

A Journey with God

Romans 8: 18-24

Evan Lature

He is not safe. But he is good.

"Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"...

"Safe?" said Mr Beaver ..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." (C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe)

That excerpt from C.S. Lewis "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" gives a quite balance understanding of who God is. Our human tendency inclines to swing from one extreme to another. Some people incline to God who's powerful, mighty, and holy that causes postures of fearful, distant, and untouchable. Some to God who's loving, passionate, and tender that causes postures of respectless and sloppy. God isn't a cute cat that we pat for comfort; He is a Lion from Judah, the King, the mighty warrior who rules the world. Neither he is a capricious tyrant that we keep distant for our safety; He is a humble servant, beautiful savior, and a living water who relentlessly invites us into His presence.

Luke 11: 11-13

*Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? **If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.***

A very good friend of mine suffers from bipolar, a mental disorder that causes someone's moods swing drastically from one extreme to another. I've been researching this particular issue since these past few years to get a well-rounded understanding of the illness. Medically, the causes of bipolar is brain-chemical

imbalances which needs to be treated with some medicines (antidepressants, etc.). Since I'm not trained in medical area, I trust my limited knowledge to studies and research in hopes to give me a helpful understanding. As a soul minister, it's been a very interesting journey to understand the illness from spiritual dimension. One time, I was so tempted to see the whole issue laid solely on spiritual area and therefore I thought of dealing it "spiritually" would get the problem fixed. Another time, I bought into all these studies and research and was tempted to believe that the whole thing is merely a medical problem (yet later I believed that it is inadequate approach to see the illness from a rational point of view alone). And another time, I speculated with some theory: what if all these things actually started when you label something (in this case is bipolar). The more you get familiar with the label, the more you believe that you have that issue while actually you might have had not.

When my friend told me that he has been healed, I was overjoyed to hear that. But I found myself hard to agree with him since not so much evidence of him being healed. At the end of the day, I learned that what actually happened was my friend wanted so bad to be healed. He desired to be healed.

As I was thinking about this, I remembered the story that Jesus unfolded one time (Luke 11: 1-8) about an unfriendly friend who refused to help his friend who asked him for bread, yet because of his friend's persistence the guy finally got up and gave him bread as much as he needed. I thought to myself if that guy eventually grants his friend's requests, how much more the good God would be very gracious to His people.

I love my friend. I do ask for a healing over him. Yet over these years, my prayers have shifted. I redefined a healing. What actually is healing? The bible contents a lot of stories about Jesus healing people. He makes the blind see, the paralyzed walk, and cures the bleeding woman. Can't I pray the same thing for my friend? Actually, I did, yet I haven't seen evidence of healing over my friend. I believe it's not hard for God to balance out somebody's brain chemical.

The story of that reluctantly helpful friend ends with a conclusion that actually puzzled me. "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,

how much more will your Father in heaven **give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him**” (v.13). I read it carefully over and over. I didn’t find that line stating that *the Father in heaven will give anything you ask to those who ask him*. Wait a minute. So, what is the story of that man all about? If he eventually reluctantly gives what his friend needs, isn’t God supposed to not withhold to give graciously to those who ask him? Yes, it’s true that Jesus himself encourages us to ask, seek, and knock. But apparently, there’s a larger narrative than just getting what we desire. Jesus wants us to pray right.

We are not to control God when we pray to Him nor to tell Him what to do what will benefit us. He is way too big to fit into our small agenda. His ways are way much “dangerous” than those rosy pictures we have in mind. But hold tight. He is a good loving Heavenly Father who knows us well and gives us the best in all His richness.

In the prayer that He teaches his disciples, it says, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 4:9)”. The prayer that Jesus teaches is not centered on the recipients but on the Giver who knows way much better than us. When we ask for Holy Spirit in our prayers, we ask that our Heavenly Father gives us understanding and wisdom to trust in His sovereignty, to believe that He knows what best for us.

The Sufferings, The Desire, and The Hope

God surely knows the pain that we are going through and the desires of our hearts. He listens to every groan and grieve we endure. In his letter to God’s people in Rome, Paul wrote,

*I consider that **our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us**. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that **the whole creation has been groaning** as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only*

*so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But **hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*** (Romans 8:18-24)

Paul unfolds the reality of following Christ in this world:

- We suffer, yet the glory that will be revealed in us is way much worthy than our present sufferings.
- Therefore, our deepest desire of God himself should never be traded with a momentarily relief.
- Because of this we learn what hope is.

Comfort in the midst of Pain: A Hopeful Suffering Creation



In light of Jesus's teaching how to pray and the nature of hope in the midst of suffering world, I pondered on what I should pray for my dear friend. I paused just to refigure what healing in the present time. According to the Bible, when Christ returns, He will fix everything that is broken and hurting (Rev. 21:1-22;5). He will restore creation including every corner of the globe to its original beauty and wholeness (NIV).

Yet my mind keeps nagging for answers for questions of: what does it mean to live today with a hopeful posture (Romans 8:24)? What is the significant of the power of resurrection in a day-to-day basis? What kind of peace Jesus promised when He said he had overcome the world and how does it actually work in the midst of brokenness, failures, shattered dreams, injustice, and laborious works (John 16:33)?

I guess the answer is Jesus himself. He's the final gift for every Christians living in this broken world. We may not get what we desire, yet in Christ we are content (Phil 4:12-

13). We may not have a lot, yet in Christ we understand what it is to live from grace after grace (2 Cor 12:9). We may not have all blessings in the world, yet in Christ we know His love is better than life (Psalm 63:3).

There's one Indonesian song I've been listening to recently. It's a song called "Maximal Efforts" describing one guy who falls in love with a girl and does maximal efforts to win over her heart. He sings,

*"This is me who never gives up even though it's not easy to conquer your heart
I'll let time to give the most beautiful answer
I've done my best, a refusal won't break me
What all matters is that you know I never doubt to choose you"*

That song taught me about what all matters in life (no, it's not romantic love). It got me thinking about the nature of love that empowers people to live daily life with a sincere heart. Because of love, the journey (both good and bad times; both thick and thin) is way more important than a possibility of failures. Because of God himself, the journey that we have with Him in both good and bad times, both thick and thin is way more important than getting all blessings in the world.

Conclusion

In the journey where we run into sufferings, pain, disappointments, injustice, we are called to pray to ask for the Holy Spirit that we would be able to continue it with hope. We trust Him because he is good: He knows and gives what best for us. We can count on him because he is "not safe": he has conquered the world and therefore not even the worst thing can ever happen to us will separate us from His saving love. Our journey with God himself is the source of joy, peace, and comfort in this world.

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