

Despair & Beauty in Eternity

Evan Lature

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me tread on the heights” (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

Last year around this time, I was waiting for my R-1 visa. It took 5 months to hear back from the Immigration Services before they granted my petition. In hindsight, I look at those 5 months as a crucible moment in my vocational journey, particularly as a cross cultural minister. It is marked with uncertainties, yet, comfort and peace were always provided from the Lord to minister to my soul. I thank the Lord, for such a moment has ushered me into encountering waiting with a different level of understanding. Waiting has taught me that it's not in blessings and gifts, but only in the Giver of gifts alone that my faith is anchored. In waiting, by remembering what He has done in the past, I gain strength, companionship, and comfort. Last year in the midst of my waiting I was gardening (something that I had never done before)! I came across a plethora of helps from people whom God sent, I wrote songs, I experimented in the kitchen, and I was kept in perspective. On top of that, in my soul was forming a little sense of understanding of the ultimate Christian waiting: waiting for the return of our Beloved One Jesus Christ the Lord.

Jesus teaches His disciples not to worry about things (Matthew 6:25-34). He put the teaching in the context of God's perfect provision for creation such as birds and flowers. Later Jesus reinforces that how much more will God take care of humans. *Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well (v.33)*. So many times in our lives we easily worry about so many things. Education, ministry, future, job, spouse, kids, etc. It doesn't mean that they are not important for us. They are important to think, to plan, to execute. I believe this doesn't suggest that Jesus wants us to deny all our needs. Yet He teaches us to seek God **first** in the core of our existence. Jesus continues His words, *“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

When He says do not worry about tomorrow, Jesus wants us to trust that our Heavenly Father is really taking care of us. Just as we see birds and flowers that He feeds and clothes, He wants us to have faith in Him. In my personal relationship with God, I grow to understand that what I have right now and where I am now is the best possible scenario happening to me. Either bad or good times, either hunger or content, either rich or destitute. I am not suggesting passivism here. I still have aspirations, dreams, future plans that I want to pursue. I still have a deep longing that every now and then wakes me up in the middle of the night. Like everyone else, I do struggle. I still experience things which seem to be moving further away every time I get closer.

Sometimes when I am anxious, I am tempted to challenge what Jesus says. Is He encouraging a myopic attitude - a neglect of tomorrow; an over simplistic lifestyle that is preoccupied with the moment and forgets the longer, bigger narrative? Is He teaching us to be like a naïve little boy who is preoccupied with his toys and doesn't care about his surroundings? I'm pretty sure this is not what Jesus intends.

I know my restless mind needs to surrender to God's love. I know that He wants me to trust His heart, even when I don't see any indication of His blessings in the present.

Present Time in the Eye of Eternity

According to the book of Ecclesiastes, there is a time for everything under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to be silent and a time to speak... (Ecclesiastes 3:1-7).

Ecclesiastes witnessed to us that our present time in the world will be filled with a lot of things, a plethora of moments & experiences that could not be evaded by humans. When despair gets in our way, it's pretty clear that according to Jesus we are called to not worry, but to trust in God's divine providence. Nevertheless, what happens if we have trusted in Him, yet we don't see His reaching hands to us?

Take a look at Psalm 69, as David wrote:

Save me, O, God, for the waters have come up to my neck.
I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold.
I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me.
I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched.
My eyes fail, looking for my God...

You, God, know my folly; my guilt is not hidden from you.
Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me.
Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.

When God seems silent –hiding His face— just like what David experienced, **I wonder to what degree should we trust Him? Or when *the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, how are we supposed to rejoice in the Lord?***

My Dad & I

I had a unique relationship with my Dad. I know Dad loves me and I do love him too. Yet as I was growing up, there was an emotional distance between us. We didn't talk much and Mom was always been a messenger and a bridge between the two of us. Dad used Mom to say things to me. Dad wanted me to be a doctor and really wanted to see me to go to the medical school. He said that to Mom, and Mom passed that to me. I said to Mom that I would not do that, I wanted to do something else in my life. After graduating from college in a different town in Indonesia, Dad wanted me to come home for good and stay home. He said that to Mom, and Mom passed that to me. I said to Mom, "I am staying in Bandung. I'm starting my life here." Every beginning of December, when Mom called me on the phone, she kept reminding me of getting my trip tickets soon. I always went home for Christmas. When I was home, from Mom I knew that Dad was really happy. Later I learned from Mom when I left home after Christmas break was over, Dad always sneaked into my room and stayed there for a while feeling blue all by himself.

When Dad had diabetes and went for medical treatment, I spent good time with him. That was when we had deep conversations and got a chance to bridge the emotional gap between the two of us. Dad apparently carried around a guilt over me. He told me a story that when I was a little kid, I was very naughty. He hit me so hard, and I cried so loud. According to him, it was a hard hit that a little child shouldn't bear and potentially could have killed me. I didn't even remember being hit by Dad so hard. My Dad was a very sensitive man, he regretted deeply what he did to me. But since then he carried the guilt. He punished himself by keeping emotional distance with me; he acted like he didn't have entitlement over my life.

