keep him secure. In the very first words of the psalm, the psalmist declares his trust is only in the Lord. "**In you, O Lord, do I take refuge.**" These first words are the foundation for the rest of the prayer and it is important to realize that, while he hangs on the cross and speaks these words, Jesus declares that his **only** hope, his **only** refuge rests in the LORD. Jesus was not relying on a Roman governor's sense of justice, the compassion of the crowds, on His authority over a legion of angels to come down and rescue Him; in fact, He could not even rely on his friends to stay by his side. His trust was in God alone. In **you, O Lord, do I take refuge**.

Then as the verses 1 and 2 continue, we notice of petitions like, "let me **never** be put to shame, deliver me, and **rescue me speedily.**" At first reading, the psalm seems honest... but maybe more like the selfish prayer of an impatient person who is looking to protect his own reputation and get out of a bad situation fast. How are we supposed to understand verses like that; especially when we see Jesus praying this prayer, this psalm?

We need to do what we always do when we are reading the scriptures; we need to look at the context, what the author is actually saying. These verses are very Godward focused – the author is trusting in God to deliver Him. His shame would mean God's shame because God is His refuge. His deliverance would reflect God's righteousness, and His speedy rescue would show that God hears his cry.

He then prays,

Be a **rock** of **refuge** for me,
a strong **fortress** to save me!
For you are my **rock** and my **fortress**.

He is asking God to be for him, to reassure him, what he knows God truly is. As Spurgeon said of this verse, “We may pray to enjoy in experience what we grasp by faith.”

Multiple times before the crucifixion, the gospels record that Jesus told his disciples that he would suffer and die and then on the third day be raised and yet Matthew records that in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” Jesus expressed extreme sorrow as he prayed that night, knowing what would happen, knowing what He must endure; but he did not waiver. He prays here through the psalm that God would **be** for Him – give Him assurance – of what He knows by faith, God truly is. “Lord, **be** my rock because you **are** my rock, but guide me and lead me for your will, not my will.” He knew the plot that his enemies had set up, the net to trap him, but He knew that they could not ultimately trap him. Nothing is more powerful than God and his will, not even death. And so with full submission, Jesus committed his spirit – His life, his will into God’s hands. “Not as I will, but as you will.” Jesus fully submitted himself to the Father’s will – even to the point of death and God remained Jesus’ fortress and refuge even as he died. He endured hell safely because God was his refuge and fortress. Jesus hoped in God’s deliverance in the midst of his suffering and he is now ruler of all.

Paul writes in Philippians 2:5-11

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus suffers in hope by...

- *Trusting in God’s deliverance*
 - *And by...*
2. Trusting in God’s love (v.6-8, 14-16)

When you are in pain, what is the first thing that you look for? Kids, if you’ve fallen down on your bike or at the playground and scraped up your knee, what’s the first thing out of your mouth? (Notice I’m asking the adults to answer this question.) You call out for your mom, right? (Or maybe your dad or a grandparent or someone you love?) If you’re in a car accident, you’re much more comforted by the sight of a loved one than you are simply by the sight of a doctor. It’s because we are more easily able to endure our suffering when we know that we are not alone; when we know that we are in the presence of people who we know and love and who know and love us in return.

The first expression of Jesus’ trusting in God’s love is through the strong language of the word hate. Look at verse 6, “I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols,” or you may see the footnote in your Bible that it could read, “**You** hate those who regard worthless idols.” Either way you read it, the force is the same – Idolatry is an abomination to God. God does not look kindly on those who choose to worship created things instead of the creator. Whether the idol is money, the approval of other people, or a carved wooden statue; God is of infinitely greater worth compared to any of those things. Jesus desired what the Father desired. Jesus’ desire was that His Father be worshipped.

Think back to when Jesus cleared the money changers out of the temple because the money changers worshipped and followed after the pursuit of money instead of the worship of God. Jesus zealously cleared them all out and proclaimed that His Father’s house was to be a house of worship.

Jesus loved what God loves and Jesus despised what God despises. “I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord.”

This should be a warning to us that we need to be diligent to love those things that honor God and guard our hearts from loving those things which do not bring Him glory. In all things, we should strive to be able to say, “but I trust in the Lord!”

These same words are repeated again in verse 14. Jesus again affirms that his only trust, his only hope is found in God. He then speaks of the power of love. Look at verse 7, “I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love.” This may be one of the most surprising images we have of Jesus; suffering on the cross, rejoicing and being glad. Rejoicing and being glad is not typically our first response when we are in the midst of pain and suffering. The rest of verse 7 tells us that Jesus trusted in God’s steadfast love because God saw his affliction because God knew the distress of his soul. Jesus knew that there was not a moment of his suffering on the cross that God was unaware of.

Verse 8 tells us that He also knew that God had not handed him over to his enemies. There was no question in Jesus’ mind that **this** was the **Father’s** will. It isn’t as if God had this really great plan, but then the Jewish leaders, and the Roman governor, and then the soldiers and the crowd just got out of hand. Every crack of the whip on Jesus’ bare back, every blow to his body, the pain of the wooden cross on his raw and bloody back, every drop of blood shed was within the Father’s will and, in the midst of it, Jesus rejoiced in the Father’s love.

