

Sunday 15th November 2015 Job: Faith in the Dark

Scriptures: Philippians 4 vs 4-13, Job 19 vs 23-27, Job 28, Psalm 25, Romans 8 v 28

Introduction

The focus of today: Looking at Job's story of faith and how his faith was stretched. What happens when God is silent; when we go through suffering and catastrophic events and God appears distant? What happens if we do not think God is speaking to us at all, even when we are not going through difficult times?

CS Lewis wrote in his book, 'A Grief Observed,' the following: **'Meanwhile where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms, when you are happy, so happy that that you have no sense of needing Him, if you turn to Him then with praise, you will be welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other hope is vain, what do you find? A door slammed in your face and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that silence. You might as well turn away.'**

The story of Job challenges us to look at where we are with God today, whether we are suffering or not. Where is our faith in the midst of what is happening to us today? Is our faith just an 'add on' to our lives or is it integral to all we do and think and the way we live?

What Job found the most difficult to bear was that God did not answer him and was silent (**Job 23**). He had a relationship with God, before the loss in his life, now he was bereft of this because God does not speak to him.

What does the book of Job ask us to think about?

Three practical questions:

- **How do we manage suffering as Christians?**
- **How do we appropriately support people who are suffering?**
- **How do we answer a world and Christians at times who ask the old question- 'how can a loving God allow or be the author of pain and suffering?'**

We live in a fallen world, and we are all fallen creatures. We are all biased to do things which are not good for us and which God does not want us to do. The suffering in the world is the result of this fallenness. This is something the world struggles with because it does not agree with this view of man.

We cannot talk about suffering and evil without coming to the cross. God chose to enter our fallen world and fallen humanity and took on all the pain the world of sin has generated. He died in brokenness with the pressure of the pain of mankind. We need to look to Jesus in our pain and suffering, knowing He has endured more. This is what Paul means when he says he wants to, 'Fellowship' or 'Share' in his sufferings,' (**Philippians 3 v 10**).

What can sustain us in suffering? In our reading today, Paul says that he has learnt to be content in whatever circumstance he has found himself in (**Philippians 4 v 11**). So for both Paul and Job it was that there was a faith in a relationship to God. This is the key, having a living, everyday relationship with a living God who has been shown to us in the person of Jesus Christ. **So where is your relationship with Jesus today?** The vision of our Church is that we will become fully alive, in the life which Jesus gives us, despite what life throws at us. When we become Christians, **Ephesians 2 v 5**, tells us that we have been made alive by the birth of His Spirit. When we become alive in Him, we are moved inside, a change comes over us that effects our lives forever. This means that no matter what you go through in life, His life is flowing through you and making you into all He has called you to be for Him. **Have you been made alive?**

Job's Lot

A man who has faith in God, is doing the right things for his family and others. In the midst of this comfortableness, he is inflicted with a series of catastrophic losses and multiple grief. He is reduced to a homeless tramp, who is physically, emotionally and spiritually broken. The only thing he has left in life, is his wife (who is not much help) and three friends.

Job has dialogues with both God, his three friends, Eliphaz (Job 4-5/15 & 22); Bildad (Job 8, 18, 25, 26); and Zophar (Job 11 & 20) and he hears from a fourth person-Elihu (Job 32-37). These people attempt to help Job understand all that has happened but they do not provide much comfort or connection for Job in his plight. Yet each of them tell of some aspects of God's character and working.

God finally speaks and answers all Job's questions with more questions. In the midst of this Job has a new revelation of who God is, despite not having any of his own questions answered. He declares, *'My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.'* (Job 42 v 5).

Job is restored to health and material prosperity after he has been asked to forgive his friends for their efforts.

Job's Support

In summary they say:

- *What has happened to Job a direct result of some action of his.* He has reaped what he has sown; retribution theology
- *They bring charges and accusations against Job to justify their stance;* he is irreverent, he has done others wrong, his children have sinned, he has not helped the poor and needy and he has been sexually immoral
- *Job just needs to repent* and everything will be wonderful again
- *Elihu*, starts in the same vein but eventually moves into realising the sovereignty of God in all suffering; God is with him and not ignoring him (Job 36 v 15), God gives comfort in suffering (Job 35 v 10) and God uses illness for a reason (Job 33 v 30). But he still comes from a sense of retribution from God towards Job.

Job's Response to his suffering (Chapters 3-27)

- *Job feels trapped, he curses the day he was born* and would rather be dead (Job 3 v 19). He cannot see why God both allowed him to be born and why he is keeping him alive if this pain is all he is going to have.
- *He laments his suffering;* how he feels and how he sees others towards him; he expresses anger
- *Job is hurting and he is reaching* out to God and others in his pain.
- *He is frustrated with his friends.* There is a clear mismatch between what he is saying and how they are responding. They are giving him, 'harsh words' (Job 19vs 1-2).
- *The silence of God* is the hardest thing to face; he feels abandoned by God.
- *He argues his innocence to his friends and to God.* If he is guilty of something, why doesn't God tell him so he can put it right.
- *He declares his faith in God his redeemer, 'As for me, I know that my redeemer lives and at the last He will take His stand on the Earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh, I shall see God, whom I myself will behold and whom my eyes will see and not another'* (Job 19vs 25-27).
- *He finally surrenders to an all knowing God,* who is true wisdom-Job 28,(the poem of wisdom).

