

Who's My Doctor Anyway?

Hebrews 2:14-15

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(GA) I bumped into a guy a few months ago at the Central City Mall – someone who attends here, but hasn't been here in a while.

A. I rounded a corner, and we both glanced at each other. This guy picks up the item closest to him and begins reading the back label intensely. It was probably grape jelly or pudding or something like that. People do odd things when they see pastors outside of the church... especially if it's people who haven't 'been around lately.'

1. We talked for a while, asked him how he was doing, and eventually I *did* ask that classic 'pastor question' – "So, I haven't seen you around much lately..."

a. His reply was interesting to me – he said that he'd been going through some hard, painful stuff and he knew others wouldn't understand.

2. He said, "It's nothing personal, pastor. It's not just church; I've pulled out of a lot of things in life."

A. Pain does odd things to us. Mainly, it makes us feel alone, distanced from others. We may even be sitting in a room of 150 people wonder:

1. Does anyone understand what I'm feeling?

2. Does anyone care?

3. If they do care, why don't they do more to show me... or to help?

B. That's just what pain – physical or emotional – does to us.

(SN) And what has always seemed odd to me is that I know people are hurting when they come to church... but they always seem so put together. Our pain doesn't stop, just because we shower, dress up, and head to church with our Bibles, does it?

A. I think we've just gotten into a bad rut of putting on our game faces when we are in public.

1. But the sad irony is that it creates more pain. We come to church with smiles on our faces, then wonder why nobody notices our hurts. Why more people don't say things... offer to help us...

a. This is hard. Feeling like others don't notice, or don't care.

B. But in pain, there's often a deeper discouragement. People in pain often think that, it's not only people, *God must not care. God must not understand what I'm going through!*"

1. But we don't admit this well either. That we have real doubts about God... that at church is often the time we feel the emptiest. We're scared to be honest about this.

a. This is why I appreciate Michael Card, He was willing to be honest. In his book, *A Sacred Sorrow*, Michael writes about a time when he was in pain and felt alone:

Read pages 27 & 28

C. I appreciate Michael's honesty. But what I find so interesting is how we connected his pain with his questions about God. Who God is... what He's like... Does He care...

1. I truly believe that hurting people hurt way more, and way longer, if they have unanswered questions about God. Questions like:

a. If I open myself – *truly* open myself – up to seek God... what kind of God will I find?

b. Is God big enough, or personal enough to understand my pains?

c. If I look hard to find God, will I find an “angry judge, a stingy benefactor, or a disappointed father,” like Michael Card writes.

D. What is God like? This question haunts us in our pain. We’re “slaves to what we do not know.”

1. So my goal for the morning is to look at Who we find, when we come to God in our pain, authentically, and seek Him with all our soul.

a. My goal is to see if the God of the Scriptures can feel what we’re feeling... can understand us?

(S) To do this, I need to introduce you to a theological term. (Stick with me, no dosing off...)

A. Many pastors and theologians used to, and some still do, affirm a doctrine called the “**Impassibility of God**”

1. “Impassibility” means incapable of suffering, or feeling pain, or of having someone hurt you. This doctrine suggests that God doesn’t react, or respond, emotionally as a person would – like when you or I cry when we find out bad news.

a. Some have taken passages like *Mal. 3:6*, when God says, “I the Lord do not change” – and they’d suggest that God never changes, so He must not change His *emotions*, either.

B. Now, I want to be very clear: I affirm the biblical truth that God is unchangeable – in all His attributes and sovereign plans, our Lord doesn’t change. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I affirm this completely. But, I cannot affirm the “Impassibility of God” and I’ll show you why in a moment.

1. But first, let me tell you why this matters.

a. Not everybody knows this term... or doctrine... most people have never been taught this idea. But yet it’s in people’s minds and this doctrine makes God seem stoic... unaffected... and standoffish about your hurts and pains.

i. “I mean, if God doesn’t feel or respond emotionally to life and things... How in the world can I bring my hurts to Him and expect Him to relate or care?”

