

21 Pentecost 2021

We gather in this place expecting to hear your voice, O God. We invite you to be among us and to speak. Your servants are listening; your children await your word. Amen.

Last Sunday, we explored Job's search for answers on his suffering. Why his wife, family, children, friends, livelihood, and his health, were all taken away from him?

Even while he had remained righteous before God.

I looked at a website called 'Biblical Training.org.' On it was a series of forty lectures concerning the Book of Job. The last lecture is called: Does Job Serve God for Nothing?

(BiblicalTraining.org)

That question was put to God by Satan in chapter 1, verse nine.

"Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10Have You not placed a hedge on every side around him and his household and all that he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11But stretch out Your hand and strike all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face."

A term that is used by Bible scholars is a term called Disinterested Piety. I had to look this up because I did not understand what it is. Apparently, it is the idea that when one does what is right or one serves God, it should be done for its own sake, or it is not real. For example, if the only reason you help a person is because you expect that person to help you in return, then is that really virtuous?

Source: <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Giving-Without-Expecting-Return>

Jesus supports this in Luke 6:34-35: "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount."

But how realistic is this? We are human after all. We have needs and concerns. Are we able to serve God strictly for the sake of serving Him and expecting nothing from God in return?

in Matthew 19:29 Jesus says: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my name’s sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” Jesus is saying that if we put God above everything else in our lives, whether it be family jobs, property, even mother and father, there is a great reward awaiting us. So, does Jesus expect our service to Him to be disinterested? Maybe, but there is definitely a reward waiting for us.

So, what can we say in answer to Satan’s question? Does Job fear God for nothing? Is Job secure in his faith because God is surrounding him with many blessings? That was what Satan was proposing. In that sense, Job’s love for God is not disinterested, **but it is real.** And the reality of Job’s love for God, is in the perseverance of his faithfulness to God, despite the trials that he now faced. I hope that it makes some sense to you.

The author concludes his lecture by saying that; “it is not that you fear God for nothing, but it is that your fear of God, your discipleship, your obedience, your love for God is valid because it endures, and it endures even in the face of terrible suffering.”

Let’s face it. When tragedy strikes, whether it be the death of a loved one, a serious illness or injury, loss of a job, or loss of one’s home, it is not unusual to doubt if God really cares.

Even Job starts to wonder if God cares about him, and longs to talk to God about it.

“How I long for the months gone by,

for the days when God watched over me,

3 when his lamp shone on my head

and by his light I walked through darkness!

4 Oh, for the days when I was in my prime,

when God's intimate friendship blessed my house,

5 when the Almighty was still with me

and my children were around me,

when my path was drenched with cream

and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil."

His words of sadness and longing for what he perceives as missing start to turn to despair.

"I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer;

I stand up, but you merely look at me.

21 You turn on me ruthlessly;

with the might of your hand you attack me.

22 You snatch me up and drive me before the wind;

you toss me about in the storm."

I can certainly relate to this. Not because I assume any righteousness on my part, but because I too, could not see God through times of suffering.

An important part of the human narrative is about being able to see God in the presence of the storm — and know that God is there.

When I call someone who has requested spiritual care, especially after a disaster, I know that reactions will vary. Despite losing everything, people often still feel blessed by God, if for no other reason than that they are still alive. Time after time, people thank God because they know that it could have been worse. Of course, I suspect that for those who are quite angry with God, spiritual care is the last thing they want or ask for.

Virginia Pastor Larry E. Davies, talks about a time of frustration and pain in his life where he was having great difficulty finding God in the storm.

“While the children slept with friends, we spent the last night of our marriage senselessly arguing over who would get the furniture, the photographs and the dishes. I even remember hiding a plastic coffee carafe under the kitchen sink. Why? I am not sure, but we often do dumb things when our lives are falling apart. By the time she drove off in a borrowed pickup truck, the house was an empty shell of blank walls, half-empty rooms, and shattered lives

Like Job, my lowest point was yet to come ... At precisely 8:00, the next morning my doorbell rang. On the front porch stood, hand-in-hand, a smiling young couple ready to meet with their minister for pre-marriage counseling. Their bright smiles soon disappeared as I walked them through the wreckage of my house toward the office. I explained what happened and assured them that I would understand if they asked another minister to handle the marriage service

What advice could a recently separated pastor possibly give this young couple that would enable them to prepare for a holy marriage? The answer? None! I could say nothing! At that point, I no longer felt qualified or able to give advice! All I had left was God ... All I had left was God!

At that precise moment, the lowest point of my life quietly became a momentous turning point because at that instant, I utterly and completely put my dependence upon God.” End quote—Larry E. Davies, “From a Pile of Ashes ...” Sowing Seeds Devotion, September 8, 1999, sowingseedsoffaiith.com.

Being able to see God in the midst of our suffering is amazing, in and of itself. But we are not likely to hear God calling us to account, as was the case with Job.

“Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind: Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself because I have some questions for

you, and you must answer them. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? (38:1-4).

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?

Tell me if you understand.

5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

6 On what were its footings set,

or who laid its cornerstone—

7 while the morning stars sang together

and all the angels[a] shouted for joy?”

God goes on describing all His created works from the beginning of time. God tells Job to stand up, be a man. Gird up your loins for battle! I have not abandoned you. I have made everything ... including you! (Job 38:3) Obviously, God did not expect Job to answer. There is no way that he could and that is the point. God Is God.

When Job finally replies, he says: “I had heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance” (42:5-6).

My friends, suffering is a part of life on this earth. But it will not always be that way.

We must remember that even in the darkest of times, God never abandons us.

Isaiah says in Ch 50 vs 10: Let the one who walks in the dark,

who has no light,

trust in the name of the Lord

and rely on their God.

If we can just hang onto this truth, we will make it through whatever trials that we may face.

Amen!