

Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 8)

Ephesians 2:4-7

Pastor Edward Cheng

December 8, 2019

Last week I talked about the hopelessness that I felt when I ran out of steam trying to swim across the river delta with my friends on a houseboating trip. Right when I thought I was going to die, a girl that I grew up with just happened to wander onto the deck and threw me a lifesaver. This is what God does for us when we are spiritually hopeless and dead. In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul reminds us of our former state before we came to Jesus. We were spiritually dead in our transgressions, without hope and without God. Then in v. 4, Paul starts with the phrase “But God,” (it’s not readily seen in the NIV translation, but is there in most other translations and the original text). These two words speak volumes about God’s character. We were dead in our transgressions. We were hopeless. We brought these dire circumstances upon ourselves. We did nothing to deserve salvation. But God turned things around despite our rebellion proving yet again that He helps us when we cannot help ourselves.

One of the most beautiful qualities of God is that He is the God who changes circumstances. He takes our difficult circumstances and turns them around. There are three implications to this statement. First, God is not to blame for your difficult circumstances. Many times, more often than we would like to admit, we ourselves are to blame, because of our own decisions or faults. Nowhere is this more true than in our spiritual lives. We were dead because of our sin, not because of God. We tend to blame others, our family, our bosses, or even God. Do we ever stop to see if we ourselves are to blame? Sometimes, however, we actually are not to blame. But even then, neither is God to blame. Those hardships that we do not bring upon ourselves arise because of the fallen nature of the world. The curse of sin permeates all creation so that suffering can happen indiscriminately. The fallen nature of mankind causes people to sometimes harm others without just cause. In these cases we may blame the world, or even Satan. But don’t blame God. It’s not His fault.

The second implication is that the Lord knows your circumstances. He is intimately aware of your struggle. He is the ultimate empath. We see this in Genesis 29:32, Exodus 2:24-25, Deuteronomy 26:7, Psalm 18:6, Psalm 34:17, and Proverbs 15:29. When we are in the darkest place, God sees and hears. Why do we so quickly doubt Him? Sometimes we are tired of waiting for Him to answer prayers. I’ve been praying for the salvation of my unbelieving friends for 30

years and they haven't come to Jesus. Other times God does not answer a prayer in the way we would like. When I prayed for my mother to be healed, she eventually died anyway. Yet in these situations know that God does hear when we cry out. Don't base your opinion about God on your own circumstances. Your life is too small of a sample size to infer God's character, and any conclusions you draw will be extremely biased. Instead, put more stock in what God tells you about Himself through the Bible. That is the more reliable ground truth. If I based my opinion of God on my experience, I would think He was absent, nonexistent, or cruel. But that's the opposite of what I know to be true from Scripture, and I choose to trust in what God says.

Finally, the Lord always acts on our behalf. We see this in Genesis 7:17-8:1. The water keeps rising and everything dies, but God remembers Noah and turns things around. We also see this in Genesis 39:20-21, 50:20, Psalm 34:19, 73:25-26, and Acts 2:22-24. Scripture tells us God acts on our behalf, but sometimes He doesn't give us what we pray for. Still, trust that He is acting for our ultimate good, and He knows what is best more than we do. Nowhere is this more true than in our spiritual lives. We see this in Isaiah 53:6, Romans 5:8, and Isaiah 9:1-7. We were in darkness, but God saved us. When we were dead in sin He gave us eternal life. In our temporal circumstances it is often hard to see how God is acting for our good, and we must simply trust Him. But with regard to the eternal, there is no confusion about what God has done for us. He has sacrificed so much to give us everything, so we should be able to trust Him now in the midst of light and momentary troubles. God is like the father who places his newborn son face down for 15 minutes to help him train his neck muscles. The baby will whimper and cry, so the father lies down with his baby, reassuring him that he is right there. He could easily pick his child up, but it's for his own good that he remain face down. Likewise, God knows what is best for us. He sometimes lets difficult circumstances befall us for our good. But He has not left our side and is always listening. But we must trust that He knows best and will work things out for our good. We can be certain of this because we were once dead in our transgressions, but God saved us and gave us life.