

Trouble in the Fishbowl

by Greta Brokaw



I don't pretend to know the mind of God - His ways are much higher than mine - but I do know the heart of God. And I know that He does not randomly or carelessly allow trouble in our lives. It has a purpose, it's part of a plan, and for those of us who know Him, it has a glorious end.

The world is watching. Don't ever forget it. When you and I think that we're all alone in our dark little hole with our personal trials and tribulations, I guarantee you that every individual who's ever heard you praise the name of Jesus, hum a hymn, or talk about Sunday church is watching your every move. Christianity is (and should be) a fishbowl, where the outside world watches intently to see if our actions, and more importantly, our reactions match up with the words that come so easy, when life is easy.

There was never a bigger fishbowl than Calvary. While the world watched, Jesus endured the ultimate trial to pay the penalty for man's sin. And even in the midst of unimaginable suffering, Jesus showed us what the world should see when you and I are in the fishbowl of affliction.

1. They should see your God in your trouble. (Matthew 27:50-54) Upon witnessing the death of Jesus on the cross, the Roman centurion walked away with no doubt in His mind that Jesus was the Son of God. When people see you going through a trial, is it clear to them that you're a child of God, trusting in Him alone, and drawing on His wisdom, strength, and comfort? Or are you just another poor, drowning soul, desperately trying to tread water on your own strength? Now don't get me wrong, you can cry your tears and have your fears, and by all means, feel free to acknowledge your own helplessness - pretending to be Super Woman only takes glory away from God. There's nothing wrong with letting trouble bring you to your knees, as long as you're on your knees before the Sovereign Lord.

2. They should see your compassion in your trouble. (John 19:25-27) It's easy to be so overwhelmed by our own grief and pain, that we lose sight of those around us. But as painful as our situation may be to us, the really big problems rarely have just one victim. Real troubles frequently impact multiple people on multiple levels, and in both good times and bad, there are always hurting people all around us. In John 19, while fully immersed in His own unbearable suffering, Jesus looks beyond Himself to see the needs of His grieving mother, Mary. And from the cross, He makes arrangements for her care, charging John to take her in and provide for her. That's the love of Christ, modeled by none other than Christ Himself. Nothing puts our own problems into perspective like focusing on the needs of others.

3. They should want what you have, in spite of your trouble. (Luke 23:39-43) Jesus was hanging on the same cross and dying the same horrible death as the thief next to Him, and yet somehow, the thief saw a hope in Jesus that He wanted for himself. Through all the injustice, Jesus maintained that peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). He did not defend Himself or fight back (Isaiah 53:7). He forgave (Luke 23:34), and He focused on finishing the work that His Father had sent Him to do (John 19:30). It was enough to soften the heart of a hardened criminal, who was all too aware of his own unworthiness. And when you and I claim the peace that passes understanding in the midst of our worst storms, it can soften the hardest of hearts around us, too. No matter how awful, any problem takes on immeasurable purpose, when it leads another soul to Christ.

If you're in rough waters right now, my heart goes out to you, more than you know. But if you know Christ, then you'll know this, too - He never met a storm that He couldn't control. The wind and waves still obey Him (Matthew 8:27), His love endures forever (Jeremiah 31:3), and while the world is watching you in your little fishbowl (Matthew 5:14), He is holding that same fishbowl in the palm of His hand (Psalm 36:7, 91:4, 98:1).