

## **HOPE AND HELP FOR THE ABUSED**

*Pastor Tim Nixon*

The sermon this evening and next Sunday evening are the most difficult I have ever prepared. Why?

We cannot simply turn to the abuse section of the Bible and discuss chapter two. We must include the whole counsel of God (yet this is normative isn't it).

They are difficult because when we talk about suffering at the hands of others, passions run deep and stir our sinful hearts.

At the same time, however, these two weeks will be very rewarding because the gracious provision, protection and providence of God can bring about radical changes in the lives of both the suffering and the one who causes suffering.

The topic is also difficult because the definition of abuse is so subjective. And, over the past few years the perimeters that have fenced in the definition have expanded from physical abuse to now verbal and emotional abuse.

In fact, some people we see have gone so far as to define abuse as anytime their spouse disagrees with them. When your children talk about a mean teacher, many times it is simply because the teacher disagrees with them. I do not necessarily want to spend time on definitions as much as on the hope and help that comes from the gospel.

Most of what we call abuse happens within families, and more specifically marriages. And so, for our discussion tonight we will look at that dynamic. In this context, abuse is the violation of trust, and we have all betrayed trust at some point in our lives. Thus abuse is relative to a continuum from lesser to greater.

If we look at the most common abuse or oppression or dominance in a Christian home is if often the husband. This is not always the case and the numbers of husbands as the sufferer is readily increasing. It may be even higher than we know because men are embarrassed to report it.

What does the world say about this distress and our goal?

1. Their goal is to stop the hurt. How?
  - Teach assertiveness rights
  - Teach principles of "tough love"
  - Take control of your life
  
2. Their goal is to stop the harm.
  - Escape to a shelter
  - Separate from your spouse
  - Divorce your spouse

Their goal in counseling is only the mental health of the abused. They do not recognize the gospel and the power of God in the transformation of lives.

Their only hope comes from within.

Our only hope comes from without.

But what does the Bible say is the goal?

- The goal in Biblical obedience is to be God's kind-of-person even in the midst of your trial.
- The goal in Biblical obedience is to seek to glorify God and win the abuser over to righteousness.
- This goal has the focus of glorifying God to the good of both the abused and the abuser.

But where is God in all of this?

God will defend the cause of the oppressed.

- "The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." Psalm 14:31
- "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" Psalm 34:18
- 'The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.' Psalm 9:9-10

God will not exempt us from trouble.

- "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake," Philippians 1:29
- "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." 1 Peter 4:19

God will supply all we need during the time of trouble.

- "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19
- "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

## **Psalm 10**

Psalm 10 was written for those who suffer at the hands of others. It recognizes honest anguish, but also genuine refuge.<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 10 guides us into knowing God in the midst of the injustice. The suffering saint can make this Psalm their own.

---

<sup>1</sup> Much of this section on Psalm 10 is adapted from David Powlison, "Predator, Prey, and Protector: Helping Victims Think and Act from Psalm 10", *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16:3, (January 01, 1998)

In writing about this Psalm, David Powlison speaks of the Psalm in four voices:

1. It is the voice of a man who felt abandoned, afraid, overwhelmed, and outraged in the face of evils. He and others were being hurt. But he knew God, so he thought and worked through his experience in living relationship to Him.
2. A second voice sounds the experience of the people of God through all ages. Israel and the church have suffered together in this fallen, adversarial world. Your individual experience does not occur alone. You are part of a larger whole, God's new society. The Lord—Yahweh, Jesus—is the hope of all the afflicted, all the poor in spirit, all the needy.
3. The third voice registers Jesus' experience. He Himself cried out these requests to God, offered these analyses of evil, and asserted these affirmations of faith that fill Psalm 10. These sentiments express a facet of the experience of the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Your Redeemer was among the afflicted, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Your individual experience is the subset of another's experience, if you are in Christ. Hear and see the One who invites your trust, gratitude, love, and hope. Jesus walked this road. Imagine, these words reveal the heart of your Rescuer. You can love the Jesus who felt, thought, and said these things. Psalms are not meditative techniques for achieving mental equilibrium. Psalm 10 not spiritual Prozac. It expresses the inner life and words of a Person whom the sufferer can grow to love.
4. Finally, we, the readers, weigh in with the fourth voice. These words are meant to map onto our experience; our experience is meant to be expressed with these words.

### **Verse 1**

Why do you stand far off, O Lord? Why do you hide in times of trouble? Where are You? Where were You? Often this is the heart's first cry and first question: "You have said that You love me, that You are a refuge and shield for the afflicted. So why do You seem absent, at the very point of my anguish, powerlessness, and violation? Where are You? Why don't I know Your protection? Why is evil unrestrained?" A sense of abandonment and isolation often dominates the first reactions of sufferers.

### **Verses 2-11**

Harmful people are Proud, Willful, Godless, and Predatory. No psalm gives a fuller description of the thought processes, actions, and emotions of those who hurt others. The afflicted man spent time thinking about and describing the kind of person who uses, misuses, and abuses others.

