

Experiencing God when Life is Hard: Hope

Psalm 106

This past week our Rooted groups discussed Week 4 in the Rooted guide, which is all about experiencing God in the midst of suffering. The first devotional in that section is entitled, “The Reality of Hardship and Suffering,” and it starts with several questions including these:

- If this is God’s world, why is there so much pain and suffering?
- If God is a loving Father, why do horrible things happen all around the world and in our lives?

So much of why life is hard is simply because we live in a world that is broken. Sin has corrupted this world and so it doesn’t function the way that God originally designed. And because of that, life is hard. Thankfully, as we’ve seen over the past three weeks, we can experience God in the midst of life’s difficulties. We can experience God when life is hard by seeking wisdom, by worshipping Him, and by remembering all His benefits in our lives. And if we experience God, it makes all the difference in our difficulties.

But what about the times when life is hard for a different reason? What about when life is hard because of our own sin? You experience the loss of a friendship because of your anger. Or your marriage is in trouble because of your selfishness. Or you experience financial problems because of poor decisions made from greed. Can we still expect to experience God?

I would suggest we often think we can’t. Or at least we shouldn’t expect much from God. And yet, the psalm we are looking at today paints the picture that even when life is hard because of the consequences of our sin, we can still experience God!

Today, we are looking at Psalm 106, which is the final psalm in Book 4 (Psalms 90-106) of the psalms. As we look at this psalm today, remember that Book 4 was a collection of psalms that were written and collected for Israel while she was living in exile. Because of the nation’s sin, life was hard. Because they continually went astray, God allowed Judah to be defeated by the Babylonians and carried off into captivity in 586 BC. And yet, this psalm speaks of hope for the people of God in that situation. And this psalm speaks of hope for any of us for whom life is hard because of our own sin.

And so, let’s look at this psalm. There are 48 verses and so I will not be able to read and comment on every verse. I would encourage you to read the full psalm this week.

The psalm begins with a call to praise God. He writes:

*¹ Praise the LORD!
Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!*

Even in exile, they are called to praise God. Why? Because *God is good, and his steadfast love endures forever*. That's what the history of God's dealings with Israel is going to reveal in this psalm. And that's why there is hope. There is hope rooted in God's character.

In verse 4, the psalmist makes this request. He prays:

*⁴ Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people;
help me when you save them,*

Because of God's goodness and steadfast love, the psalmist believes that God will show favor to His people, that He will *save them*. And so, the psalmist prays, *Remember me* too. He is praying for the nation, but he is also praying for himself.

In verse 6, the psalmist prays something that makes sense if you are in a difficult situation because of your own sin. He offers a confession. He prays:

*⁶ Both we and our fathers have sinned;
we have committed iniquity; we have done wickedness.*

The history of Israel that he is going to recount in the psalm will demonstrate how those who went before him sinned repeatedly. But he is also confessing that the current people of God living in exile have sinned. *We . . . have sinned. We have committed iniquity.*

If life is difficult because of your own sin, this is the place to start. Don't downplay your sin. Don't deny it. Own it. Confess your sin to God. Get honest with God about it. The pathway to experiencing God is through confession and repentance.

Now in verse 7, the psalmist begins to recount the history of Israel's sin. What he presents in verses 7-39 is organized around three timeframes in Israel's history: in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the land. And so first, he talks about when the people were **still in Egypt**:

*⁷ Our fathers, when they were in Egypt,
did not consider your wondrous works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love,
but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.*

They had seen God's *wondrous works* – the plagues that God brought on Egypt in order to force Pharaoh to set them free from their captivity. But they quickly forgot, and so they *rebelled by the sea*. They failed to believe that God would save them as Pharaoh's army approached (Ex. 14:10-12). They didn't believe in spite of what they had seen. They sinned.

And yet, verses 8-12 share how God saved them for His name's sake. He parted the waters of the Red Sea so they could walk through on dry land. And when Pharaoh's army sought to follow

them, God caused the waters to cover them. Pharaoh's army was destroyed. When Israel saw this deliverance, they *believed; they sang his praise* (v. 12).

Now, you would think that once you saw all that God did to deliver you out of Egypt that you would always believe, right? Well, they didn't. Verse 13 says that *they soon forgot his works*.

In verse 13 the psalmist begins to recount **episodes from their time in the wilderness**. Verses 13-15, recounts how in Numbers 11, they became discontent with the manna that God provided every morning. It wasn't enough. And so, they complained. They wanted meat. In Numbers 11:18, they said, *Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt! Well off?! Are you kidding me? God did provide meat, but he also sent judgement for their sin.*

In verses 16-18, we see the sin of jealousy (v. 16). The psalmist recounts the time in Numbers 16 when men rose up to challenge Moses' authority. They essentially said to Moses, "Who put you in charge?" (Num. 16:3, 13). Of course, God did, right? In response to their sin, God caused the ground to open up under those who rebelled (Num. 16:31).

