

BOOK REVIEWS

INHERITANCE OF TEARS: TRUSTING THE LORD OF LIFE WHEN DEATH VISITS THE WOMB, by Jessalyn Hutto. Minneapolis, MN: Cruciform Press, 2015, 104 pp., \$9.99.

Is miscarriage a subject that falls within the province of the social sciences? Insofar as 15 to 25 percent of all pregnancies end in miscarriage (Hand, 2013; NIH, 2013), the impact of this collective tragedy on society is immense. Yet, as the writer of *Inheritance of Tears* points out, the painful grief, suffering, and loss of couples who experience miscarriage is often borne in silence, with no one coming alongside. How are Christians to understand and respond to miscarriage, and how are Christians to minister to a world of people suffering the same? These are questions for which Christians need answers, yes, but also to which Christian social scientists should incline.

Jessalyn Hutto, who –with her husband– has experienced two miscarriages, writes from a place of deep sensitivity and insight. As she herself has gone through and reflected upon miscarriage, she has become “increasingly convinced that the church desperately needs a solid theological framework with which to make sense of this suffering” (p. 12). In this wee volume of five chapters and roughly one hundred pages, Hutto succeeds eminently well. By the way, Cruciform Press did a fine job of designing and producing this attractive, sturdy book.

The first chapter, sharing the book’s title, is “Inheritance of Tears.” This phrase comes from a Susannah Spurgeon quotation, which makes reference to “the painful effects of sin that each member of the human race will suffer” (p. 21). In other words, miscarriage must be understood as a result of the Fall. As with other grievous tragedies, miscarriage is part and parcel of this sin-warped, groaning creation.

In the second chapter, entitled “The Good but Difficult Plans of God,” Hutto explains the comforting reality of God’s sovereignty over this suffering sphere. Regardless of how horrible the situation surrounding miscarriage (or any other trial), powerfully comforting perspective is available to sufferers through an appreciation of God’s attributes and purposes. Without sliding into glib platitudes, Hutto persistently orients sufferers through her gentle but poignant prose:

In order to trust God when his will is difficult to accept, we must know who he is.

To rest in his difficult providences, we must have confidence in his character...

Trusting God’s character when you cannot understand his purposes is pivotal to accepting a difficult providence like miscarriage. (p. 44, 47)

Peering into a situation from such a vantage point may not constitute a healing panacea, but it is foundational to the life of faith in the face of trials.

“The Good Shepherd” is the title of the third chapter. Here the focus is on the Savior’s ability to identify with and aid ones who are suffering because of miscarriage. Hutto unpacks three specific ways that Jesus is able to relate to and comfort in the midst of the suffering that surrounds a miscarriage. He understands 1) loneliness and isolation, 2) fear and anxiety, and 3) intimate loss. Toward the end of the chapter, Hutto’s explanation is trenchant:

...our suffering **with** Christ makes us more **like** Christ as we behold him with greater clarity. This is the fountain from which all sanctification flows, and suffering is perfectly suited to drive us to the Good Shepherd who so lovingly suffered on behalf of his lost sheep. (p. 65)

Truly, he can bear the burdens of sufferers because of what he himself has borne.

In the fourth chapter, “Hard Frosts and Spring Flowers,” Hutto –with deep but practical theological acumen– parses the providence of God. In short, she explains five powerful ways that the Spirit of God can use the painful experience of miscarriage: for salvation, for communion, for fellowship, for testimony, and for perspective. In fact, she encourages sufferers thus: “...ask our good and loving heavenly Father to use this dark time for your spiritual good. This sorrow isn’t without purpose” (p. 82).

The final chapter, “The Coming Glory,” focuses the affections of the reader-sufferers on how their trial fits into God’s glorious plan of redemption and restoration. Hutto’s perspective is gloriously, gracefully burden-lifting:

Miscarriage is part of the narrative of God’s people; it is part of God’s **gospel story**. This means that we’re all part of something much bigger than ourselves. The times of sadness we face place us right in the middle of the bigger story of God’s people. Thankfully, though, suffering is not how the gospel story ends. Suffering may be our current reality, but it is not our future reality. (p. 87)

Her explanations never minimize the painfulness of miscarriage, but they do maximize the glory of the gospel *and* the author and perfecter of our faith, King Jesus.

Some of my favorite parts of the book are the prayers for suffering mothers (and truly fathers, too!) that follow each chapter. Often the prayers I find in Christian books seem disingenuous, lifeless, or clinical, but Hutto’s prayers –rooted in her own painful experience and informed by her profound reflection– are rich in empathy and encouragement.

Early in the fifth chapter, Hutto repeats the purpose of her book: “to help you see the unique trial of miscarriage within the broader context of God’s redemptive plan...how miscarriage relates to the gospel” (p. 86). In this goal, Jessalyn Hutto succeeds brilliantly. Throughout this book the reader will gain perspective and comfort, and the God of all comfort will gain worship.

Inheritance of Tears fills a gap in the existing literature specifically because miscarriage is so often kept a private affair, in which the couple experiences shattered dreams and hopes, as well as the pain of separation from an already much-loved child. But Christians cannot keep silent, for we –even as our Lord did– are called to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15) and to give a reason for the hope that we have (1 Peter 3:15). Hutto’s book is full of and overflowing with the hope-filled Good News, which is sorely needed and will be much-welcomed by those suffering through miscarriage. Perhaps Christian social scientists, and specifically the readers of *JSIRS*, should play a leading role in the exploration and alleviation of this tremendous pain which is silently endured by so many. An appropriate starting point is to taste and see the goodness of the Savior through Hutto’s book, and then to share this paper-and-ink-and-heart blessing widely, repeatedly, persistently.

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