

# *“The Sighs and Groans of God”*

Mark 7:31-37  
Romans 8:18-27

November 14, 2010

Sermon preached by  
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Okay, so maybe it's happened to you before...I don't know. But this past week, I came across a word in the Bible that I hadn't noticed before. Now, that's not to say that I know every word in the Bible! I don't! There are, to be sure, LOTS of words in the Bible I haven't noticed before! But this one was strange because I've studied this passage before. I'm familiar with this passage. I've even preached a sermon on this passage before. But I'd never noticed a particular word in the passage that seemed to almost leap up off the page and smack me upside the head as if to say: *“Hey! Look at me!”* And when I DID look at the word, it seemed to grab my attention and wouldn't let me go.

Problem is, however, I just don't know what to DO with the word. It's not a big word mind you. But it's sort of like a speed bump that you don't know is there until you run over it going too fast. ***Ka-thud!*** *“What was THAT?”* I thought to myself. And when I went back to see what it was that I had run over, that's when I really NOTICED this word for the first time. But I still didn't know what to do with it. So I just let it sit for a few days in order to see whether it might go away...and if it DIDN'T go away, whether it might make any more sense to me than it did when I FIRST read it.

Well, it DIDN'T go away. Like I said, it grabbed my attention and simply WOULDN'T let me go. But after contemplating it for a couple of days, I think I've begun to get a handle on just what it might mean. It think I've begun to understand what it could be saying to us this morning. But I've got to WARN you: it's a word you don't want to hear unless you're willing to change your mind a little. This seemingly insignificant little word may just move your spiritual furniture around a bit.

Let me share the passage of scripture in question with you. It comes to us from the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Mark's Gospel, the 31-37 verses. Listen for the Word of God:

Mark 7:31-37

Now, I don't know about you, but as far as I'm concerned, that's quite a passage! Jesus is presented with a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. Perhaps he stammered. Maybe he spoke with a terrible lisp. Perhaps, because of his deafness, he never learned to speak properly and talked like that deaf Miss America from a number of years ago, Heather Whitehead. Whatever it was, he simply WASN'T the way he was SUPPOSED to be. He was not what God had CREATED him to be.

Jesus, however, refused to exploit the situation. There would be no GRAND HEALING in front of crowds of people! Instead, Jesus took the man aside, away from the crowds, stuck his fingers in the man's ears...spat, and touched the man's tongue. And if that wasn't strange enough, then Jesus did something I would have never, in a million years, expected him to do. He looked up to heaven...that I would have expected Jesus to do...but then he let out a deep SIGH. Or as another translation puts it, Jesus **GROANED!**

Now, I might have expected Jesus to clap his hands...or to say a prayer...or maybe even to shout *“Hallelujah!”* or *“Praise the Lord!”* But Jesus did none of that. Instead, he paused, looked up toward heaven and **GROANED**. From the depths of his being came a rush of emotion that said far more than words could EVER say. He **GROANED**.

And yet, the word seems strange...perplexing...out of place – especially for Jesus, the Christ...the Son of God...the Lord of both Heaven and earth. Oh, I know the scripture tells us Jesus wept when his

friend Lazarus died. And I know he called forth Lazarus from the tomb. And I know he was part of creating the universe with his Word which was in the beginning with God and WAS God. But a Lord who GROANS? A God who SIGHS? It simply WASN'T what I was expecting. And that, I think, is the reason it caught my attention in the first place and wouldn't let me go.

But then, maybe it caught my attention because I do MY share of sighing and groaning as well. Don't you?

I SIGHED this week when I visited an elderly woman in the nursing home and she failed to recognize me...thought I was the doctor...and why couldn't I do something to help her die, she asked me. She was tired of living...tired of fighting...tired of being fed through a tube inserted in her stomach. She just wanted to go "home" and be with the Lord.

I SIGHED when I read the tragic, front page story in the Examiner this week about the young 17 year old boy who will spend the next four years in prison, and no doubt the rest of his life, paying for the terrible accident that killed his best friend and severely injured three other young men as well, all because of the careless, youthful, disastrous mistake of recklessly driving too fast on a snowy, ice-covered road.

I GROANED when I heard about the heartbreaking tree-cutting accident that took the life of Nathan Thompson and thought about the devastating loss his wife and daughters and parents and brothers and sisters and in-laws and a whole host of other people who knew and loved him are experiencing because of his tragic death.

I SIGHED as I sat in my office this week and listened to a husband tell me how his wife refuses to forgive him for his "stupid indiscretions" as he calls them.

I SIGHED as I listened to a daughter tell me about her estrangement from her father and how she could never forgive him for the awful, terrible things he has done to her in the past.

I SIGHED as I listened to a mother cry about her son, who no matter WHAT she does, simply cannot stay out of trouble with alcohol and drugs and the law.

I GROANED when I watched the news and saw how tragedy is being compounded upon tragedy in Haiti as a cholera epidemic is sweeping across that nation and its people who have already been so severely devastated by last January's massive earthquakes.

Oh, I GROAN alright...and if my hunch is right, you do your sharing of GROANING as well.

If you're concerned about what's happening in the world, you GROAN.

If you have children, no matter HOW old they may be, you've probably SIGHED.

If you've ever had to face the reality of a serious illness or accident in your life...or in the life of someone you love...you've probably SIGHED, as well.

If you've ever had someone betray you...or forsake you...or stab you in the back, no doubt you've GROANED.

If you've ever tried to resist temptation...or fallen to temptation...you've probably GROANED.

