

JOB: FACE TO FACE WITH GOD

Job 38:1-12, 18-21, 32-33, 36

Job 40:9-10

Over the course of the last few weeks, I have been attempting to draw us ever closer to the Christ-centered life. Sometimes this kind of life comes only through trial and tribulation. I began with a message from Job entitled, “*Job, Man Who Comes Forth As Gold.*” Elihu, you will remember, came alongside Job and presented his suffering friend with such a high and holy vision of God that Job was finally able to begin to listen to the Lord. I doubt very much that Job could have made the transition from his futile conversations with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, to his fertile conversation with God if Elihu had not stood in the gap and prepared Job to hear the word of the Lord.

I then preached on *Christ as the Epicenter of Our Faith*, the One who deserves to be on the throne of our life, at the centre of our life, and not at the periphery. I followed that up with a message entitled *Imitating Christ Through Dependence and Discipline*. The idea here was that if we really believe that our Lord knew how to live, then we should imitate him, and that the place to start is in cultivating our relationship with him through the practice of certain disciplines – solitude and silence, study, meditation, prayer, fasting – just to name a few.

Last week, we focused on *Seeing Life from a Biblical Perspective*, the idea being that the brevity of life and the fact that this life is a time of preparation for eternity means that we must do for our Lord all we can with all we have for as long as we live. The time is short! The King is coming! Every day must count for the Master! There is no time to waste!

The problem, however, is our fallen nature. As Theodore Epp once said with such remarkable personal insight:

“I have a fallen nature living within me. He is just as old as I am. He cannot be changed nor can he be trained. He cannot be changed for the better. He is unchangeably evil, and if I give him room he will show himself.”

This is what happened to Job. Under the relentless assault of his three friends, who falsely accused him, Job reacted rather badly. His fallen nature showed himself. He insisted on his own righteousness, not realizing that no one is righteous before God in and of themselves, for “***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God***” (Ro. 3:23). We must slay the old nature; the old nature must be crucified, for he cannot be trained. That’s why Paul said, “***I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet it is not I that live, but Christ who lives in me.***”

Job was just like us. He needed to see himself, but he could see himself accurately only when he first saw God accurately. The things that were hidden deep down in Job’s heart were not made plain to him until God brought them to the surface. “***The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart***” (1 Sam. 16:7). Job was brought face to face with God so that he could also be brought face to face with himself. This is what we all need. It is not until we see, in our mind’s eye, how high and holy and glorious God really is that we begin to see ourselves in our true light.

What a profound difference there is between how we interact with each other and how the Lord interacts with us. Job's three friends humiliated him, but God humbled Job, without any humiliation. There is a difference between humiliating someone and humbling them. Human beings can easily humiliate each other, but it takes God to humble us. So how did God do it?

Well, if you look at the text carefully, you will see that the Lord exposed Job's profound ignorance of the natural realm and of God's governance of it.

He plies Job with question after question. He is relentless in his cross-examination. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Who marked off its dimensions? Who established its boundaries? Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons? Do you know the laws of the heavens? Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind? Do you have an arm like the mighty arm of God? Can your voice thunder like His? It is as if the Lord was saying to Job:

“Job, if you cannot understand the natural realm and how I go about governing it, then how do you propose to pass judgment on my governance of the moral realm? After all, my governance of the moral realm is surely far more incomprehensible and mysterious to you. Job, if you cannot explain the origin and history and innermost workings of your own abode, what makes you think that you can explain the innermost workings of the mind of God? If you, Job, cannot tell what the way is to the abode of light, then how can you possibly comprehend the way that God, who is the Light, chooses to lead fallen men to redemption?”

Job is left reeling! He can answer none of God's questions. ***“I am unworthy,”*** stammers Job, ***“how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth ... I will say no more”*** (40:4-5).

I believe that God had at least four reasons for appearing to Job at this time and dealing with him as He did. First, it was not God's intention to explain to Job the reason for his sufferings. If God answered all our questions, if He explained the purpose and meaning of all our trials, then the good intended might well be nullified. The trials would not show what was deep within our heart; there would be no real test of our character, no place for faith to be exercised. There is something about our trials and testings that God cannot explain to us at the time we are passing through them without destroying the very purposes they are designed to fulfill.

Second, the Lord spoke to Job in order to let him know that God really was involved in Job's affairs, and that He had been watching and hearing and caring for him all along. We must remember the limits that God had placed on Satan at the very beginning of Job's time of testing: ***“He is in your hands, but you must spare his life”*** (2:6). If not for that restriction placed on Satan, there would likely be no conversation now between Job and the Lord – Job would likely be dead. Instead, he is conversing with God Almighty! If David asks God, ***“What is man that you are mindful of him”*** (Psa. 8:4) then God shows us that not only is he mindful of us, he actually speaks to us.

The third purpose God had in dealing with Job as he did was to bring his servant to the point where he was willing to trust God even though he still had no explanation for what was happening to him. If we always have to have an explanation for things, then we really do not trust God. Faith, in the Biblical sense, means trusting God in the face of all seeming contradictions and in the absence of all explanations.

When Peter, James, and John were on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared and began to talk with Jesus. Peter was bewildered and, not knowing what to say, muttered something unintelligible about erecting three shelters – one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Then, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “***This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!***” (Mk. 9:7). Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. Sometimes we just need a fresh look at the Lord Jesus so that we can see him in a new light as he really is.

This brings me to the final reason for God dealing with Job as he did. He had to bring Job to the end of himself. You see, it is through trials that we are made aware of our need of finding victory in Christ. Job needed to be brought to the end of his self-righteousness, self-vindication, self-everything, so that he could find his all-in-all in God alone.

Sometimes God allows darkness to enshroud our hearts for a season to force us to look to the Light – the Light that only is God! The next time we are tempted to sit in judgment on God by asking such questions as, “Why does God do this or that?” or “Why does He allow such and such to happen?” or “Why doesn’t He explain such and such to me?” let us remember that we are such finite, puny creatures, ignorant and prone to be filled with vanity and pride. Let us remember what Socrates said:

“All human knowledge is but a knowledge of our ignorance.”

Theodore Epp is surely right when he says, “Without God we would fade into nothingness, just as a sunbeam suddenly disappears when the sunlight is cut off.” Let us not allow our trials and sufferings to sow seeds of bitterness in our hearts. Neither let us set ourselves up in judgment over the Lord God, blaming Him for His seeming inactivity on our behalf.

- He really is involved in our affairs, though we often see it not.
- He is working to bring us to the point where we are willing to trust Him even though we lack explanations for what is happening to us. Real faith does not always require explanations.
- He is bringing us to the end of our self-reliance and making us aware of our need of finding victory in Christ.

Our only possible response, if we have truly seen God, is to humble ourselves and to approach Him in repentance, throwing ourselves on His amazing grace, His mercy, and His infinite love.