

# Haiti, My Beloved

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The average person may find it difficult to remember what he or she was doing on Jan. 12, 2010, at 4:53 p.m. EST. For those who were on the island of Hispaniola in the country of Haiti, their memories remain quite vivid because of a tragedy that has left our whole world stunned and speechless. This horrific event has impacted all human beings, but for residents of Haiti and Haitians abroad, it is particularly painful. It is painful because most Haitians have this love-hate relationship with their country of origin. They hate the inefficiency of its political and social systems, but they love it too much to watch it gradually deteriorate.

I, for one, have been grieving since that fateful day because my tie with Haiti goes back to the day of my birth. Not only was I born there, but I grew up in Port-au-Prince, which has been the focus of many news reports for the past five days. The years of my childhood and adolescence provided ample opportunities for me to be well acquainted with sorrow and poverty. I was a young boy when we had to skip meals for a while because of lack of funds. I was there when the Duvalier regime ended in 1986. I lived through the long embargo of the early '90s which claimed many lives for lack of food. Yet, through it all, my mom taught me to rely on God and the truth of His Word. The following verse has been a source of great comfort to me:

Psalm 125:1, *“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.”*

Those who knew me when I was in college will tell you that I used to sing a particular song quite often. On Jan. 5, 2010, I was asked to sing something impromptu to a medical team that was visiting northern Haiti. Little did I know how prophetic the words of “His Eye Is on the Sparrow” were going to be.

*“Why should I be discouraged?  
And why should the shadows come?  
Why should my heart be lonely?  
And long for heaven and home?  
When Jesus is my portion  
My constant friend is He  
His eye is on the Sparrow  
And I know He watches me.*

*“I sing because I’m happy  
I sing because I’m free  
His eye is on the Sparrow  
And I know He watches me.”*

If I were to ask you the innocent “How’s it going?” question, what would your answer be? Experience tells me that most people are quick to say, “Good, fine, OK.” Those more refined

will probably say, “Very well, thank you.” There is one response that I have been training myself to use, and it comes from preacher and writer C.J. Mahaney in his book, “The Cross-Centered Life.” It is this: “I’m doing much better than I deserve.”

I will spare you the controversies that result from my use of said response, but let me tell you why I choose it. It provides a clear and accurate picture of me. In public you see this body, you hear this singing voice, you are aware of my credentials, you see my relationship with my spouse and daughters, you hear of my involvement with short-term missions. Those closest to me may tell you of my rigorous schedule and the discipline with which I attack it daily. They may tell you that I cook, that I spend time with my family, that I read my Bible regularly, that I like to pray, and, on the other hand, they may certainly tell you where my faults lie, especially where, when and how I’ve let them down through the months and years we’ve spent together.

However, there is one person who can depict a vivid portrait of me and, I assure you, you will not like what you see. You’ll see that I am a sinner of the worst kind and that I deserve death. You will find that I battle with irritability, impatience, ingratitude, entitlement, pride and idolatry. Each one of those sins crucifies the Lord Jesus anew, and the punishment that I deserve, according to the Holy Scriptures, is God’s wrath or hell. Thanks be to God who, through the blood of Jesus, took my spiritual bankruptcy and replaced it with an inheritance of gargantuan proportions. He gave me the power to become His child, a joint heir with Christ in the kingdom of light, a forgiven and loved man, a servant with a new purpose of living.

My response to such an amazing gift is inexpressible joy and overflowing gratitude because this treatment is certainly much better than I deserve. When life seems rosy, I am grateful and happy; but what about when I face heartaches, disappointments, disaster, horror and difficult circumstances? If you are like me, your tendency will be to choose forgetfulness which leads to ingratitude, self-pity and ultimately grumbling. God takes such actions very seriously as seen in Numbers 11:1, “The people of Israel complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when He heard them His anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.” See, the path of forgetfulness is the highway of disobedience which leads to death. God had specifically warned the Israelites through Moses to be careful to remember.

Deuteronomy 5:15, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”

Deuteronomy 8:19 reads, “If you forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.”

Sadly though, Psalm 106:21 reveals that “they forgot the God who saved them who had done great things for them in Egypt.”

Friends, when the apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God to write in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!,” it was God’s way of telling us that we ought to choose joy and gratitude at every single moment of our lives, whether fun or dreary,

good or bad, easy or difficult, because according to Psalm 126:3, “The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy.”

Sometimes we can't see anything that's good in our lives. When that happens, we must pray like the apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:18, “That the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which he has called us.” What – or rather, Who – is that hope? Christ, the Holy and True One, the Alpha and Omega, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the One who died and came to life again, the Amen. He is our hope. I don't know about you, but that revelation made me realize that I'd better remember who Christ is in the midst of trials; a timely revelation as I was about to witness Haiti's greatest trial to date.