2. You see why this is important?

C. Let me quickly show you from Scripture why the idea of the “Impassibility of God” simply does NOT account for the full, beautiful picture of God in the Bible.

1. Let me give you a couple examples from the OT first on how God is *affected* by His people. He does feel things...

a. *Hosea 11:8* says, and this is God talking, “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? ***My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.***”

i. Does that sound like a God that doesn’t respond emotionally to His people?

b. In fact, isn’t the entire book of Hosea an experience that God puts a man through, Hosea, in order that Hosea will understand how God feels... How God is hurt and angry about His people’s unfaithfulness?

i. God had Hosea marry a whore, so he’d know God’s feelings. The entire book proves that God feels and responds in emotion to His people.

c. One more passage as an example. Listen to God’s feelings of jealousy that Israel caused God to feel. *Ezekiel 23:25* says, “And I will direct my jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in fury.”

2. These are just a few examples, but what I want you to catch is that there are dozens and dozens of verses that show ***God changes His emotions in response to people.***

a. What we go through here on life does affect Him. He **feels** things...

D. Now, some of you are hurting so badly today you're thinking, "That's great, pastor, God feels things... it doesn't mean He understands me. God is God... I'm a human... what could He possibly understand about human suffering?" ***My*** personal human suffering?

1. That's a fair question, by the way. It's one thing to know God can feel things – It's another thing to believe that God fully understands your hurts.

a. Think about it. I'm around hundreds of people every week who I **know** feel things. You feel things. All people feel.

b. But, I wouldn't go to ***all people*** and unload all my soul onto them. Just because someone has the capacity to feel doesn't mean they get me... understand with compassion what's happening to me. Right?

2. Who would I go to? Who would you go to, to share your sorrows and grief?

a. I don't know about you, but I'm only going to share my soul – my deepest pains and grief – with someone I know gets me. We're all this way. We're all selective about who we draw near to and fully share our pains with.

E. Because this is true – I want you to hear this morning that there is nobody who understands your personal pain better than God. I can prove this to you. Turn to Hebrews 2:14-15. ***Read Hebrews 2:14-15.***

1. When this passage says "children" – it's referring to people, God's people that He created. And it says, "because my people I created share in flesh and blood, God Himself also participated in flesh and blood. That's what it says..."

a. Only, it doesn't exactly say this in the original language. In the original the phrase, "flesh and blood" is turned around. The original reads, "blood and flesh". That has different sound to it doesn't it? It's meant to.

i. "blood and flesh" has moral tones – it's a phrase affirming the struggle of being human. We bleed... we live in frail human flesh in a world of things that prick us, or worse.

a) One commentator writes, "The order 'blood and flesh' reflects and emphasis on suffering associated with shedding blood."

F. This verse is saying, "God's children – you and me – entered into the human situation of suffering... of "blood and flesh"... so God decided He should as well."

1. This is of course talking about Jesus, and the moment we'll celebrate at Christmas.

a. Friends, what I want you to see is that God is able to understand human pain. Because, God in His love, entered into the 'blood and flesh' experience that we're in... and man, did He ever enter in!

i. I don't mean to minimize your pain, but you and I will never come close as humans to suffering as much as God suffered. His suffering had a double-edged quality to it:

a) When Jesus died on the cross, a Father watched His Son get brutally murdered.

i) If there is a worse emotional pain to go through in life, I sure can't imagine it. At the cross, God suffered infinite pain as a Father...

b) That's the first edge to God's pain. There's a second. In that moment, the same God, just another personality of the same God, gave up His life.

- i) The suffering of Jesus as a human is unimaginable.
 - a) First, to be betrayed by a friend, by a kiss...
 - b) To be beaten beyond recognition...
 - c) To be publically displayed and humiliated in front of a crowd of thousands on a Roman cross...
 - d) To be nailed with stakes through the arms and feet and then die of asphyxia – or choking.
- ii) The physical & emotional pain Jesus walked through, as a child of ‘blood and flesh’ like you and me... is incomparable.

