

Out of the Rock

April 2nd, 2017

It was about a month ago that I drove down to Liberty University with my daughter, Sarah,

- so she could attend a four-day event for this Fall's incoming freshmen.
- And while she was there on-campus, I stayed at a BnB in the mountains of the Shenandoah Valley.

After the difficult month we had as a family leading up to this trip, I really needed the one-on-one time with God.

- So, as I pulled up to my cabin, I quickly started a fire and sat down in front of it with my Bible.
- I had been reading through the Book of Mark and so I opened to where I left off in chapter 8.

Jesus walking with His disciples who were no doubt talking about all the amazing thing they had seen Him do.

- So, hearing all this, Jesus turns to them and asks, "***Who do the people say that I am?***"
- "Well, some people say Elijah, others say that You're one of our prophets."

But then He asks them, "*Who do You say I am? Who am I to you?*"

- Now, I know how Peter answered that question. He said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."
- But as I was reading this, I found myself in the middle of this scene.
- Jesus was looking at me... and He asked me, "***Craig, who do YOU say that I am?***"

Of course, I knew what the right answer was. But Jesus was clearly asking me to speak truthfully from my heart.

- "Well, Jesus... You're my **constant companion**, my **friend**, You're my **hero**...

- But I think **I've forgotten Your majesty... I've lost sight of Your power & authority to lead my life** however You wish...
- I've forgotten that my problems really are Your problems." So, Craig, who do you say I am?
- **I wrote this in my journal:**

Well, Jesus... **with a faith weaker and more weary** that I would have wished for...

- With **hope and expectation a little dimmer** than I would have wanted, I can say this...
- That You, Jesus, are everything I will ever truly need... that You are Almighty God, my powerful Savior, my King and Warrior who goes before me.
- You are my Knight in Shining Armor, My steadfast anchor, My treasure and hope."

I thought a lot about what it means for Him to be my hope. Hebrews 11 says that, unlike "wishful thinking,"

- real hope is **"the conviction of things not seen."**
- The conviction, for example that **He will never leave us** or forsake us... that **His love will never fail.**

I shared a few weeks ago a story from 1 Chronicles 20:17... the story of Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah.

- If you remember, God's people were terrified as three nations joined together to destroy their nation.
- In fact, these armies were already at the western shores of the Dead Sea. They could be in Jerusalem in a day or two.

Whether it's **invading armies** or **invading circumstances**, it's easy to just scramble...

- To **try and somehow control** what, deep down, we know isn't really controllable.
- But we're told, **in verse 3, that while Jehoshaphat**

“feared,” he immediately “resolved to seek the Lord.”

- So, with all the *“all the men of Judah standing before the Lord with their wives, children, and little ones,”* as verse 13 says,
- *Jehoshaphat cries out to God,” in 2 Chronicles 20:6, saying:*

“O LORD, God of our ancestors, you alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you! ¹⁰ “And now see what the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir are doing. You would not let our ancestors invade those nations when Israel left Egypt, so they went around them and did not destroy them. ¹¹ Now see how they reward us! For they have come to throw us out of your land, which you gave us as an inheritance. ¹² O our God, won’t you stop them? **We are powerless against this mighty army that is about to attack us. We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help.”**

I’ve thought a lot about that last line... “We don’t know what to do, but we are looking to you for help.”

- Truth is, we often look everywhere but God for help... but Jehoshaphat runs right to Him in his fear.
- I wonder if he was reading the words of David for himself. In Psalm 118 he writes:
- ***“In my distress, I prayed to the Lord and the Lord answered me and set me free. The Lord is FOR me, so I will have no fear... Yes, the Lord is FOR me; He WILL help me. Give Thanks to the Lord for He is good! His faithful love endures forever.”***

And yet, as those as those storms stretch out over weeks and even months, at some very basic and perhaps unconscious level,

- we might just find ourselves crying out to God... “Can you see what’s happening, God?”
- “God, are you here? Are you listening? Do you care?”
- We might begin to **question God’s intentions for us...**

- Wondering, whether He has the **interest, or even power**, to answer the cry of our heart.
- That was **certainly true of Job**.

In the Book of Job, we're invited into the life of a godly man who, through a series of tragedies, *over which he had no control*,

- looses **not only** his possessions & livelihood & family **but** became so sick himself that he almost died.
- But then, on top of all that, Job's three friends, **who came to him with the hope of offering him comfort**,
- end up telling him that the reason all this was happening in his life **must have been because of some unforgivable thing** he had done wrong to make God so angry.

So Job answers his three friends. And, the **first thing he tells them** was right on the money...