On Tuesday, Jan. 12, shortly before 5 p.m. EST, I was in northern Haiti when a deafening 7 magnitude earthquake shocked the whole country followed by a long series of aftershocks many of which were on a scale of 5.1 and higher. You are no strangers to the news thanks to around-the-clock coverage by CNN and other means of communication. Our church has been particularly in tune with this horrifying carnage because of its connections with Haiti through the North Haiti Music Camp. Johnny and Greg Cullison were there the week before it happened, and my family and I were to leave Haiti two days later. On the internet and TV, you have seen countless images depicting intense pain, highlighting severe losses, and intense suffering.

It is doubly hard to take when one thinks that Haiti was already at rock bottom before it all began. That morning missionaries and pastors rolled up their sleeves to minister to the numerous needs facing them, women got up very early carrying baskets full of produce to sell at outdoor public markets, some fortunate young children went to school while others roamed the streets begging for “1 dolla,” drivers loaded their little tap-taps with too many passengers, others lined the streets leading to the American Consulate to seek a better life in the U.S., and still others went hungry, all the while hoping and trusting that the Lord would provide for them.

Despite the wonderful 20-20 focus of hindsight generously provided by scientists, no one could have suspected that Haiti was going to sink further down into misery. Nonetheless, Port-au-Prince and its surrounding towns have been flattened, looking like plates of partially eaten pancakes at an IHOP or Denny's. A nation that was already at the bottom of the Western Hemisphere's economic ladder has been trampled underfoot. Yet, instead of the barrage of such questions as, “Why Haiti? Why do bad things happen? Where is God? Is there a God? How will Haiti ever recover?” we have been instructed to “be joyful always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

You say, “What?” and I say, “I know.” A terrible tragedy just happened, and we're supposed to be joyful, prayerful and grateful? I wish I could say that God's Word had provided a list of exceptions like the Civil War, the sinking of the Titanic, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and JFK, the wars that killed innocent people, the Jewish Holocaust, Vietnam, 9-11 and Hurricane Katrina. If no such provision was made, perhaps emotional turmoil might be a consideration when dealing with the death of a child or a parent, a disgruntled boss, a rebellious

youth, a nagging woman, a stubborn guy, a scandal, marital unfaithfulness, embezzlement, bankruptcy, a load of debt, a dwindling 401k, cancer, and the list goes on and on.

The truth is we have been taught to think that we deserve better. Better life, better circumstances, better food, better health, better family, better country, better everything. And so, when a tragedy hits, we are left thinking of what went wrong. This attitude reflects the arrogance that we know better than God what we deserve.

I have yet to hear of a tragedy that was not swift, heart-wrenching and mind-boggling. It is usually a very large hit for all those concerned and, whether people like it or not, the whole world is affected. Why, you ask? It is because ever since Adam and Eve were thrown out of Eden, human beings have barely changed. We all must work for food, find shelter, take care of our family, and desire security (meaning we fear death). When something comes our way and disturbs any one of those wants, we feel infringed upon and our spirit goes into what I call agita mode. There is no peace, no comfort, no hope, and no stability. Job says it best in Chapter 3:29, "I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

So it is normal for a human being to mourn in the wake of a catastrophe. After Job was hit hard, he tore his robe and mourned for his dead children. However, in his mourning, Job kept a healthy perspective on his position in life. He realized that all he ever had belonged to God anyway and so he chose to worship God in Job 1:21, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

You see, Haiti has seen its share of destruction. Today, as I speak, there are dead bodies peppered all over the place while throngs of desolate and desperate people are going past them in search of much-needed water, food, shelter and loved ones. The earthquake was not particularly choosy, counting among its victims fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, teachers, mentors, Haitians, Americans, Brazilians, French, Canadians and many more. I am connected to it, you are too because you are alive and a human being.

Your knowledge of this situation is evidence that the faces and stories of those immediately affected have caused us to join in the mourning of this significant Haitian holocaust. We mourn for every family lost and/or torn apart. I mourn over my cousin, Obicson, who went to work on Tuesday and minutes before his work day was over, he went missing, his wife has lost both of her legs, and their four children have been taken to a boarding house. My Facebook status update on Tuesday told the world that I was in painful tears for the crumbling of my hometown and the death of my people. Your words of encouragement showed that you, too, shed tears whether visible or not. We mourn together and we weep for Haiti.

We will not mourn as those who don't know Christ, however. We have a Savior who promised to comfort us in Matthew 5:4. We have a Lord who will turn our mourning into dancing again, and One who will lift up our sorrow. We have a Messiah who came to seek and save the lost. We have a Redeemer and Friend who is very familiar with pain and trials and who has overcome death and the grave. We have a God who holds the key of David. "He is the Lord, the Everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the

weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope and wait in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31).

