

## Day 6

### Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You.

*"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, hear my voice." -Psalm 130:1*

Many of you know I love baseball. I also enjoy watching baseball movies. A few of my favorites are *The Rookie*, *The Natural*, *42*, *Moneyball*, and *Million Dollar Arm*. It's not one of my favorites but there is a classic line in *"A League of Their Own."* Can you picture Tom Hanks, playing the role of manager Jimmy Dugan, saying, "There's no crying in baseball."

From time to time we are tempted to think there should be no crying in the Christian faith. A true Christian would never cry to God, or so we might think, but should always praise Him. You might even feel as if you are a weak Christian, if you cry out. We are fooled into thinking faith should be so grand and glorious that it never succumbs to barring it's soul but should move forward with a stiff upper lip. This line of thinking tells us faith should be impenetrable to our emotions, including tears.

But the psalmist constantly and consistently "cries out to the Lord." This hymnbook of the Bible is filled with different types of psalms. Wisdom, praise and thanksgiving. And also "laments."

Some say a third of the psalms are laments (I've never counted. I'll take their word for it.)

So what do we make of this?

This letter is very simple and straightforward. Crying out to the Lord can be a negative, but it can also be a positive.

How?

The lament psalms teach us that it's never wrong to cry out to God for help. God hears us in our pain and welcomes us close.

Listen to how Jessica Brodie describes the lament psalms...

"Have you ever been so overcome with anguish you not only feel overwhelmed with sorrow but also utterly, completely, soul-despairingly alone, as if no one on earth could possibly understand the depths of your pain? In times like these, it helps to remember God is there, and He's ready to shoulder your burdens, suffering, and distress. Not only does God understand and see you in the center of your pain, but He's available for you, listening and ready as you cry out your heartache, anger, or sadness."

Crying out to God is not weakness, but it is actually a great confession of faith. Your cry is acknowledging that only God can help you and sustain you in your day of trouble; whether that be physical, emotional or spiritual pain.

When we cry out we acknowledge God is our everything!

So yes, there is crying in the Christian faith. But we do not mourn like the world. We mourn with hope! And a hope that does not disappoint us.

+To God be the glory!

## Day 7

### **Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You**

*"By His wounds we are healed." -Isaiah 53:5*

The only scars in heaven will be the scars of Jesus. For there were no scars in Eden and there will be no scars in Eden 2.0. But in between Eden and Eden 2.0, here on this earth, our bodies bear the proof of the fallout of the Fall.

My body is no exception. I have scars on my face, neck, chest, wrist, arms, torso, and legs. All from being in ICU. (Almost sounds like the old song, "Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes"). I might invest in Vitamin E with the amount of lotion I have used!

Scars remind us of the pain. You might be a senior citizen and have a scar from when you fell off your bike as a small child. Every time you see the scar you see the accident. A college teammate of mine grew a beard to cover a scar on his face, so he didn't have to explain to everyone his foolish antics that lead to the very visible mark.

Not every scar can be covered. Not every scar is physical. Not everyone scar has to be a memory of suffering.

Scars can be transformed into emblems of grace. God's grace in our lives. Reminding us that God's healing hand was with us.

They can teach us humility and help foster a spirit of dependency on God. Recalling we are dust and to dust we shall return. But thanks be to God we eagerly await that day when our lowly bodies will be like His glorious body.

A soldier in battle or a mother during childbirth might years later bear scars that are beautiful reminders of the sacrifice upholding the sanctity and value of human life.

Ephesians 5 reminds us, there will be no "blemish" on our body or soul in heaven. How? For the blood atonement of Jesus is more powerful than the dermatologist's tricks of Vitamin E or cocoa butter.

For His scars have made us at one with the Father. For His death was ours that we might live. Go ahead and join Thomas in looking at His hands and His sides. Touch the scars of Jesus. Go ahead and look at your scars. Because they will not be there for long. Because by His wounds we are healed.

Until that day wear them proudly as evidence that He sustains us until life everlasting!

+To God be the glory!

**Day 8**  
**Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You**  
*"We are more than conquerors." -Romans 8:37*

I have lived in Alabama for 12 college football seasons. A team from the state of Alabama has won the national championship in 7 of those 12 seasons. Scorecard? The Alabama Crimson Tide have 6 and the Auburn Tigers have 1.

It's fun in the Fall to live in a place where your team is always winning! No one likes to lose. Here is the good news for Christians! You are on the winning team.

A major theme in the psalms is that God will conquer His enemies, who also happen to be our enemies. Read Psalm 2 and you will immediately experience this victory. In fact, Psalm 2 reminds us that the Lord laughs, scoffs, at those who think they will defeat Him.

So can we!