- Basically reminding them that oftentimes in life, these kinds painful seasons simply "happen"...
- even to those who love and walk with God... *"This isn't about my sin!"*

And yet, even though he got that one right... **what he said after that** reflected the heart of a man who's hope was waning... a man in a lot of pain...

- He begins sharing **how much easier it would've been** if God had never brought him into this world.
- In fact, a little later, he begged God to just end his life... to let him fall asleep one night and never wake up.

Of course, Job isn't alone in this. Along with Job... **Moses, Jeremiah,** and **Elijah** get so discouraged at different parts of their lives that they each ask God to take their lives.

- But, in every case God says, "No!" **Don't you think when their dark seasons had passed**, they were glad God had said no?
- Thank God that God sometimes says no!

Though his relationship with God had always been so strong, Job suddenly **finds himself doubting God's love & promises...**

- That God must be an **uncaring** God and, if not uncaring, than **unable** to make things better when things come crashing down in our lives.
- You know, *just as in Job's life*, when you're in the middle of something painful... when the **scaffolding of life** gets stripped away...
- Where some or all of what you've been working so hard for falls apart... **reputation, health, a relationship, your career...**

When you **still aren't pregnant** after months of trying; when you **still can't find the "right" job** after searching and searching...

- When you still haven't **met that special someone**; When you're still struggling with depression;
- When you just can't seem to **get ahead financially** no matter how much you try.
- When you're in the midst of all that... than what do you do?

Well, in this great moment of fear, Jehoshaphat resolved to seek the Lord.

- "We are powerless against this mighty army that is about to attack us... we don't know what to do... we need Your help."
- So, how does God respond? In verse 15, He says
- **"Do not be afraid! Don't be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow, march out against them..."**
- Verse 17... **"But you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the Lord's victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out there tomorrow, for the Lord is with you."**

Well, if life seems to have three armies on your flank about to attack; If, like Job, you're wondering where God is

- or whether you'll be able to make it through that storm you're in...

- Then I'd like to **challenge you to focus on three things** as you seek the Lord for yourself.
- First, I'd like to encourage you to **focus more on who He is** rather than **having all the answers**.

1. WHO HE IS.. not what is happening

We saw a few minutes ago how **Job accuses God of two things**. He says to him, *"You don't really care for me. And even if you do, you are not able to help me."*

- Well, apparently, that got God's attention; because **it was just after this that God chose to speak** to Job...
- **Not** in a "still small voice" like He spoke to Elijah, but, as chapter 38 says, *"From the whirlwind"*.
- So, what did God say? A lot! In fact, without any interruption, He speaks to Job straight through chapters 38 and 39.

He starts off saying, *"Who is it that questions my wisdom? Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Do you know how its dimensions were determined? Do you know what supports its foundations and who laid its cornerstone as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"*

For all of Job's complaints... for all of his questions directed toward God...

- What you'll soon notice as you read this section of Scripture is that **God doesn't offer a single answer to a single question**.
- Instead, God goes ahead and **raises seventy questions** for Job... asked right after another.
- Imagine God asking you as He did to Job, *"Have you ever commanded the morning to appear and caused the dawn to rise in the east? Can **you** hold back the movement of the stars?"*

You read in chapter 39, *"Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth? Have you given the horse its strength or clothed its neck with a flowing mane? Are you the one who makes the hawk soar and spread*

its wings to the south? Is it at your command that the eagle rises to the heights to make its nest?"

For two chapters, 38-39, **God continues to fire these questions off at Job**. And then, in **verses 3-5 in chapter 40**, Job is given an opportunity to reply.

- *"Then Job answered the Lord and said, 'Behold, I am nothing. What can I say back to you?'"*
- *Job is saying, "I have no right to accuse you of not caring, because you have created it all. You control nature and tenderly provide for all of its animals. If you provide for them, how much more must you care for and love me."*
- From there, God continues again with another discourse of questions... from **verse 6 of chapter 40** all through chapter 41.

But then, in **verses 2-6** of chapter 42, **Job again replies**. He says, *"I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you. You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' [SEP] It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about; things far too wonderful for me."*

- Now, keep in mind, that after the first discourse, Job was broken as he realized who *he was*... up against the backdrop of who **God really** is.
- And now Job cries out to God saying, *"I am sorry... I'm so sorry for saying that you don't care, because I know you care. I am sorry for saying that You can't help me... because I know now that You can... that you are in control."*

What I want you to see from all of this is that what changed Job **wasn't some fresh revelation** of why bad things happen to good people... or why our prayers can go unanswered...

