

## **Beyond the Sunset, Beyond the Pain**

‘A gentleman who had been very unhappy in marriage married a second time, immediately after his first wife died. Samuel Johnson said of him, “His conduct was the triumph of hope over experience”.’ Certainly that gentleman was filled with hope that the second time around, the marriage would be a happy one. Indeed, one can assume that all the while he was suffering in his first marriage, he was looking forward to a future marriage that would be everything his first one was not. Some people may find his attitude ill advised, inexplicable. Such people base all their lives on their lived experiences. Because of this perspective, they, consciously or unconsciously, limit themselves to only what their past experiences have “taught” them. They may manage to eke out a reasonably “successful” life, but it, at best, would be but a stunted version of the marvelous life God had originally intended. Such people lived “safely”. They lived “rationally”, “realistically”, “objectively”, “clear-mindedly”. Holy Spirit would beg to differ. He’d term it more accurately as “faithlessly”. Another way of putting it would be “pridefully”, “self-fully”, even “disappointingly”.

Because basing the way we live solely on what we can see, hear, and experience with our physical senses, is tragically self-limiting. It truly is so disappointing to the God Who made us, Who

put into us all the unique qualities and characteristics that make each of us who we are. We are capable of so much more than we expect. Indeed, our Father God stated in Hosea 4:6: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”. The Passion Translations makes this even clearer: “My people are destroyed because they do not know Who I am”. The connection between any true knowledge of anything and God is explicit. For God is all knowledge, all knowing. All knowledge that benefits us, that nourishes us, that builds us up, comes from Him and only Him. Why else would Lord Jesus pray, repeatedly, as He was being nailed to the cross, as Luke 23:34 records: “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing”? How much of our lives are near disasters because we truly haven’t a clue as to what we’re doing? Or maybe, many are too prideful to admit it. Failing to admit it doesn’t change the fact one whit that we’re catastrophes just waiting to happen. If not for the *grace* of God intervening on our behalf, we would have long since crashed and burned! For the devil is doing all he can, pulling every string he can find, to pull us off course and into each and every ditch in life, to bring as much suffering and destruction into our lives as devilishly possible.

Except that God is love, and God loves us. He intervenes steering us clear of one disaster after another tragedy. Truly, if not for His gracious interventions, we wouldn’t even know that we need Him at all. For the situation that Hosea was addressing squarely indicted the priests. For they had not been teaching the

people the truth about God. For so long they had neglected to diligently study God's Word, ignored their duties as priests, particularly to intercede for the people, that they themselves had relegated themselves to abject stupidity about God. It was so bad that most didn't even realize how blind they'd become. It had gotten to the point that the priests were worse than useless! Hosea 4:6 continues: "Since you have refused to let them know who I am, I will refuse you as My priests. Since you have ignored the teaching of your God, I will ignore your children". Listen as God piles on the charges against the supposedly "holy" priests, in verses 7-8: "The more you priests increase in number, the more of your sins against Me I have counted. You have exchanged Me, your glorious God, for something shameful. The priests lead My people into sin so they can eat more of their sin offerings. They want the people to sin more and more".

Compare that to Apostle John's warnings in his Second Letter, verses 7-11: "Numerous deceivers have surfaced from among us and gone out into the world". John is here specifically addressing the heretical teaching that had spread among some of the believers that Lord Jesus had not really been a physical man, but had walked on the earth only as God as a spiritual being. For this heresy taught that everything physical is evil, and only the spiritual is good and pure. Thus, Lord Jesus could not have had an actual physical body, and everything that is recorded about Him were illusions, analogous to a hologram. But the inescapable

problem with this is that if Lord Jesus did not come as an actual human being, how could He have atoned for our human sin if He didn't have a human body to sacrifice for sin? This heresy, called Docetism, is yet another abomination, dreamt up in the dungeons of hell to ensnare people otherwise on the road to heaven.

People fall prey to this heresy if they ultimately do not know Who God is. For when we know God and His ways, we live increasingly fulfilling lives—lives we were always destined to live. But what does living fulfilling lives mean? If we think getting rich, living in the lap of luxury with armies of servants to see to our every need, want and whim, doing anything and everything we want, is what it means to be fulfilled, well, we're much to be pitied. For as much as docetism and gnosticism held that the physical world is evil, trying to reject everything material these days is unthinkable in today's materialistic world which all but rejects everything that is spiritually righteous and holy. All these deceptions grow like weeds in our social media feeds and are the devil's tools to lead us away from the Lord. Everything around us, screaming for our attention, are traps designed to lure us away from faith in the only One Who can save, Whose very name means "Savior".

While what our Lord Jesus went through is admittedly and truly horrifying, distasteful, repugnant to our "respectable sensibilities", it was not only necessary but must be squarely faced by all people with their eyes open. For only by accepting the gore of what our Lord endured do we get the necessary understanding of

Who He is and what He did for us. Without that understanding, it's not possible to be a real Christian. Without that understanding, one can not gain a heart of pure gratitude, faith and trust in the providence of God for our lives.

What the better question for us to ponder is how our Lord managed it. How could He go through it? We know He didn't want to. We know He prayed that He might be spared. We know how He suffered, even to sweating drops of blood in Gethsemane. We read the play by play of the beatings He endured, the mockings, the humiliations. If anything, the wicked tongue-lashings He heard while hoisted up on the cross cut more deeply and painfully than did the physical lashings, whippings, the nails driven through His hands and feet. And yet it says He kept praying over and over, under His breath, in His mind, that Father God would forgive the wicked people sinning against Him so gruesomely, because they did not know what they were doing. Perhaps most galling of all was the mocking of one of the murderous thieves crucified alongside Him. One might reasonably think that people undergoing the same execution might commiserate with one another. Maybe even become "friends" in their last few hours of dear life. But no, the demonically-incited vile hatred within many of them knew no bounds. Cursing out the Lord while He is at His lowest, worst, most vulnerable, as His very life drained out of Him, could there be worse treatment? I think not. And so did the other thief. He spoke up, loudly, denouncing the first thief for

his haughty insolence. Shutting up the first one, this second thief Luke 23:42 records, then prayed to the Lord hanging beside him, “I beg of You, Jesus, show me grace and take me with You into Your everlasting kingdom!” Verse 43 records the Lord’s answer: “I promise you—this very day you will enter paradise with Me”.

This was no pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking; no comforting but meaningless platitude. This was an ironclad guarantee. Can you imagine? This second thief is the very first person in all history to be saved by Lord Jesus’ shed blood! And this was part of what enabled Lord Jesus to go through it all. For He could see beyond the sunset of His physical life, beyond the pain and agony. For the anguish of this life will pass. It will not last forever. It will end and the beyond we’re guaranteed is far more worth than any suffering, grief, death, destruction that we will face in this life. Best of all, regardless of how bad it can become, we never face it alone! For the Lord is with us. Helping us. As we allow Him to guide our steps as He’s promised, it couldn’t be better. Remember Romans 8:37-39: “Yet even in the midst of all these things, we triumph over them all, for God has made us to be more than conquerors, and His demonstrated love is our glorious victory over everything! ... His love will triumph over death, life’s troubles, fallen angels, or dark rulers in the heavens. ... There is no power above us or beneath us—no power that could ever be found in the universe that can distance us from God’s passionate love, which is lavished upon us through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One!”

