

"Where Is God When You've Been Betrayed?"

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New Testament Lesson: John 16:28-17:2

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 41:8-13

Two scientists were on a field trip in the mountains when they discovered a baby eagle in a nest on a jutting rock, just below the top of a dangerous cliff. The eaglet had been deserted, and they wanted to rescue it.

They asked the young son of their guide if they could lower him on a rope to retrieve the little bird. The boy was not at all enthusiastic about this. They offered him money, then doubled it, but still the boy refused. Finally, one of the scientists asked in despair: "Well, then, how do you propose that we save the baby eagle?"

The mountain boy replied: "I'd be glad to go down to rescue the bird for free if you'll let my dad hold the rope." Now that's trust. The boy would trust only his father, because he knew how much his father loved him – that his father would never let him down or do anything to hurt him.¹

Today we ask the question, "Where is God when we've been betrayed?" The answer has to do with trust and love, like the trust and love between a devoted parent and a faithful child.

In today's New Testament lesson, Jesus foresees betrayal by his own disciples, saying, "Do you now believe? The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone says Jesus. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me."

Jesus loved the disciples, but he trusted in God. And in doing this, Jesus shows us how to withstand any betrayal, and not only withstand it, but find a sense of peace in the midst of it. The most important thing to know in finding such peace in any situation is the *nature of Jesus, and the nature of God, and our nature, as human beings.*

Jesus says, "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father," and

¹ From <http://www.homileticonline.com>, with thanks to Jim Moore, Houston, Texas.

his disciples say, "Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech! ... By this we believe that you came from God," that Jesus came here specifically from God.

Three important things have just been made known to us here, in this exchange between Jesus and his disciples. The first thing is that Jesus is God incarnate, the full expression of **God's love** sent into the world.

The second thing we come to know is that **God is trustworthy**, raising Jesus up in the ultimate act of redemption – "I am going to the Father," says Jesus.

And the third important thing to know we know because Jesus came into the world from God. Because Jesus came from God, it means that when he was with his disciples, he was separated from God – "*My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me!*" *That's how much **we are loved.***

Jesus is God's love in the flesh. God did not abandon Jesus to the forces of this world. God is trustworthy and raised him up for us and for our salvation, showing just how much we are loved and protected.

It is because of God's love and God's trustworthiness that we can have peace in our hearts amid any betrayal. Whenever this world stands opposed to God's loving and trustworthy nature, that's when we experience betrayal.

To feel betrayed is to be separated from God, either through our own actions or when we buy into the misguided actions of others. And usually, it's a mixture of both. Usually there's enough blame to go around when we find ourselves wondering why on earth we feel so alone, so distant from God, so betrayed by the world.

I know you know what I'm talking about here. Betrayal is all around us. Who here makes enough money – either now or before you retired? No doubt there are a few who can't complain. But most people get squeezed for all they've got by their employer, by the household bills, by that unexpected expense that's just too huge and too frequent. Betrayed by the world as it is.

And then there's betrayal in our closest relationships – at home, or at work, or at school. Somebody disrespects you or lets you down, and you feel betrayed. Often we get over it in time, but not always.

Betrayal is just a part of the world we live in. It shouldn't be, but that's how things stand right now, – no one can escape it.

But everyone can overcome it, when we understand the true nature of God in any situation.

A mother trying to calm her frightened child said, "Don't be afraid of the dark, honey. God is with you." To which the child replied, "But I need somebody with skin on."²

Actually, we don't want a god with skin on, unless that god is Jesus Christ. And he's only here in Spirit not in the flesh, at it stands now.

The way we overcome being betrayed – again either by our own sinful nature or by the actions of others – is through the power of the Holy Spirit. And the only way for us to tap into that power is by trusting in God, and in God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

After revealing his divine nature to the disciples, Jesus tells them, "I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage says Jesus I have conquered the world!" Jesus says it plainly, the world will betray you. Count on it. But count even more on God and on God's Son, who suffered the ultimate betrayal – death on the cross at the hands of those he loved more than life itself. Jesus suffered this betrayal AND with God overcame it.

And not just once and only for himself, but again and again, one eternal act of redemption for the sake of all creation. And that includes you – and me. In this exchange between Jesus and his disciples where he reveals his divine nature and foresees the world's ultimate betrayal – in this moment, Jesus gives us the power to come back from any adversity, any betrayal. And that power is gained **through trust**. Even more than love.

"In America, we love fairly easily," says physician and author Abraham Verghese.³ "But to trust someone is almost ... a higher goal than to simply love someone. ... I suspect," says Verghese, "that the most complete form of love is also to trust someone and risk all the pain that might ensue from having not just loved, but also trusted them, bared oneself to them." Jesus loved the disciples, but he trusted in God, and in trusting God, he overcame the world.

²Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, *Twelve Christian "Beliefs" that Can Drive You Crazy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 196.

³Abraham Verghese, "The conversation," *Joe*, vol. 1, number 1, 1999, 40.

If we put our trust in the actions of others or ourselves, we suffer. But if we put our trust in the Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ, we gain the power to overcome the fallen nature of our world.

The next time you feel betrayed, know that it is only the world that has failed you, not God. Take heart; be at peace in that knowledge, the knowledge and love of God, and of God's only son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Jesus has and does conquer the fallen nature of this world, and in that we can and do glimpse the divine nature of God, even now, even today, even with your own eyes, in your own heart of hearts.

Even when the world has betrayed you, there – in the ever-present redemptive act of Jesus Christ – there is God, ready to raise you up, if we but trust in God Almighty. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

O God, when our weariness seems to overtake us, renew us with your strength. Remind us that, in our weakness, your power is made perfect.

Allow us to receive your strength, not to fight to find our own.

We pray for the people of Baltimore, that your peace would win the day amid all this turmoil.

We pray your protection and provision upon the people of Nepal, even as we seek to send what assistance we can for a country devastated by earthquake.

We pray for our own country, Lord, that you would guide our leaders in serving as you would have them serve.

And we are thankful, Lord, that you have not left us all alone, and that you only ask that we seek you and trust in you. Help us to do just that. You alone are our strength.

We pray all this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who calls us to lift our voices to you in prayer, as you taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive
our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**