- The truth is, God didn't answer any of Job's objections or questions.
- Instead, it was through a **deepened revelation** of who God is that Job found true solace and comfort in his pain.

That's why Jesus' question to all of us, "Who do you say that I am," is so incredibly important.

- What satisfied the cry in Job's heart was a renewed understanding of God's **love** and **mercy** and **power** and **provision**.

In fact, even though we know that Job had walked with God for many years before all of this, he writes in **42:5**,

- *"I had heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."*
- **Is there any comfort when there are no answers?** Guys... a lot of life is spent in that sphere... of not understanding why.

Why does it hurt so much? Why is it happening to us? Why isn't it getting any easier? Why does God seem so silent?

- And yet, even when there are no answers, there is comfort... and **that comfort comes from a reliance on the revealed character of our God.**
- Is there any comfort where there are no answers? There was for Job.

In spite of deep pain, Job is comforted... not because he's **suddenly become a great philosopher or theologian** explaining the nature of suffering...

- But because he came to understand, in a whole new way, the Father's Heart...
- the heart of a God who is **infinite in His mercies, love, and goodness.**

So, if these have been challenging days for you... know that you really can find rest...

- **Not** in a set of answers, but in renewed understanding of the **goodness & nearness** of God.
- It's what made all the difference in David's life when he wrote, in **Psalms 27:13** that he would have *"despaired if it had not been for the goodness of the Lord."*

The second truth we need to remember as we face those challenging seasons of life is this... that God doesn't purpose to make our lives easier... but better.

2. NOT EASIER... but better.

You see, guys... the good news of the Gospel is **not** that God will always provide a way to make life *easier*.

- The Good News of the Gospel, for this life, is that He is always at work to make our lives *better*.
- And, by "better," I'm talking about **a life that is rooted in His purposes and will...**
- which, at times **will include what Paul describes in Philippians** as "the fellowship of His sufferings."

I really believe that all of us, consciously or unconsciously, to some degree, **have this belief...**

- **that God is here** to simply make our lives easier or more comfortable.
- I think it comes from a struggle we, particularly as American (Western) believers have regarding our journey through life.
- You see, **we've somehow have come to believe** that things should always go well and that we deserve to always feel good...
- That our *feeling good* is always God's greatest priority for us.

Even though we understand how so many believers around the world are suffering,

- as **American believers**, we still have an expectation that things will... and should always go well...
- and, by "**going well**," I'm referring to a life where we always have at least a little "**more than enough...**"
- and where **we're comfortable**, have **plenty of safety nets**, and remain **reasonably entertained**.
- God has the power to make it happen... so then, why wouldn't He use that power? He loves us, right?

But then, **when dreams shatter** and **prayers go unanswered**, we might find ourselves drifting further and further away from God.

- Not that we just turn away from Him... but rather, **over time**, our disappointments turn into anger or indifference. And why?
- B/c on some level, **we believe that God's glory will always be revealed in our prosperity**... whether financial, relational, physical, or emotional.

You see, guys... to the degree that we believe that **God's agenda is to make our lives easy**...

- to that degree **will we struggle trusting God** through those difficult times when hope seems so far away.
- I'll never forget going to the hospital in order to tell someone that he had, at best, three or four months to live.

Even though he had walked with the Lord for most of his life... how could this not be painful?

- After hearing the news, **he sat quietly for about 30 seconds** before looking up me and a few family members, saying, "*Well, God has always been good to me.*"
- He **didn't have the assurance that things were going to get easier**... but, at the end of the day, He knew his life was in God's hands... a God He knew to be faithful and good.

In those few minutes, I was reminded of the difference "hope" makes... as the reality of God's essential nature...

- His goodness and His power... **served to not only anchor Him**... but to remind him how His best days really were ahead of him.
- It's what the writer of Hebrews meant when writing in **6:18-19**... ***"Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls."***

It is so natural for us to think at times that our **relationship with Jesus has no greater purpose than to improve** the *quality* of our journey through life...

- And, by quality, **I mean a pleasurable life** where things don't go wrong (or at least too wrong)...
- and **when they do, they correct themselves** in 30 minutes like a Brady Bunch episode.
- Marriages should be perfect, we should always succeed in ministry, we should always have more than we need, and so on.

Truth is, if our dreams were never shattered, *we would continue to walk thru life believing that lie... valuing only what God can do for us now.*

- God is not committed to making our lives easier... but **through the difficult times He allows** from time to time, He is always working to make our lives better.
- Clint and I were talking about this last night... how **it's only when He's all you have** that you realize that **He's all you really need.**

And lastly, I'd like to encourage you to **focus more on His timing** rather than **our** timing.