The Lord will be victorious here on this earth or ultimately on the last day. No matter the enemy waging war against us - whether they be physical ailments, emotional assaults on our heart, or spiritual warfare in whatever form or fashion - we are more than conquerors.

Our fear is that we look at the scoreboard, our circumstances in this life, and we are tempted to think we are on the losing team. The psalms remind us that the arc of history always bends to the Christian putting a "W" in the win column. For no one and no thing can defeat Him. And everything Christ has won, He has given to us.

No Christian in the past has ever lost. No Christian in the future will ever be defeated. You are on the winning side. Contrary to what cable news or social media might tell you. This is no prosperity gospel. This is THE GOSPEL.

Martin Luther penned it best in the hymn, A Mighty Fortress: "And take they our life, Goods, fame, child and wife, Though these all be gone, Our victory has been won; The kingdom ours remaineth."

Our victory has been won!

Even if you are in a place like ICU, do not be fooled. You are a victor in Christ Jesus our Lord. Don't quit at halftime. Watch the game unfold until the buzzer, I mean trumpet, sounds!

+To God alone be the glory.

## Day 9

### Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You

*"Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you." - I Peter 5:7*

It's almost as if God is my last resort when He should be my first choice.

I have a tendency to only pray about something after I have tried to solve it first. If I can't solve the problem, then I take it to God in prayer. My problem is really control. I want to be in control of the situation. Instead of God being in control, if I'm honest, I prefer to be in control. And when I'm not in control, I get anxious.

God is so good that He invites us to cast all of our cares on Him. All. Not some. Not a few. Not the big. Or just the small. But all of our anxieties.

We will have anxiety. That isn't the question. The question is what we do with our anxiety. It is worth highlighting Peter does NOT say that we are to deny our anxiety, ignore our anxiety, mask our anxiety, fight our anxiety, or run from our anxiety.

Peter tells us to "cast" our anxiety on Jesus.

It is an action word. Telling us to literally "throw" our anxiety. The Greek gives the modern picture of the garbage man who comes down your street and just chucks the garbage into the back of the truck. In fact, he often does it so violently that a good bit of your trash ends up on the street waiting for next weeks pickup!

The key to learning how to "cast" is to back up to verse 6 in I Peter 5. Peter links casting with humility. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He might lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."

We never work out the shoulders in God's gym, the church. But we do work out the knees. Purposefully, God did not give you broad enough shoulders to carry your burdens. In worship, we kneel. We kneel as a symbol of humility. That we are not in control. That He is in control. That is a good thing. That is a great thing.

The sovereignty of God is a great comfort to the Christian.

A big view of God results in smaller problems. A small view of God results in bigger problems.

A Christian preacher has a wonderful way of putting it: "The presence of humility results in the absence of anxiety. The presence of anxiety results in the absence of humility."

Take it to the Lord in prayer. For He cares for you!

+To God be the glory!

## Day 10

### Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You

*"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."  
-Psalm 139:16*

Ever go on vacation and need a vacation after your vacation? When you got home you were totally exhausted. You needed a few days to recover before heading back to work. In fact, vacation was more tiring than work.

How did this happen? You traveled to some enchanted land or one of your favorite destinations. You only had a few days. So, you try to fit in everything...see everything and do everything. I mean everything.

Disney? Sound familiar? You go from sunset to sundown.

"Hey," you think to yourself, "we might never be back here again. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

This attitude not only puts a damper on a vacation, but also on life.

We can be fooled into thinking that a "full" or abundant life is determined by either a long life or whether we checked off all the boxes on our Bucket List. Preferably we want both- quantity and quality of life.

So, we feel an unhealthy pressure to make sure our life was a life worth living. Or we feel cheated if life throws us a curveball and we experience ill health, struggling finances, or broken relationships.

Scripture reminds us that God looks at things differently. So should we.

Every day of your life has a number. God started numbering them before you were born. He will keep numbering them until the day you die. Then there will be numberless days in eternal heaven with Him.

God has already written all the days of your life in His book. He has already numbered the days of your life and has ordained that number to be right in His eyes. The days given glorify Him. Whether that number is 1 year or 10 years or 100 years - your life will achieve the purpose for why He sent it into this world.

Do you know someone who is terrified of everything? Terrified of flying? Terrified of the ocean? Terrified of doctors and the hospital? Terrified of getting hurt and dying? Terrified of not living a long life? Terrified of not checking off all the items on their bucket list? God cheats none of His children. He knows the right timing.

Remember! He has given us life everlasting. He gives His heirs an inheritance of treasures beyond our wildest dreams. Both quantity and quality

.  
Your number of days on earth has already been ordained. Your place in heaven has already been prepared. Fear not! Take heart. Let not your heart be troubled.

"This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

+To God be the glory!