

GOD AMIDST OUR FRUSTRATIONS

Key passage: John 21:1-9

The setting of today's scripture is on the Sea of Tiberias (the Roman name for the Sea of Galilee).

There they were together, 7 men. They are depressed because of the horrific events leading to, and culminating in, the death of Jesus.

They went to Galilee and returned to what they knew best: fishing.

How many of you have ever felt frustrated and or that you are a failure?

God is never a God of failure or confusion. He is never frustrated and He never fails.

But each man here was controlled by the past. And that is outside God's will.

Their leader was gone. They had watched Him being crucified on a cross. And they had all run away in fear.

Yes, they had witnessed that Jesus had risen from the dead. He had appeared to friends and family.

But they still felt very alone. Memories of the past haunted them, immobilized them and sapped their energy.

That is what the past does to every person. It freezes you into inactivity.

"When a Christian man starts looking back, it's only a question of time until he goes back." Billy Sunday

The problem with past failures is that they don't stay in the past. They travel with you into the present. They lead to frustration with your present. And frustration is outside of the heart and will of God for you.

Whenever things don't go the way we expect, we look back and wonder if it's worth it all. We want to drop everything and get away from it all.

We start wondering:

"Where is God in my tragedy?"

"Where was God on 9-11?"

"Where is God when it hurts?"

1. The same place He was when Adam rebelled in Eden – waiting to cover his sin. (Gen 3)
2. The same place He was when Noah built an ark – protecting him from disaster. (Gen 6-9)
3. The same place He was when Job lost everything he had – proving Himself to be God despite unfortunate circumstances.
4. The same place He was when Joseph was rotting in jail – accomplishing His perfect will. (Gen 37-50)
5. The same place He was when Moses (Ex. 1-4) was on the backside of the desert – preparing him for greater service.
6. The same place He was when Samson (Jud 14-16) was groping in darkness – strengthening him in his hour of weakness.
7. The same place He was when Jonah (Johan 1-4) was being swallowed by a fish – teaching him that God’s way is best.
8. The same place He was when Daniel (Dan. 6) was being thrown to hungry lions – guarding his faithful testimony among the jealous men who plotted to kill him.
9. The same place He was when Peter & John (Acts 3-5) were beaten for preaching the Gospel – providing them greater opportunities for sharing the good news of Christ.
10. The same place He was when Paul (Acts 14-28) was being stoned, shipwrecked and imprisoned – assuring him that all things work together for good to them who love God.
11. The same place He was when Jesus hung on the Cross enduring the pain for the benefit of others - using the schemes of wicked hearts to bring about the redemption of mankind.

In Isa 55: 8-9, God reminds us: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” ...As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

The bottom line...

God was not surprised by 9-11, or the recent fires. But He was saddened by it.

God did not cause 9-11 or the fire. But He does comfort those affected by it.

God may not prevent all future acts of terrorism or arsons. But He will provide peace to

those whose hearts are filled with hatred if they will turn to Him.

Jesus' relationship with the disciples begins and ends with a miraculous catch of fish. They meet him in the miracle.

Jesus approaches His disciples and poses a question to all the disciples:

Vs 5 *He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"*

God asks us questions to help us find out where are you and what is going on.

He called to Adam, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) and Adam had to admit, "I am trying to hide from You."

When he heard Sarah laugh at the thought that she would become pregnant at 80 years of age, God asked, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen 18:4). Abraham had to answer, "Nothing is."

He asked the prophet Ezekiel in 37:3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

Where are you at? What you doing? God wants your answer!

He prepared the breakfast for the disciples.

He know what we need, when we need it

Mathew 11.28-3 *Come unto me those who are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest.*

Psalms 23 He prepares a banquet for me before my enemies.

Jesus poses his next question to Peter:

Vs 15 *Simon son of John, do you love me?*

He asks the same question to Peter thrice.

Jesus is raising up the issue of Peter's motive.

Why did Jesus press the question three times?

He is emphasizing the importance of the issue. He was not focusing on Peter's past failures or successes but his present reality.

The first 2 times, Peter replies that he loves Him.

The third time, Peter acknowledges, “Lord, you know everything.”

He was completely honest with Jesus. This is what God wants from us.

To that response, Jesus said “Feed my sheep.”

If we love the Lord, it will find expression in some very practical ways.

Love must be expressed.

How will I express my love for the Lord? I will tend to that which He loves, His sheep.

Ministry begins with our love for the Lord. But it does not end there.

A genuine love for the Lord will extend itself to loving and serving people.

Ministry is about people—their needs and their eternal destinies.

This is not a call to a profession.

It is a call to a lifestyle. It is a call to maturity. It is a call to personal sacrifice. It is a call to serve others.

What can we learn from this incident of Jesus and his disciples:

1. All our efforts without God are in.

The disciples were experts in fishing, but they could not catch anything.