3. NOT OUR TIME... but His

In the first three chapters of **Daniel**, we read about how three godly men, **Shadrach, Meshach** and **Abednego**...

- had been thrown into **Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon's fires** as punishment for not bowing down and worshipping him.
- The fires should have engulfed them in a moment... but in **3:24** we read how King Nebuchadnezzar *"leapt to his feet in amazement."*

He asked his advisers, *"Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the fire?"* They said, *"Yes!"*

- He then said, *"Look! I see **four** men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods!"*

- Well... he almost got it right! Right there in that fire was the Son of God.
- **Jesus was there** to protect them from the flames... to take off the ropes that bound their hands.

When I read that passage, I can't help but wonder what they were saying to each other while in the fiery furnace.

- I can imagine Jesus telling them how proud He was of them... that He loved them so much.
- In a very real way, **that furnace, turned out to be the greatest experience of growth in their lives...**
- and it all **took place in the midst of** what must have been the most difficult, more fearful moment in their lives...
- At least until the moment they realized that God was with them!

You see, just like it was for Job, the **furnace turned out to be the place where they met God** in a whole new way.

- And... God wants to meet us in the furnace, too.
- Isn't that where the **disciples really understood who Jesus was out there in the middle of the Sea of Galilee** during that terrible storm?
- Most of those guys spent their lives fishing those waters. They know that **a storm like that could easily take their lives.**

And man... they were afraid... at least until Jesus shows up. Of course, if they could have written the script, Jesus would have shown up a good bit sooner.

- But, instead, as Scripture says, "***He came in the darkest part of the night,***" when things were at their worst.
- But when He came... everything changed. They may have thought it before... but now they could answer the question, "Who do you say that I am."
- They looked at Him and said, "**Truly you are the Son of God.**"

But what I want you to see here is that as much as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego must had **cried out to be delivered from the furnace,**

- the **reality is** that God decided to deliver them while *in* the furnace.
- In other words, it's in the middle of those storms... **those places in life that seem so terrifying and painful...** that we find Jesus right there with us.
- And just as it's in the eye of the storm, **those places, then,** turn out to be the safest places of all.

Jesus is telling us, *"I'll meet you in the furnace. Follow me. It's going to look dark, it's going to look dangerous, it's going to scare you, but you keep following me. The road may seem long and winding... but I will meet you in the furnace."*

You see, it's in the midst of those painful and challenging seasons of life that we can really express Job's heart to God in Job 42:5...

- ***"I've heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes!"***
- Guys, let me ask you, how many heroes of our faith had it easy?
- How many of those people written down in that **great Hall of Faith in the Hebrews 11** had their prayers answered *when and how* they wanted?

Out of a lifetime of experience, **David wrote in Psalm 81:16 that** ***"Out of the rock will come forth the honey..."***

- that out of the hardest of times, we'll experience the sweetest of all God has for us.
- **But sometimes we just have to wait for the honey.** It rarely comes just when "we" think we need it.

Guys... we know that along with all the wonderful times life brings our way, **there will always be those seasons** where we're stretched perhaps further than we've each been stretched before.

- Perhaps that's where you are right now. It's not been easy... and you're wondering how much longer you can keep it together.
- Whatever's going on, remember that what will anchor us in the midst of those challenging seasons isn't set of answers...

- But an **understanding of God's essential character**... His love & goodness.

Knowing His **goodness & love**... **Knowing that He not only cares for us**... but **has the authority and power** to intervene...

- Knowing that **He's already made the ultimate sacrifice** for us... knowing **His promise to never** ever leave us or forsake us...
- Knowing these things will be the **compass & rutter** that will help us **navigate through the difficult storms** that will inevitably make their way into our lives from time to time.

If you're struggling right now... then hear God telling you, ***"I'll meet you in the furnace. I might not deliver you from it, but I'll deliver you in it."***

- I don't know what furnace you're facing; I don't know what this means for you. **I just know who will meet you there.**
- **He says in Isaiah**, *"Fear not, though you pass through the flames they will not burn you, they will not destroy you."*
- **He says**, *"I'll be there in the storm. I will never leave you... I will never forsake you... In My time I will rescue you with all the fury and power of heaven... in the meantime... know that you don't have to wait alone. There is another one in the furnace with you."*
- *You may not be able to see Him right now, but there's another One... the Son of God... there in the furnace with you."*

"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you go through the deep waters and the great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through the rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up and the flames will not consume you." Why?
"Because I am the Lord your God." Isaiah 43

AMEN

Ministry Time: *Who do YOU say that I am?*