

Lessons from Macy

M.W. Bassford
11-23-08

Introduction.

- A. On September 19, 2008, my life changed forever, although not in the way I had been expecting. I had anticipated the beginning of a journey on the uncharted waters of fatherhood, with all of its frustrations, challenges, and joys. Instead, what I ended up with was a life that was more of the same old, same old. The only difference was the picture on my bedroom wall of a little girl I loved but would never get to know here.
- B. That's what I want to talk about this morning. I know that there are a number of people who would be appalled at my choice of topic. How could I do something so ghastly as to discuss the death of my daughter in a sermon I wrote a little more than two weeks after it happened? I thought about that, but I decided it was something I needed to do. In the first place, this is for me. As all of you know, I'm both very verbal and very analytical, and putting such a tragedy into words is a very natural way for me to process what has happened. Second, this is for all of you. In my heart of hearts, I'm a teacher. It's my role to point out the connections between the word of God and real life. I love you and want to tell you what I've learned so that you can benefit from it. Finally, though, this is for my daughter. Some might feel that I'm dishonoring her memory by using her passing as a sermon illustration, but I think that exactly the opposite is true. The real dishonor would be for me to go on as though this had never happened, to sweep my remembrance of her under the rug, to ignore love and loss and replace them with indifference and silence. I'm not going to do that this morning. Instead, I want to talk with you about all this, about the lessons I've learned from Macy.

I. Life and Satan.

- A. The first thing that I've learned from all of this is that **LIFE IS FRAGILE**. I think it's fair to say that this is the first time that anything truly tragic has happened to me personally, but still, this lesson came as no surprise. Over and over again, the Bible tells us that everything we have on earth is temporary, and there's nothing we can do to make it permanent. Consider what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:11-12. Sadly, this is so true. Lauren and I considered very carefully every decision we made during the pregnancy, and every time, we did what we thought best. We entrusted her care to men and women with all kinds of technology and medical know-how at their disposal. And yet, despite all our efforts, the evil time came anyway, and she was lost.
- B. Friends, this is something we need to get at a gut level. We can lose everything we have in an instant, and there's nothing we can do about any of that. Before the sun sets this evening, any of us could lose our jobs, our possessions, our families, our health, or our lives. We can be smashed, and be left with nothing to do but pick up the pieces, because that's the way life is. We need to live, then, with an awareness of how fragile our gifts can be, and appreciate all the blessings we have while we still have them.
- C. I recognize that this makes the world around us seem like a very harsh place, but there's a reason why it's so harsh. We so often encounter suffering because **SATAN IS POWERFUL**. Many people in the denominational world miss out on this one. Their perspective is tinged by Calvinism, so they tend to view God as the active cause of suffering in their lives. They say that God took their loved one, or God caused them to suffer a health problem, and so on. Friends, that's just not what the Scripture teaches. God allows these things, but He is not the cause. We see the true cause described in Job 1:9-12. Here we see Job, a righteous man who had done nothing to merit divine punishment, as the subject of conversation between God and Satan. Satan seeks permission to smash his life up, and God gives it. As the next chapter reveals, Satan then employs all sorts of different tools to ruin Job. He tempts evil men into attacking him, but he also makes use of natural forces like wind and fire to destroy Job's possessions and family. Brethren, Satan is just as powerful and capable today.
- D. All of that really just begs the question, though. Why does God allow Satan to work such evil? Why did righteous Job lose his possessions and his children and his health? Why does God let the devil take those things away from any of us? As best as I can tell, the answer is that if God refused to let bad things happen to good people, He would be denying Himself. When Adam first rebelled against God, He handed down a curse against Adam and all his descendants, which we read in Genesis 3:17-19. Essentially, because Adam chose Satan over God, God handed all of us over into the physical power of Satan. When Jesus calls Satan "the ruler of this world" in John 14, He is not exaggerating. Satan hates us. He is filled with the desire to humiliate, injure, and ultimately kill us, and he does all of those things. As long as he confines his ravages to the hapless children of Adam, he has every right to behave as he does, because he is operating within the bounds of the decree that God made. God is far more powerful than Satan, but He is limited in what He can do because He has to play by the rules that He Himself laid down. God must be faithful to the curse that He pronounced so many thousands of years ago, even when the results of that curse afflict the people He loves most.
- E. Of course, this is not an absolute. Satan will take advantage of what God said to ensure that God's people are made to suffer too, but God does not wholly consign any of His faithful children to the dominion of Satan. We

saw this in Job 1, when God refused to allow Satan to kill Job, and we see another echo of the restraint that God places on the evil one in 1 Corinthians 10:13. Bad things happen to good people. Even very bad things happen to good people, but God will not allow a burden to be placed on any one of us that is greater than we can bear. Something that I thought about a great deal in the days following Macy's death was that if Lauren and I had lived 100 years ago, and exactly the same situation happened, I wouldn't just have lost my daughter. I would have lost my wife too. That didn't happen because God didn't allow it to happen, quite possibly because God knew that it would have been too much. I miss my daughter constantly, but I'm making it, and I know that life is going to go on. Without Lauren with me, I don't know that those things would be true, and to be honest, I don't much want to think about it. God makes no promises that our lives here will always be pain-free, but He does promise that grief for the child of God will come in bearable measure.