This burning describes the arousal of any evil desire. It captures vividly the flame of violence and anger that pursues its victims. Even at the mildest level—verbal degradation of another—a dark passion operates, seeking another's harm most often with verbal assaults.

The analysis of evil-doers lays them bare. They do what they want, serve what they want, follow what they want, delight in what they want, and glory in what they want.

### **Verses 12-15**

There is aid for the hurting. The voice that initially said “God is distant” now asks God to be near. The voice that then rehearsed trouble now begs that trouble get dealt with. This God can “rise” and “lift His hand”: He has power to act. God can remember—and do something.

God has seen the hurt and turmoil that they inflict on others. He takes note of it. He will do something. The dark threat thrives on concealment and the powerlessness of its victims. But it is completely visible to God, and must reckon with a greater power.

Sufferers look to the Lord as the only real source of help. The weak and helpless trust. God has been the helper of the helpless. He must become such again.

### **Verse 16-18**

The Lord will right wrongs. This psalm ends with quiet confidence. The initial dismay, the sense of dark threat, the cries for help, these end up in affirmations. God is a person with a name—Yahweh, I AM THAT I AM—who rules forever.

Sufferers call on a God who has previously annihilated evildoers and idolaters. What has been, points to what will be. This King is now known even more fully. The Lord is Jesus, before whom every knee shall bow. He has redeemed the nations – including the abused.

If you “suffer in a Godward direction,” He gives you hope: you are not abandoned. He gives you hope: your sufferings and cries have been heard and will be taken very seriously.

What does God want?

- He wants you to trust Him.
- He wants you to rely upon his providential protection.
- He wants you to practice aggressive submission.
- He wants you to seek godly counsel and support.
- He wants you to learn how to overcome evil with good.
- He wants you to be wise in your actions and reactions.

What has God provided for protection?

- The institution of the church. The church that practices church discipline is the best friend of an abused member. (Matthew 18:15-17)
- Both counseling and a caring fellowship are part of that protection.
- The institution of the civil government.

In godly relationships, there is an anticipation of mutuality. Kindness, long-suffering, grace, forgiveness are all lived out in a reciprocal fashion. Marriages thrive when you have two people committed to loving one another as Christ loved us. Mutual ministry is a hallmark of loving relationships.

However, the problem is when I begin to live out my relationships in a way that expects (demands) a return. I subtly begin to require my spouse to match my efforts. My focus shifts from an anticipation of something good to a demand for it. It becomes the reason I do or don't do things for my spouse, and it begins to inform my reactions.

Any agenda for change must focus first on me and let go of changing my spouse. You must die to the mentality that I deserve happiness, good circumstances, a decent marriage now. You must strive for more than a sense of duty by remaining in the marriage (For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:10).

How do we truly hope?<sup>2</sup>

- Hope cannot be found in a guarantee that my marriage will flourish or my spouse will change.
- You don't give up hope of a better marriage, neither do you make it your foundation for hope/happiness.
- Hope is found in a person, Jesus, rather than my circumstances.
- Hope is found in thriving as a person even if my marriage never does.
- Joy can be found in the morning...."His mercies are new every morning."

What do we learn from a suffering Jesus, because we are striving to be more and more conformed to him?

- He experienced the brokenness of relationships
- He did not fix everything that was broken
- He came to serve, not to be served
- He spoke honestly and purposefully in conflict
- He did not allow the opinions of others to influence him
- He looked to his father for comfort and wisdom (the garden)

"Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

Jeremiah Burroughs

What is our goal through this?

- "Give us our daily bread" – We live our marriage out day by day and God gives grace for the moment.
- Strive for something more than dutiful effort.

---

<sup>2</sup> Much of the next few paragraphs is adapted from, Julie Lowe, *Thriving in a Failure-to-Thrive Marriage*, presented at the 2016 CCEF National Conference.

- Wisdom is needed: it is from above, pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy (James 3:16-17)
- Pursue others to pray for you and your spouse
- Ask for accountability. Let others honestly speak into your world & struggles.
- Pursue counseling as a support, when needed.
- Pursue relationships that encourage growth in your marriage.
- Speak in gracious ways about your spouse
- Accept that you cannot, should not, and will not fix everything
- “I have learned in whatever situation I am in to be content.” Philippians 4:11
- Look for small steps that build what is broken or lacking, or simply what you would like to grow.

### **Reflect and Respond**

Commitments of those who are oppressed must include:

- Finding rest in Christ, not my marriage
- I will not treat you as your sins deserve
- I will choose to love you over guarding myself/self-protection
- I will actively pursue loving my spouse. I won't withhold good from them.
- I will look for ways to delight in my marriage
- Be free from bitterness, despair, criticism
- Be wise in how you interpret your spouse's behavior—give the benefit of the doubt
- Look for ways to build up
- Put aside your desire to help them “get it”
- Give grace and mercy
- Model kindness and grace before your children and the world
- Forgive