G. Why? Why would the infinite God of the Universe who sits in the heavens and does whatever He pleases do this?

1. This passage gives us two reasons. The first reason is that so you, a hurting person, can know that God loves you and understands your pain. Verse 14 is a verse telling us that God is fully-with hurting people.

a. I’ve quoted him before, but I like how Timothy Keller describes how God loves and understand suffering people. He says, “God binds up His heart so closely with suffering people that he interprets any move against them as a move against Him.”

i. That’s the first reason I see. God loves you so much He wants you to come to Him when you’re hurting. Some of you have never done that... some of you have never met this God who loves you so much He became ‘blood and flesh’ in part to display His love for you.

a) I know that many of you are in pain – please don’t leave here this morning without knowing that you’re in a right relationship with this personal God.

ii. God created, and you may see Him around you in creation, but because of your sin, you are separated from Him. Your sin has caused a separation between you and God, and the only way to make things right by asking Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.

a) It’s a simple step. *Romans 10:9-10* describes it well: “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

b. I believe there are people here today that need to take that step of faith into a relationship with Jesus. You may have been in and around the church your entire life, but you haven’t asked Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.

i. You haven’t experienced just how personal and loving and forgiving this God can be. All you have to do is place your faith in Jesus.

a) One of the reasons God became man was so that you could know He walks with you through your human experience.

2. The other reason that God went through this double-edged suffering is found in the last part of our passage *verse 15 – Read.*

a. There’s another part to the human situation of suffering – another way as humans we live in pain. To live as a person, is to live in the power of death.

i. **Q:** What is the power of death? What power does death hold over our lives?

ii. **A:** It's the power to make you fear, feel anxious, uncertain. Death brings the unknown. And we fear what we do not know... especially when it comes to what happens after death.

a) I have done quite a few funerals and more than I'd like to count have been for young people. At viewings, at funerals, at gravesite services, there are always people that have that look of fear and dread in their eyes. That's the power of death.

i) I have a relative, someone very close to me, who said, when he'd lost both his parents, "I have no idea what happens when people die... and it scares me to death."

3. That's the power of death. But, that's what Jesus removed for people of faith. We no longer have to wonder what happens, or will happen to us, when we die... Jesus' death secured for us a defined future. A Christian knows where she's going... and they don't fear death like a someone who doesn't have that certainty.

a. Plutarch, the Roman historian, said, "Who can be a slave if he gives no heed to death?"

i. Friends, God took on blood and flesh – He suffered and died – in order to free us from the fear of what happens after we die... what happens when someone we love dies.

(A) When I began this series "Hospital," I had no idea how it would invite God to bring, or surface, suffering. Maybe it's just opened my eyes to it, more. But, there are so many hurting people in our community.

A. I've had so many phone calls, or drop-ins, because of pain. And a part of me says, "This is so great..."

1. Not that you're hurting... but that people are beginning to be authentic. Talk about their pains and grief.

B. This morning, I simply wanted to remove another obstacle to authenticity. I want to remove the obstacle of being "slaves to what we do not know" – the obstacle of not knowing that God feels your pain and understands what you're going through. He 'gets you'!

1. A false view of God – the view that God is impassive – that's the lie that's held back the tears of too many in our hospital.

a. There are things we need to mourn...

b. There are things we need to confess and know we're forgiven for...

c. There are pains and hurts we need to walk through with other people...

2. There's nothing Satan would love more than for you to believe that your brothers and sister at Heartland don't care. Or, even worse, that God doesn't care... or understand.

C. Your brothers and sisters at Heartland do care. And you have a God that cares so much He took on 'blood and flesh' for you.

1. My prayer is that you know this Savior by faith and that you allow yourself to be authentic with Him and us in the future.

Let me pray.