II. Brethren and God.

- A. Thankfully, not all the lessons I've taken from this have been painful ones. For one thing, I know for certain now that the **BRETHREN ARE WONDERFUL**. Solomon comments on the importance of having others with us in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. This passage is certainly amply fulfilled in the church. I don't think you can know what a difference you've made in our lives these past few weeks. Something that Lauren and I have talked about a great deal is imagining how awful this whole ordeal would be if we had to go through it alone. If you want to shudder, think about some teenage mother in a hospital somewhere who has just lost a baby and has nobody to be there for her. No husband, no parents, no friends, no church, nothing. Having to handle such a crushing burden alone would destroy just about anybody. It happens. I'm thankful it didn't happen to us.
- B. Indeed, exactly the opposite has happened to us. The brethren back in Joliet were and continue to be absolutely amazing in their supportiveness and love. The Christians here and in other places where Lauren and I have been have truly proven worthy of the name of Christ in their generosity and in their concern for us. In fact, this pattern has been repeated throughout the entire brotherhood. We've gotten a huge number of sympathy cards from people we don't even know. Take, for instance, the church in Plant City, Florida. Neither Lauren nor I have ever been there in our lives, and yet, if we've heard from one person in that congregation, we've heard from dozens of them. Nor does any of this touch on the most important thing of all: your prayers. We've had Christians all over the country praying for us, and I know it's made a night-and-day difference. I've heard a lot about our courage and our faith and so on recently, but the truth is, if we're able to stand, it's because we're leaning on you, and that, friends, is why we have the church in the first place.
- C. Of course, all of this love points only to a greater love. From this, I've learned that **GOD IS EVERYTHING**. As Lauren and I continue to move beyond this, we only do so through the help that we have in Him. Consider, for instance, the promise of 1 Peter 5:8-10. Normally, we use 1 Peter 5:8 to talk about sin and temptation, but in context, that's not really the original point. It's talking about Satan in his role as the source of human suffering. However, as the passage says, Satan is only able to keep up the attack for a little while. Then, God's people who remain true to Him will share in His abundant comfort. That's the hope that we have.
- D. I can't imagine how different the story would be had this happened to us if we were unbelievers. Non-Christians who lose children take to drinking or drugs, start fighting with their spouses, get divorced, or just never get over it. Not so for us, because we have something more. Look at the illustration that Jesus makes in Matthew 7:24-27. The point is pretty plain. If you're a child of God, you make it through the storms. If you aren't a child of God, you don't. If there is one point that I want to make in this sermon, this is it. It's so easy for us to fall into the trap of thinking we don't need God. It's so easy for us to go through life, bopping along, thinking we've got the situation under control because we're so smart and we're so strong, and nothing bad is ever going to happen. If life was really like that, maybe we could handle ourselves. If life was really like that, maybe we wouldn't need God. But life isn't like that, and that's exactly why we do.
- E. I promise you, friends, if it hasn't happened already, sooner or later something is going to happen to you that is going to bring you to your knees, and when that happens, you're going to need God, whether you have Him or not. Having Him is going to make all the difference. Looking back, I can remember times in my life when my relationship with God wasn't what it should have been, when I didn't have Him to lean on, and I ran into some self-inflicted trials. From an objective standpoint, those trials ten years ago weren't anything half as bad as what I'm dealing with now, but I didn't have God then as I do now. As a result, I can honestly say that I suffered far more with those little trials than I am now with this big one. It took me months and months of anguish to get to the point of healing that I'm at now after just a couple of weeks. The difference is huge.
- F. And that gets us to the bottom line for Christians. The apostle Paul, who suffered more than a little bit here, sums it up in Romans 8:35-37. No matter where we are, no matter how bad things get, unless we separate ourselves from the love of Christ, Christ will never separate Himself from us. Nor will our Lord lead us to stalemate. Through Him, we won't just get through this. We won't just limp into the rest of our lives, crouching in fear of the devil's next assault. Through Him, we will see even so great an evil work out for good. Through Him, we'll make Satan sorry this ever happened. Through Him, we will be more than conquerors.

Conclusion. If you want to seek victory through Christ, it can be yours today if you claim it.