

THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL TODAY

February 27, 2016

Chris Katulka, God is Greater Than Life

Today I want to turn your attention to a phrase that has redefined the way I see the world as a Christian and view God in the midst of pain and suffering. It's a phrase that I repeat often, over and over, to remind me of who I am, and who God is!

Tragedy, and the suffering and pain that come with it, is never far away. It's something that can build over time, OR it can strike suddenly, changing your life within a few moments. The truth is none of us are exempt from pain and hurt. It happens to the political elite, and it happens to the retiree, it happens to the rich, and it happens to the poor. We all suffer.

Suffering and tragedy have the ability of either pulling us closer to God or shoving us away from God. I recently read an article where the author was talking about the terrible loss of his baby and in the article this once devout Christian lost sight of who God is in His suffering, he writes, "As time passed, however, my faith weakened. I lost the feeling of God's presence and the impetus to pray, and perhaps as a consequence, the ideas I had of God began to make less and less sense to me. I lost clarity of what I believed, finally confessing to my wife late one evening that I couldn't honestly say

whether or not I still believed in God. This was not a confession that brought us peace.”

He goes on to say that he hasn't become an atheist, but agnosticism or skepticism about what he believed and whether or not he believed in it.

Now, I'm not speaking to you as someone who is waiting to experience a tragedy like the author above did. A little more than four years ago on what seemed like a regular day I received a phone call that has changed my life to this very day...I found out my father, who was only 56, died suddenly. The day before he was with my family, and then the next day, without any goodbye or I love you, he was gone.

Through this time of processing the loss of my dad I came up with a phrase that changed the way that I see God in the midst of suffering and pain. The phrase is this... and it's really easy to remember:

God Is Greater Than Life!

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You know for many of us God is greater than our jobs, God is greater than our finances, God is greater than our homes, or even

our own health... but don't touch my family! Don't touch my kids. When tragedy breaks, it's way past those boundaries we've set up. For many it seems like the very existence of God is questionable.

But if God is really who He says He is from the Bible... Isn't He greater than life itself?

Now hear me out. I'm not saying that this kind of tragedy should leave us rejoicing. The loss of life should bring us to our knees. It's full of pain and loss and what might seem like emptiness.

I am reminded of a passage in Leviticus—that's right—Leviticus. There aren't many stories in Leviticus. But this one struck me.

The story is of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the high priest. They were doing their priestly duties, and they didn't take them seriously and they offered the wrong kind of offering to the Lord and God... and as a result of their misuse of the offering God struck them down. God consumed the lives of Nadab and Abihu for offering a "strange fire"

Listen to what the text says, "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the Lord and

consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord has said: Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all people I will be glorified.” And Aaron held his peace.”

Now typically we can read right over this text... but let's put ourselves in Aaron's shoes. Aaron... a father... just lost two sons... whether or not Aaron's sons offered an improper offering... Aaron's world was just shaken to the core when his two sons died.

When Moses approaches Aaron after this and Moses says to Aaron, “This is what the Lord has said: Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all people I will be glorified.” Ultimately, Moses is saying, for those who come near to God it must be remembered God's glory, majesty, and exaltation is greater than life itself... no matter what happens God is Greater Than Life!

It's Aaron's response to Moses that changed the way I thought about how to understand God when pain and tragedy surround me... It says in Leviticus 10:3, “And Aaron held his peace.” You might think of all people to say... Ok, Moses! I'm out of here... I didn't sign up for this... here's my high priestly robe and crown... find someone new. Forget God, I didn't ask for this.

The text says... “Aaron held his peace.” Aaron, the High Priest of Israel in the face of his pain agreed with Moses words... God is Greater Than Life. God’s Mission is Greater Than Life. God’s Purposes are Greater than Life.

This phrase doesn’t eliminate the pain at all... I still miss my father. I’m sure Aaron was heartbroken at the loss of his sons for the rest of his life... But, knowing that God is Greater than life helps to put any tragedy, pain, suffering, and loss we are dealing with into a spiritual perspective.

Jesus knew this the most... He didn’t want to die, He prayed against it... but He knew God is Greater Than Life... He knew the Father’s Plan was Greater than His very own life. So Jesus laid down His life, so that we might gain life... and as a result God exalted Him for His obedience.

So I want to challenge you to start living with this phrase engrained in your mind: God Is Greater Than Life. When God is greater than life itself it frees you in those times of pain and tragedy.