Ps 127:1-3

2. It is important to obey Jesus.

Disciples knew about fishing, and were perhaps some of the best fishermen on the Sea of Galilee.

What Jesus was suggesting did not make any sense.

Sometimes God puts us in situations where it seems like there is no answer.

In your relationship with God, success follows obedience, even when what he is asking you to do seems ridiculous to you.

You are not smarter than God. You cannot keep doing the same things and expect different results. This involves humility.

When it comes to following God, you cannot give up. And you cannot always rely on your knowledge and training.

Jesus wants us to have a teachable spirit.

There are some people to whom you simply cannot tell anything, because they think they already know it all. They do not want your advice.

King David in his great penitential prayer said, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (Psalm 51:12).

3. We meet God when we come to the end of our own resources.

The disciples had been fishing all night. They were at the end of what they could do. Their resources were spent. That’s when God showed up.

At the point where we give up is often when God shows up.

Simon Peter was certainly at the end of his resources. He had boasted that if everyone else left Jesus, he would still be faithful, but he wasn’t.

He had failed Jesus. He played the coward. He fell when he boasted that he would stand.

When he first met Jesus he was very aware of his sinful heart.

Before Peter had been called to be a disciple, at the first miraculous catch of fish, the Bible says, “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’” (Luke 5:8).

At this second miraculous catch Peter would have liked to have said the same thing, but he was too ashamed to say anything.

It was good for him to give up thinking that he was someone special and realize that he could fail like everyone else, because that is when he really began to understand his weakness, the forgiveness of God and the power of a new life.

It was in his brokenness that he experienced Jesus in a new way.

It is good to come to the end of our resources and realize our weakness, so that we give in to God.

Jesus already had breakfast ready for them. You have to wonder where Jesus got the fish from.

Jesus was always making something out of nothing, and he has not changed. He is still the same today.

When everything you have tried in life turns out to be nothing, he can make something out of it.

He creates fish and bread and wine.
He gives health where there was only sickness.
He gives strength when there was only weakness.
He gives life where there was only death.
He gives hope where there was only despair.
He gives forgiveness where there was only shame.
He is the God of new beginnings.

When we reach the end of ourselves, we come to the beginning of him.

4. You have to put the net in where the fish are. The point is that the answer is often closer than you think.

If you are going to fish, you have to put down your net where the fish are.

If you are going to receive the answer God has for you, you are going to have to do what he says, when he says it and where he says to do it.

Illustration

There was a weak and sickly man. His condition grew worse, but he could not afford a doctor.

He lived in the deep back woods in an old log cabin, and out in front of his cabin was a huge boulder.

One night he had a vision. God told him to go out and push the massive rock in front of his home all day long, day after day, until he told him to stop.

The man got up early in the morning, and with great excitement, he pushed on the rock as long as he could. After a rest he pushed some more. The night vision was so real that it inspired the man as he pushed against the rock. It gave him meaning.

Each day he pushed a little harder and a little longer.

Day after day he pushed. Days rolled into weeks, and weeks into months, as he faithfully pushed against the rock.

After 8 months of pushing the rock, the man was getting tired of pushing the rock so much, and in his tiredness he started to doubt his dream.

He measured from his porch to the rock, and after pushing the rock, he would measure to see how much he had moved the rock.

After two weeks of pushing and measuring, he realized he had not moved the boulder a fraction of an inch. As a matter of fact, the boulder was in the same place as when he started.

The man was so disappointed, because he saw his work had accomplished nothing. He was tired and his dream seemed dashed upon the rock. He sat on his porch and cried, because he had invested so much time for nothing.

But as the sun was setting in the west, Jesus came and sat down next to the man as he was sitting on his porch.

He said, “Son, why are you so sad?”

The man replied, “Lord, You know how sick and weak I am, and then the vision you gave me built up a false hope.

I have pushed with all that was within me for many months, and that old rock is right where it was when I started.”

Jesus said to him, “I never told you to move the rock, I told you to push against the rock.”

Jesus told the man to step in front of the mirror and look at himself.

As an act of obedience the man stepped in front of a mirror. He was amazed. How could he have missed this?

He had been so sickly and weak, and what he saw in the mirror was a strong muscular man.

He also realized that he had not been coughing all night. It dawned on him that he had been feeling better for months, and it was all because he had been pushing — not moving — the rock.

Then the man realized that the plan of God was not to change the position of the rock, but to change him.

God’s plan was not for the rock, but for the man.

Understand the plan. Trust what he is saying to you. Listen to God. Do what he says.

Do the work of obedience. It is not nearly so important that the rock in your life be moved as it is for you to push against the rock.

It is when you push against the rock that you become strong — whether the rock moves or not.

It is when you obey and cast your net on the other side that the net is filled, and a way is opened up for deeper fellowship with Jesus.