In verses 19-23, the psalmist recounts one of the most grievous episodes in Israel's history. This is the account from Exodus 32 that we read on Monday if you have been doing the 21 Day readings. It was when they made the golden calf. Moses had been on the mountain for 40 days meeting with God and the people, not knowing what happened to Moses, asked Moses' brother, Aaron, to make an image who would be their god. And Aaron listened to them and makes the golden calf. And so, verse 19 says:

*¹⁹ They made a calf in Horeb
and worshiped a metal image.
²⁰ They exchanged the glory of God
for the image of an ox that eats grass.
²¹ They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt,*

They forgot God, their Savior. And so they committed idolatry. They *exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox* (see Romans 1:23). And if not for Moses' pleading with God not to destroy them, they would have been destroyed.

In verses 24-27, the psalmist next talks about when the nation was standing on the edge of the Promised Land. Verse 24 says:

*²⁴ Then they despised the pleasant land,
having no faith in his promise.*

They didn't believe what God had promised - that He would give them victory over the people in the land. And so, they *did not obey the voice of the LORD* (v. 25) to enter the land. And as a result, God made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Now, as we come to verse 28, we read about how they took wives from the nation of Moab (Num. 23:1-2) in defiance of what God had said and as a result they began to worship Moab's gods. They committed apostasy and idolatry as a result of intermarrying with the people of the land.

This same sin occurred once they were **in the land**. In Deuteronomy 20, God had instructed them to kill all of the inhabitants of the land, but verse 34 tells us that they failed to do what *the Lord commanded them*. And as a result, in verse 35 we read this:

*³⁵ but they mixed with the nations
and learned to do as they did.
³⁶ They served their idols,
which became a snare to them.
³⁷ They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to the demons;*

We may wonder why God would instruct them to kill all the people in the land. This gives us some indication. These were a people who practiced child sacrifice. But Israel didn't obey. She did not destroy all the people. And so, Israel followed their ways even to the point of practicing child sacrifice.

What a depressing history right? A history of sin. A history of unbelief, discontent, jealousy, idolatry, and apostasy. Israel repeatedly forgot God and sinned. And yet God was never done with them. Because He is good and His lovingkindness never ends, He continued to save them. And so, in verses 43-45, we read this summary statement.

*⁴³ Many times he delivered them,
but they were rebellious in their purposes
and were brought low through their iniquity.
⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress,
when he heard their cry.
⁴⁵ For their sake he remembered his covenant,
and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.*

Life was often difficult for Israel because of her sin. And yet, Israel's history demonstrates that even then there is hope, because of who God is. He remembers *his covenant*. And so, with that history the psalmist, knowing that the people of God dwell in exile in Babylon because of their sin, makes a request. He prays:

*⁴⁷ Save us, O Lord our God,
and gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.*

The psalmist has real hope that God will do something because that has been God's track record to save Israel in spite of her sin. And so he boldly asks, *Save us, O Lord our God*. Bring us back to the land. The psalmist knows that there is hope, not because of their obedience and faithfulness, but because of God's character - He remembers his covenant and continues to express his lovingkindness.

And so, here's the point for us. Life may be hard for you right now because of your sin, because of your own failure to follow God. You can still experience God. You can still call out to Him for help. There is hope, because of who God is. Certainly, as we read Israel's history, we know that there are real consequences for sin. God doesn't always spare us from the consequences of our sin (Gal. 6:7). And yet this psalm illustrates what the Bible teaches over and over again. God is a God of grace and mercy. And because of that there is hope that God will restore. There is hope that God will save.

Communion: As believers in Jesus Christ, our hope is that God relates to us out of the New Covenant – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Today, as we celebrate communion, we remember God's great saving act in history. He sent His Son into the world to live a perfect life, and then die on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And he was raised again in victory over sin and death. When anyone trusts Jesus for the forgiveness of his or her sins, you are forgiven for all of your sin – past, present, and future. God makes you His child. He places His Spirit within you. The Lord's Supper reminds us that God now relates to us in light of this new relationship with him.

And so maybe you are in a hard place because of your sin. Know that God is still going to relate to you based on what he has done for you in Christ. Romans 5:1 says:

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Because of what Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection through your faith in Him, you have peace with God. You stand in grace. God loves you. God is for you still! If you will only confess your sin and repent, in other words, turn around and go the other way, you will find that He is there like the father in the story of the prodigal son with arms wide open to you. And yes, there may be hard things that He allows to stay in your life because of your sin, but He will be there to strengthen you, and give wisdom and grace for your situation. He will be there to walk with you in whatever mess you've gotten yourself into because of your sin.

And so today, as we remember Jesus' sacrifice for our sin, if you are in a difficult spot because of your own sin the place to start is confession. This is the invitation. Get honest with God about your sin. Talk with him about it in these moments.

So often when we sin we think that the way to get back into a right standing with God is to earn it. We think we need a track record of obeying God before we can go to him. You cannot earn

your way back into a right standing with God. It is all grace. And so, all you can do is turn back to him in confession and repentance.

Now, if you have never trusted Christ for forgiveness, you also have hope of experiencing God. No one has wandered too far or been too bad that God won't reach out in grace and mercy and save. But you do need to turn to Him. You do need to call out to him. In faith, you need to admit your sin to Him and ask for forgiveness. And when you do, God will forgive you. He will place His Spirit in you. He will make you his child. And He will begin to transform your life. If this is you, won't you come to God today? Won't you trust Him today? My encouragement to you today as we celebrate communion is that you would humble yourself and call out to God for salvation.