So our mourning will be like that of Jesus over his friend Lazarus. We must cry out to God and watch God’s miraculous hand perform wonders before our very eyes. He will restore us and the people of Haiti as we call on His name. When we reach the point of complete depletion, when it feels like we are hitting a wall, the Lord kindly brings us to place of restoration.

Throughout this painful week, Psalm 80 has been a source of real comfort to me. There is a refrain from that Psalm which is repeated three times. It is found in Psalm 80:3, 7, 19, “Restore us, O God, make your face shine upon us that we may be saved.” I’d like to suggest that each one of us needs to be restored by God and in God on an ongoing basis and that, in itself, is a huge blessing. My beloved Haiti needs restoration and that will take place when the whole nation cries out to God in humility.

Let me share some of the thoughts that came to mind:

1) Restoration is the act of mending the rags of our lives into complete and beautiful garments of praise for the glory of our Lord. Rags present themselves in all kinds of shapes and sizes (besetting sins, self-righteous acts and huge mishaps), but ultimately the Lord uses them in His bigger plan to restore us into a powerful witness of His grace.

2) Restoration is the process whereby God shines His light and the fullness of His dazzling brilliance onto the deepest pockets of darkness in our lives.

3) Restoration is the act of God revealing to us the hope of glory and the mystery of Christ: He came to seek and save disobedient souls through the sanctifying work of His blood on the Cross.

4) Restoration is the necessity for us to recognize our destitution, confess our sins which wage war with God, repent from the foolishness of our ways, embrace the solid faith that purifies, and proclaim to the world God’s plan for salvation.

Once restoration happens, “then we will not turn away from you, [O God]; revive us and we will call on your name” (Psalm 80:18). So, restoration is the hand of God moving (giving us Jesus Christ). From Christ, spiritual blessings flow into us giving us a desire for Him. Desiring God is the place that keeps us steadfast in His love, away from worthless idols (Jonah 2:8). Once God handpicks us, chooses us, we can call on His name and clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col. 3:12).

It is this restoration that will give us the strength to help those in need in Haiti. There are numerous charities that help channel funds into Haiti from around the globe, and if you feel led to contribute, I know God will bless your efforts. People are in need of water, food, shelter, security. They have been severely damaged emotionally, physically, financially and spiritually. Kids have become orphans and parents have become childless. The new daily grind involves coping with the stench of decomposing bodies, the desperate search for loved ones, the agonizing

wait for aid, the fear of looters, the despairing cries of a hungry and thirsty child, and the pervading chaos of the entire southern part of Haiti. Immediate help is necessary and welcome.

However, I must say that such an approach is not complete. Haiti can only survive if a solid investment is made in its foundation. Because of my involvement with the North Haiti Music Camp and Universite Chrestinne du Nord d'Haiti (Northern Haiti Christian University), I must tell you that what God has placed on my heart is a strong desire to see transformation in Haiti. Transformation happens with the formation of future leaders and workers based on the truth of divine information. The crumbling of what was in Haiti offers hope for a new dawn but that can only happen through Christ-centered education which will provide the right foundation for the rebuilding process.

Hosea 4:6 declares that "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," and I have witnessed the truth of that verse in Haiti. The people of Haiti are desperately in need of God and, in His providence, God left us His Word to guide us there. Psalm 119:9-16 talks about the necessity to know God's Word, to meditate on it, to memorize it and to apply its truth in our daily walk. Once we know God's Word, it becomes a real part of us guiding our thought process, values and behavior. It is the gateway to a life of purity as we will seek to please and love God by obeying His commands.

Furthermore, the people of Haiti need practical knowledge in order for sound teaching to bear fruit. We need people, Haitians or otherwise, who will commit to train blue collar and white collar workers for a long time. We need volunteers who will teach musicians, pastors, doctors, accountants, and architects. We are desperate for people who will demonstrate the importance of good gardeners, custodians, plumbers, as well as politicians and government officials. Such change does not happen overnight; it takes love, courage, will and perseverance.

I stand before you now because godly men and women invested time, money and energy in feeding me God's Word and training me in other areas according to biblical principles. While the provision of food and blood is really important now, we want to be sure that we will contribute to the propagation of the life-giving message of the Gospel. That is why we are partnering with Haiti Hope Fund to help fund Christian education programs, seminaries, schools and scholarships for those who have been severely hit by the earthquake. When current relief agents are long gone, we want to be sure that there will be Christ-followers digging deeply to secure the firm foundation of Jesus in a dark land like Haiti. Won't you join me in contributing toward that end? As we pray, give, love and share the needs of Haiti, we, too, will be restored.

I still cry, but I know deep in my heart that I have been blessed beyond measure since this period of suffering will produce a much stronger character in me and in you if we choose to believe. I will pray that God will restore all of us both physically and spiritually for His glory. And I will pray that the divine restoration of my beloved Haiti will cause it to regain its former title, "the pearl of the Caribbean Islands."

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