Verses 9-13 are the ones we began with to describe the suffering. And it is after that description of suffering; the grief, the sorrow, the terror that he says, “But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.” Jesus suffered in hope by trusting in God’s love.

In Russell Moore’s book, *Adopted for Life*, he tells the story of how he and his wife adopted two of their sons. In two separate instances, he describes the orphanage where they had come from.

When Maria and I first walked in the orphanage, where we were led to the boys the Russian courts had picked out for us to adopt, we almost vomited in reaction to the stench and squalor of the place. The boys were in cribs, in the dark, lying in their own waste. (p25)

Later in the book, he writes:

Of all the disturbing aspects of the orphanage in which we found our boys, one stands out above all the others in its horror. It was quiet. The place was filled with an eerie silence, quieter than the Library of Congress, despite the fact that there were cribs full of babies in every room. If you listened intently enough, you could hear the sound of gentle rocking – as babies rocked themselves back and forth in their beds. They didn’t cry because no one responded to their cries. So they stopped. That’s dehumanizing in its horror. (p52)

These children suffered in horrible conditions, but their suffering was heightened in their despair, these little babies had learned to believe that no one was listening to their cries; no one was coming for them, no one cared.

Jesus Christ was able to rejoice and be glad as he suffered on the cross because he knew the Father’s love. By God’s love, he was seen and not abandoned. By God’s love, he was known and understood; by God’s love, his cries were heard; and by God’s love, he rejoiced and was glad.

Jesus suffers in hope by...

- *Trusting in God’s deliverance*
- *Trusting in God’s love*
- *And by...*

3. Trusting in God’s ultimate victory (v.17-22)

We know that Jesus did not remain on the cross. On the cross, he took on the sins of the world. He suffered the punishment that you and I deserved. Jesus knew that sin would not win out in the end, and that God would bring every deed into judgment. Jesus trusted in God's ultimate victory over judgment. In verse 17, he prays that God would not bring him to shame, but bring the wicked to shame. In verse 18, he prays that God would silence lying lips and those who speak down to the righteous in their arrogance.

At the final judgment, everyone will give an account before God. Every word spoken, every deed and secret thought¹. Jesus' hope did not lie in the human courts because he knew that judges could be corrupt. He did not hope in the judgment of man because he knew that people are not able to see every deed, every thought, every intention. Jesus knew that ultimate justice would only be served on the day of reckoning. In Matthew 10:26-33, Jesus said, "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." And in Hebrews 10:30-31 "For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Jesus was able to endure the humiliation of false accusations raised against him and he said nothing because he trusted that final justice would be served for the wicked.

He then goes on to speak of the blessing and riches of God's goodness stored up for those who believe in him, starting in verse 19,

"Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you
and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!

20 In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men;
you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues.

21 Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a
besieged city.

22 I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight."

But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help"

These 4 verses, but especially verse 19 speak so confidently in the goodness of God, that you almost have to remind yourself that this is the prayer of a suffering man – that this is the prayer of Jesus as he hangs on the cross – suffering the physical agony, but even more so, the emotional and spiritual suffering of the Father turning His back on Christ as Jesus takes on the sins of the world.

Jesus also trusted that God's ultimate victory would bring goodness and deliverance for those who put their trust in God. There is abundant goodness for those who follow after God. Jesus would have trusted this for himself and for his followers. As I mentioned earlier in Philippians 2, Jesus' temporary pain, suffering, and humiliation on the cross caused God to highly exalt Him, so that every knee will one day bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

In one way, you might be tempted to say that it was easy for Jesus to trust God's ultimate victory because Jesus is God. He was there at creation and he will one day be the judge of the world. There never was a time when Jesus did not exist. Of *course* he could trust in God's ultimate victory....but then, doesn't that make his witness and his example all the more credible. These are the things that *Jesus* trusts of the Father.

This is all the more reason that we should also believe. Hebrews 4 says this very thing, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then **with confidence draw near to the throne of grace**, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Conclusion

The last two verses of the psalm conclude with a call to us, as believers, to live in the same hope and trust that Jesus did while hanging on the cross as well as serving as a warning for those who do not believe.

23 Love the Lord, all you his saints!

The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride.

24 Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!

You see, it is because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross that we are delivered from death to life, and it is through Christ’s willingness to suffer in our place that we feel the His love, and in His righteousness that we will be able to enter into eternal joy in the new heavens and the new earth. And so, until that final day we will live in hope, knowing that we have been redeemed.

As the apostle Peter changed the believers in 1 Peter 2:21-24:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

And so it is that because of Jesus’ sacrifice, and only through His blood that we too can suffer in hope by:

- *Trusting in God’s deliverance*
- *Trusting in God’s love*
- *Trusting in God’s ultimate victory*

ⁱ Ecclesiastes 12:14

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