PRACTICALS

1) How do we manage and get through times of struggle, dark times of faith when nothing makes sense? The following things can be applied to any situation we find ourselves in:

A) Tell Jesus about it;

- *Job pours out his heart to God* and Paul asks us to bring all our anxieties to God and to pray them through (Philippians 4 v 6). This is just what Job did. He was honest about how he felt and expressed his anger and frustration. Job was processing his distress. This is not a sin nor an example of 'feeling sorry for himself.' God does not seem to find any of his expression a problem. I think sometimes we have a fragile view of God that somehow we will damage our relationship with Him or God will be mightily offended if

we express anger towards Him. The bottom line is **HE KNOWS ALREADY WHAT WE FEEL, even if we choose not to be honest with Him about it..**

- **Seeing the greater purpose in suffering;** We can ask 'why' but the better questions are 'what' questions. What faith lessons are you showing me through this situation? It is about finding God in the situation we are in and inviting him into all we are feeling. **Job said that he was being tried by God and that he would come forth as gold (Job 23v 10)**
- **Presence of God;** creating a dialogue with Him; what would He say in this situation from what you know of Jesus? We need to put ourselves in a position where will hear from Him. Sometimes adversity and sickness makes us hear from God in ways we would not have done normally. (*Illust: seeing Martin Hallett*)

B) Reach out and talk to other people:

- **The Pride of self- sufficiency (Matthew 5 v 1/message of society & history) can prevent us from reaching out to others and we also prevent others from serving us.**
- **Fear can also prevent us from reaching out;** fear of rejection, looking stupid. We need to choose the people we share with carefully. It is dangerous to share too broadly.
- Caleb Breakey, in his book 'Called to stay,' says, '**We want our fellow believers to think we are strong Christians. So we avoid saying and doing things that might show weakness. This isn't childlike faith. This is putting up a front out of fear. Instead, like a child, humbly choose to care more about what God thinks of you than what others think of you.**'

C) Focus on the good things & declare them:

- **Job was able to declare his faith and belief in God despite his confusion.** Job longs for God but cannot find Him but still declares his redeemer, that he will see him one day and that God knows he is on the right track (chapter 19 v 25-27 and 23 v 11). Paul encourages us to think on good things (**Philippians 4 v 8**) and to 'rejoice always,' (**Philippians 4 v 4**). Rejoicing is not about being, 'Happy, happy..'
- **Always remind yourselves of who Jesus is, what he has done for you and rely on His goodness.** If we believe God is good, all the time, despite what you see in your own life **God works all things** for our good (**Romans 8 v 28**); do we really believe this? It comes down to simple trust in who we believe God to be-Do we believe what God has said about Himself or what our circumstances are telling us?

2) How do you help others in their situation?

- **Listen. Are people good listeners today?** There was a clear mismatch between what Job was asking for and what he got back in reply from his friends. He often received harsh words (**Job 19 v 1-2**). Are you prepared to listen to someone and give them time, without interrupting?
- **Choose to show compassion (Colossians 3 v 12).** Ask when you do not understand, decide to allow Christ's compassion in you to rise up for them. Please say sorry if they say you have got it wrong and do not get offended.
- **Drop off your agendas, judgements, your own story or opinion.** Job's friends gave him their own understanding and kept pressing home their own view and did not really hear him. Love does not seek its own agenda- (**1 Corinthians 13 v 5**).
- **Encourage (1 Thessalonians 5 v 11).** When was the last time you asked someone- how are things going with you and your faith? (*ILLUST- What my friend said to me, 'I want you ask me what things are really like and do not put up with my avoidance*) When was the last time you gave some positive feedback to others to encourage them? We are often too keen to tell people what they have done wrong. Are we scared of them becoming big headed? Or do we enjoy chopping people down rather than building them up? Or are we jealous of another's success or skill? Love is not jealous (**1 Corinthians 13 v 5**).
- **Ask yourself- what might God be saying to you through the situation of this person you are supporting?**

'But heaven is silent. A first reader of Job may be surprised that God does not explain to Job why he is suffering. As a matter of fact, when it is all over, Job still does not know why he has suffered. He is never informed of the conversation in heaven between God and Satan. He never learns of the wager.

There are many wounded people who will live out their days and die without knowing why tragedy interrupted their lives. If only God would say something. All I'm asking for Lord is some clue as to why all these things happened. I would make it if you would speak to me. Just a hint Lord? Just a hint OK?

But like Job we learn the tough lesson that God is not obliged to explain His actions. Humans need a system of justice; God does not. God sets the standard of human behaviour, but he Himself is not bound by them, unless he chooses to be.'

From, 'When Heaven is silent,' by Ronald Dunn

Conclusion

We do not have all the answers for the big questions. The world finds this difficult, as we do.

We can choose to find God where we are at and develop a relationship with Him.

Last week I talked about stretching our faith. Our faith can be stretched by holding on when it is tough and when we are in a position of supporting others.

Where does Jesus want you to stretch your faith today?

What is he already doing in your circumstances that might be an indication of that?

Useful books

When Heaven is Silent by Ronald Dunn (1994)

Where is God when it hurts? By Philip Yancey (1998)