If you've ever had your back to the wall with the hounds of life snarling at your feet, you too have probably turned your face toward the heavens and GROANED.

Oh, I realize there exists in life a sigh of relief...a sigh of expectancy...even a sigh of joy. But that isn't the sigh that's described in this story from Mark's gospel this morning. The groan that Jesus groans is a groan of frustration and sadness that lies somewhere between a fit of anger and a burst of tears.

The Apostle Paul also spoke of this groaning. Twice he said that Christ's followers will GROAN as long as we are on earth and long for heaven. Creation *itself* GROANS as with the pains of giving birth...as if it is giving birth to something which has not yet happened...something which is YET to come. And even the Holy Spirit SIGHS and GROANS on our behalf, the scriptures tell us, as the Spirit prays for us "*in sighs too deeps for words*"... "*in groans that human languages cannot express.*"

All of these sighs and groans come, I think, from the recognition that this is NOT how things are supposed to be. Human beings are not MEANT to be separated from their creator. Therefore we GROAN, longing for the time when we are, once again, AS ONE with God. God's good creation was never INTENDED to be inhabited by evil...by sinfulness. And so, all creation GROANS, eager for the restoration of things as God intended them to be. Our conversations with God were never SUPPOSED to depend on a translator...on someone having to make intercession FOR us. Therefore, the Spirit GROANS on our behalf, looking to the day when we shall see God face to face...for now we only see in a mirror dimly.

And when Jesus looked into the face of the deaf man, realizing that this was NOT the way God created this man to be, the only appropriate thing for him to do was to SIGH...to GROAN. "*It shouldn't BE*

*this way,*” his groan said. *“Your ears weren’t MEANT to be deaf. Your tongues wasn’t MEANT to stumble.”* People aren’t MEANT to have to be fed through tubes inserted directly into their stomachs. Young men aren’t SUPPOSED to cause tragic accidents that kill their best friends. Trees are SUPPOSED to fall on a father while his young daughters watch in horror. Husbands aren’t SUPPOSED to betray their wives. Fathers are SUPPOSED to abuse their daughters. Sixteen year old kids aren’t SUPPOSED to get mixed up with alcohol and drugs. Entire nations and millions of people aren’t SUPPOSED to suffer the devastating consequences of an earthquake and a hurricane simply because they happen to live in the wrong place at the wrong time. And none of us...NONE of us are supposed to face the terrors of some terrible disease that saps the life out of us...the life that God gave to us as a blessing...and a joy...and a hope...and a promise. God never MEANT it to be that way. That’s NOT how God created the world to be. Jesus KNEW that. And the *imbalance* of it all...the *injustice* of it all...the *not-supposed-to-BE-that-wayness* of it all caused Jesus...and causes US to GROAN.

Plain and simple, life is NOT YET what God intended it to be. And so we groan...and Jesus groans...and the Spirit groans...and even God, I’m convinced, groans...longing for that time when we and all of creation along with us...when both heaven and earth and all that is therein...are restored to what God intended. When that time will come, we don’t yet know, Jesus tells us. NO ONE knows...only the Father who is in heaven. And so we CONTINUE to sigh...and GROAN...and all creation along with us.

And yet, as strange as it may sound, OUR groaning...and JESUS’ groaning...and the HOLY SPIRIT’S groaning...and even and especially GOD’S groaning are nothing less than a sign of HOPE for the lives we live in this time UNTIL God brings about what God fully intends. For you see, in Jesus’ anguish over the way things ARE, rather than how they SHOULD be...in Jesus’ GROANING over the unfairness of life...in Jesus’ very SIGHS and GROANS...there is, good friends, HOPE – HOPE because, had Jesus NOT groaned...had he NOT felt the burden of what was SUPPOSED to be but not yet is...had he NOT seen and known and experienced the injustice and the unfairness of all that causes God’s people...INCLUDING US...to suffer and hurt and be deprived of life as God intends for us to know it, we would be in a far MORE pitiful condition than we are even now. For we would have NO HOPE. Had Jesus simply chalked it all up to the inevitable and washed his hands of the whole stinking “*mell of a hess*” that the world has become, what HOPE would be have then?

But Jesus DIDN’T simply wash his hands of the whole stinking mess. Oh no! Not by a long shot! The very GROANS of Jesus...which are nothing less than the SIGHS and GROANS of God...ASSURE us that God, through Jesus, still CARES about God’s people...about US...and about our world...and about life...and about all creation around us. God GROANS for the day when ALL sighing will cease...when what was INTENDED to be will finally be. Listen to how the Prophet John, the writer of Revelation, describes that grand and glorious day when God’s ultimate will for all creation shall finally be revealed:

For then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her groom. And I heard a loud voice from the throne proclaiming for all to hear, *“Behold, the dwelling of God is now with God’s people. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more...neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for those former things have all passed away!”*

Revelation 21:1-4

That day, of course, is yet to be. But it shall ONE DAY come! When? We don’t know. Only God knows!

In the meantime, what we CAN know...what we can KNOW...beyond a shadow of a doubt...that we have a SAVIOR, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is WITH US ALWAYS, it is true...but who ALSO sits on the right hand of God...SIGHING and GROANING on our behalf. And that, good friends and beloved of the Lord, is the comfort...and hope...and promise...and strength we need for the living of our days UNTIL that new heaven and new earth shall FINALLY be ours!

May God give us strength and courage enough for the wait...faith and hope enough for the promise!  
To God be the glory, this day and always!  
Amen...and AMEN!

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