

Embodied Shalom: Who Hears My Plea?

Romans 8:18-23; Isaiah 53:3-5; Hebrews 4:14-16; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Palm Cross

When I suffer, who hears my plea?
A carpenter fashions a cross for my grip.
My hand holds fast to this piece of tree.

I search for hope like a pearl in the sea.
My captive body calling from the ship:
When I suffer, who hears my plea?

From my prison of pain I long to break free,
but all I hear is the crack of a whip.
My hand holds fast to this piece of tree.

I dream of playing with my kids in glee,
to run and chase and laugh and skip.
When I suffer, who hears my plea?

A carpenter's scars answer me
with hope of life to find through this trip;
My hand holds fast to this piece of tree.

In darkest night I look to Thee,
praying in a garden as your blood starts to drip:
When I suffer, who hears my plea?
My hand holds fast to this piece of tree.

By Kyle Haynes, Distinct Citizenship

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was **subjected to futility**—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope ²¹ that the creation itself will also be set free from **the bondage to decay** into the glorious freedom of God's children. ²² For we know that **the whole creation has been groaning** together with labor pains until now. ²³ Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also **groan** within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, **the redemption of our bodies**. Romans 8:18-23*

Chronic illness often implies that there is a long lasting medical condition with your body.

- According to the Center for Disease Control approximately 76% of adults in America have at least one chronic condition (diabetes, MS, Crone's disease, depression, etc.)
- 51% of adults live with more than one illness.
- And adults 65 or over? 93% have at least one chronic illness and nearly 80% have multiple.
- And almost 25% of adults (1 in 4!) live with chronic pain.

Disability is a natural part of life, a natural variation in human diversity, and one of the many ways humans exist in the world.

- According to the CDC, more than 1 in 4 adults (28%) of adults in the US have some type of disability (cognitive, mobility, hearing, vision).
- Adults with disabilities are more likely to experience barriers to healthcare access, particularly younger and middle-aged adults.
- The stats about systemic injustice towards people with disabilities are too many to list today, but they include inadequate health care, economic and employment disparities, and physical and infrastructure barriers, to name only a few.

Illness or disability is no one's fault

We know this to be true, but sometimes our actions, advice, and avoidance implies otherwise.

As he was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him. John 9:2-3

Jesus makes no comment about this man's character and states directly that God's works might be displayed in him. Jesus' ultimate healing in this man's life was not to give him sight, but to give him belief!

Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. John 9:38

Our human understanding of justice continually falls short without true redemption through the broken body of Jesus.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was... Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. Isaiah 53:3-5

Healing, peace, restoration comes through Jesus Christ, the One who Saves.

The body is good even when it suffers.

- God himself looks on and loves us. We were made for communion with him.
- All bodies have psychosomatic unity. Everyone is made from dust and is sustained by the breath of God.
- Our bodies are a tangible, unavoidable reminder that we are not in control. No amount of exercise, food, or wellness antidote can change that our bodies are imperfect and temporary. (2 Cor 4:16)
- We have value as God's image bearers. Counter-cultural: what you do vs. who you are

*The LORD your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing. Zephaniah 3:17*

Dependence is a truthful way to live.

- All people are limited, even though we try to live without limits.

- God's design is that humans need help. In your illness or disability, you must learn to ask for help.
- Able-bodied people assume they don't need help when in reality everyone does. We must learn from the people in our lives who ask for help.

Don't continue drinking only water, but use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. 1 Timothy 5:23

Disability can reveal aspects of God that are often overlooked.

- Patience, interdependence, vulnerability
- Hospitality, perseverance, community

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens—Jesus the Son of God—let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

Receiving healing is broader than praying for a cure.

- A cure is removal of disease.
- Sometimes healing comes without a cure.
- Healing in Christ is restoration of communion with God, yourself, others, and creation.

False hope can birth cynicism, resignation, entitlement, and even bitterness.

True hope knows that suffering is real, but Christ is present, and resurrection is coming. You can be healed, whole, full of embodied shalom and not be cured of your physical illness or still be a person with disability.

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. **By his wounds you have been healed.** 1 Peter 2:24*

We have the ultimate validation of vulnerability through Jesus Christ himself who bore pain in his own body and co-suffers (sympathizes) with us in our weakness.

Christ has died. Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

In order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV)

Questions:

Do you believe your body is good even when it suffers? Why or why not? In what ways has God been with you in your suffering?

What does life in your body point to? Self-sufficiency? Independence? Dependence?

How does your body display the vulnerability of Jesus himself who bore pain in his own body?

How would you describe the difference between cure and healing? As a human man, Jesus suffered in his body so that we might be fully healed. How can this bring comfort to you in your own pain?