Ecclesiastes says, "*He has made everything beautiful in its time. **He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end***". (3:11) My relationship with Dad was redeemed that night when Dad shared his guilt and pain with me. That night I saw Dad as a fragile little kid carrying guilt too big to bear. And I loved him so deeply. By God's grace, our relationship was restored. My dad passed away in June 2015, two months before I came to the United States. It was a hard time for me to leave home.

Beautiful in its time

In the eye of eternity, God made everything beautiful in its time. Talking about time, we should keep in mind that God's time and ours are not the same. "*With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day*" (2 Peter 3:8) Therefore, there's no use of timing God. He knows the best timing for us. When Jesus says, "*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself* (Mat. 6:34)", that's an invitation to enjoy God himself in the present, either in a time of weeping or laughing; and either in a time of mourning or dancing.

Can we enjoy God when God seems to be silent and far away?

Parker Palmer wrote, "The deeper our faith, the more doubt we must endure; the deeper our hope, the more prone we are to despair; the deeper our love, the more pain its loss will bring... If we refuse to hold them in hopes of living without doubt, despair, and pain, we also find ourselves living without faith, hope, and love" (A Hidden Wholeness, p.82-83).

In many stories about the heroes of faith I've read, I found what Parker Palmer said true. It takes **doubt, despair, and pain** to live a life of **faith, hope, and love**. And surely, in this fallen world we could always point out that sometimes people cause their own troubles and misery. For example, the book of Habakkuk shared a piece of information about Israel's wickedness: they have plundered many nations, shed human blood, and destroyed lands and cities, including everyone in them (2:8). In the Psalm that we read, David caused his own misery (v.5 *O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you*). And the guilt that my Dad carried came from poor self-control. In a legalistic mentality, it's easy to agree that all these people deserve punishment because of their own mistakes. Can we imagine if God didn't intervene and never demonstrated His justice and love? This world could have been doomed to its own destruction. There would have not been the beauty of grace, forgiveness, and redemption. Praise the Lord, He is not silent and stepping away. God won't let evil prevail over the people He loves so dearly! In ways that humans cannot fathom, He is working to bring us back to His heart. He will not let evil snatch His beloved from His hands.

Isaiah 40:27-28 (NLT) wrote,

*“How can you say the Lord does not see your troubles?...
Have you never heard?
Have you never understood?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
The Creator of all the earth.
He never grows weak or weary.
No one can measure the depths of His understanding.”*

Living Coram Deo

There’s a Latin phrase that rings in my heart “Coram Deo”. *Coram* is derived from the Latin *cora*, which means “the pupil of the eye”. *Deo* is the Latin word from God. The key idea in the phrase is **intimate, personal relationship**. In this case, God intimately knows me. Nothing is hidden. And I am to consciously seek to live all of my life in the presence of God – before the face of God.” (*Coram Deo Before the Face of God, Allen Miller.pdf*)

Living Coram Deo is a call for each Christian who has encountered the beauty of God’s grace, forgiveness, and redemption. By living before the face of God, we realize that though evil, pain, and brokenness are ubiquitous, they will never overpower God’s plans for the world. Though we fail, His love never fails. In an intimate, personal relationship pouring out our heart is accessible because He knows us and wants to be known by us as well. In Coram Deo, we get to sneak a peek at eternity that God has set in humans’ hearts.

The Cross

We can’t talk about eternity without the cross. In Jesus Christ, eternity has penetrated to the heart of time, the heart of history, and the human heart (Henri Boulad, *All Is Grace*, p.39). With that, the cross allows us to see that both beauty and despair are parts of reality in life. *“Christ Jesus who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross”* (Phil 2: 6-8).

On His journey to the cross, He was the eternity that is penetrating into the present, who encountered a plethora of human experiences under the decree that there is a time for everything. He made friends, healed people, walked with them, wept along them, enjoyed the beauty of human relationships, yet He got betrayed, mocked, smitten, abandoned and felt the great despair on Gethsemane. If the Son of God encounters the pain and the beauty in His life, why would we His followers only embrace the beauty & pleasures and avoid the pain & despair in life?

There is a time for everything under heaven. There is a time when the fig tree doesn’t bud, no grapes are on the vines, the olive crop fails, the fields produce no food, and there are no sheep in the pen, and no cattle in the stalls. But there is a time for God to make everything beautiful in its time. Since we cannot

fathom what God is doing, do not worry about tomorrow, immerse yourself in the present, trust His providence, rejoice as you wait upon Him, and remember that The God of Eternity has ever walked on earth just like us.

The song God gave me:

Your Presence

By Evan Lature

As sun comes up, I set aside
I'm in my room to hear your voice
My restless mind keeps pushing in
I grab my guitar, I try to sing some melody

You tell me I will never be alone
I need you, Lord please stay with me
Your promises I'll carry in my heart
Come quickly, Lord Your presence's here

As I wait upon you, dear Lord
Calm all the tempest inside my soul
I glanced Your face in fallen world
Yet pain and brokenness, why do they still linger?

You tell me I will never be alone
I need you, Lord please stay with me
Your promises I'll carry in my heart
Come quickly, Lord Your presence's here

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