

“Do you not care?”—A Reflection on Suffering and the Heart of Christ



by ESTHER LIU

“I don’t think I can take this anymore...” My friend’s tearful confession carried the weight of weeks and months of heartache and pain; to bear even one more minute of sadness felt intolerable. Her heart was broken. And in that moment, my heart broke too.

Have you ever experienced suffering that left you desperate and battered? It can happen suddenly—an unexpected phone call, a troubling medical diagnosis, a betrayal. In one moment, hopes and dreams are dashed and life as you know it shatters. Or the suffering can build up over time—weeks and months of grinding work, unrelenting relational strife, chronic pain and disability, long-standing unfulfilled desires—the stubborn persistence of hardship dragging on your soul. Whatever it may be, there are times when our distress feels like more than we can bear. We feel vulnerable, unprotected, and alone—powerless to change what is hard or wrong. Silver linings and positive thinking are not enough to mend our broken hearts. We are walking through a dark tunnel—with no hint of light at the end of it, with no *hope* of light at the end of it.

As Christians, deep suffering can create a painful dissonance between our professed faith and our actual lived experience. It was not as difficult to believe that God had a good plan for our lives when our lives hadn’t

yet fallen apart. The promises of his love and provision were easier to trust before sorrow left us feeling depleted. Truths that once brought peace and comfort can feel hollow and confusing amidst suffering. The God who hears prayers—why does he not answer when we need him most? The God of justice—why does he allow evil to go unpunished? The God who redeems and restores—why does he not come and fix what is broken? As we live in this painful dissonance, as our cries for help seem to be met with deafening silence, another question may emerge:

“Do you not care?”

It is a raw and unsettling question. But as we dig into Scripture, we realize it is not a new question. It echoes the cries of God’s people throughout history; it is a cry expressed by Jesus’ own disciples:

And leaving the crowd, they took [Jesus] with them in the boat. . . . And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:36–38)

We can perhaps relate to the disciples here. There are times we also encounter storms in our lives that threaten to ruin us. Not only do we feel helpless to make the storm cease, but we are left to witness the devastation and we wonder what Jesus is up to. Does he see our distress? Does he know we might not make it? Why doesn’t he intervene?¹ In these moments, we struggle to grasp his heart and his purposes toward us. We *don’t* understand what he is doing; his ways are beyond us. We *don’t* know why he allows the storm to continue. Meanwhile, we *do* know that it’s painfully tempting to see the chaos—the violent winds, crashing waves, sinking boats—and start to wonder if Jesus doesn’t care.

While Jesus does not respond directly to the disciples’ question, we are familiar with the ending of this story: “He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:39).

1. Indeed, in Matthew’s account it says: “The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’” Taken together, the stories make it clear that the disciples believed he could intervene to save them and the fact that he did not caused them to question his care for them.

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