

Series: LIFE 2.0

November 27, 2016

Title: Wilderness Prayer

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Text: Romans 8:12-27

Jesus' groan

A prophet without honor:

It was an encounter that wasn't supposed to happen at all: a meeting of Jew and Gentile in a pagan Greek city on the border of Jewish territory. In his gospel, Mark tells us that Jesus, like the ancient prophet Elijah, had been hiding out in Gentile territory for some time. It may well be that in the light of His scathing critique of His religious opponents, the Pharisees, He needed to be out of sight for a while. Mark tells us that:

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Mark 7:24 NIV

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret.

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After healing a Greek woman's daughter, He traveled to another safe haven: the Decapolis. The word 'Decapolis' means "Ten Cities." These ten cities had been founded as centers of Greek culture following the death of Alexander the Great. Now, like the pagan city of Tyre, they provided a temporary haven for Jesus.

A deaf man's Exodus:

It didn't take long for the pagans of the Decapolis region to recognize Jesus as the miracle worker from Galilee. Perhaps they had heard of how He had restored a demon-possessed man to his right mind and sent him home to the Decapolis region to share the Good News of how God had set him free.

Now these pagans came to Jesus with another man who needed to be set free on the New Exodus Jesus promised:

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Mark 7:31-32 NIV

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

Once again, Jesus answered their prayers:

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Mark 7:33-35 NIV [amended]

After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!") At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

For one handicapped man, the Exodus into God's New Creation had begun!

Jesus' groan:

Picture that scene: Jesus and a deaf mute all by themselves. The man is totally helpless. He cannot hear anything Jesus is saying; he cannot speak a word. He is trapped in the brokenness of the old Creation. And there – in that most needy and desperate place – Jesus *groans*. His groan comes as an inarticulate prayer from the deepest part of His soul. And this groan opens the door for the miracle that follows.

[Slide 2]**Creation's – and Our – Exodus****Creation's Groaning:**

Paul tells us that Creation knows something we too often forget: that God has purposed a New Exodus for His world, beginning with the liberation of humans made to reflect His Presence in His world. Paul says that the whole created order is waiting with eager, intense anticipation for that to take place.

But he goes on to say that this eager expectation expresses itself in a paradoxical way:

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Romans 8:22 NIV

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

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Doing the New Calculus which tells us that **Suffering < Future Glory** means experiencing *both* Suffering and the hope of glory *at the same time*. This “groaning” is *both* a response to the intense suffering of a broken world *and* an expression of the birthing of God’s New Creation. It is “pain with a vastly greater purpose.”

The Christian’s groaning:

Like the deaf man who could scarcely speak when he stood alone before Jesus, Paul says that we, too, have no words for our longing to be set free from death and decay:

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Romans 8:23-25 NIV

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. [Slide 9] For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not 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.

We have become brothers and sisters of the resurrected King. His reality will one day be ours. But in the meantime, living in our mortal bodies, we “groan inwardly,” eagerly anticipating what is to come.

Paul picks up this same theme when writing about our glorious future to the Corinthian church:

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2 Corinthians 5:1-2, 4 NIV

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling.... [Slide 11] For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

This is how the New Calculus works. **Suffering < Future Glory**. We have a foot in both worlds; our groans reflect both realities. They tell of where we've been; but more importantly, they tell of where we're going!

Down payment:

What makes the difference between the groaning of the world around us and the groaning that arises from within us? Paul explains that the difference comes from the presence of God's life-giving Spirit who lives in us. He says:

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2 Corinthians 5:5 NIV

Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

This is what Paul means by calling the Holy Spirit the "firstfruits" of God's New Creation. A positive pregnancy test informs a couple that they are *already* Mom and Dad, even though they will have to wait for the baby's birth. And that birth will not be without the groans of childbirth! In the same way, God's Spirit is alive inside us, reminding us every day that we are God's child. In fact, the birthing process has already begun!

Wilderness Prayer

The Spirit's groans!

We can understand why Creation would groan under the immense burden of the brokenness of the world. We can understand why we groan, both in our suffering and in our anticipation of our resurrection and life in God's New Creation. But did you know that God Himself groans? Paul writes:

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Romans 8:26-27 NIV

In the same way (!), the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Creation groans. We ourselves groan. The Spirit groans.

Isn't that what Jesus was doing when He faced a deaf mute in a side alley of a pagan city? He entered right into the depths of the man's misery and brokenness. He touched his ears and tongue. And He groaned a prayer to help that unnamed Gentile in his profound weakness.

Wilderness prayer:

Think of this deep groaning that touches the very heart of God as Wilderness Prayer. It is a prayer too deep for words. It goes beyond our understanding of why things happen. It bursts out of the deepest core of our being, where God Himself has chosen to dwell.

Face it: we simply *don't* know how to pray or what to pray for when it comes to doing that radically New Calculus which tells us that Suffering < Future Glory. We – like the deaf man – cannot express the pain we feel. We have no understanding of the glory that God has in store for us; we haven't "been there" yet.

And that is why God's Holy Spirit prays inside us every day of the journey.

Never settle for less!

So never settle for less than the glorious resurrection that God has promised you through His Spirit. Never forget what Paul says:

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2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

And in the meantime, don't be afraid of a broken and confused world. Like Jesus did for the deaf man, your willingness to groan alongside another person may be just the prayer that sets them free.