



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

Reading Job 42 : 1-6

Sermon: 4 October 2009

The text for the sermon is verse 5:

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.”

Once upon a time there lived a man with the name of “Job”. He was a wealthy man with many materialistic things that kept him busy and happy. In those days if you had a lot of sons you were considered as very rich. Sons would look after your well being when you were old. They would also defend you against the enemy in times of trouble and conflict. This man had 7 sons. “Job” was despite all his riches a faithful servant of God. He even made sure his children lived in a relationship with the Lord.

But this mans faith got tested. On one day he lost everything he had, his house, everything he owned and even all his three daughters and the 7 sons. If this was not enough he also got sick, infected with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

He then went into mourning by putting some ashes on his head without accusing God! Even when his wife tempted him to curse God he called her a fool!

He then went to his friends for some advice and it is obvious that they did not understand God’s dealings with humanity. They talked about things they did not know or understood themselves. But hat is remarkable that their answers did not please “Job” either. In his journey of despair, anger and grief He also went to God. He asked God why all these happened to him. He was a god-fearing man that did nothing wrong. WHY was he being punished?

Then there is a big silence. “Job” waits in suspense for God to answer him. And then from chapter 38 to 41 God indeed answers “Job” out of a storm. God says to him: How can you question my dealings with you? God exposes Job for what he really is--a finite creature. God presses him further and reproach him, challenging him to come up with a better answer of why everything happened to him. God hammers Job by asking him unanswerable questions about creation, himself and the no understandable nature of some of the animals.

“Job” had to admit. He was speechless, unable to say one more word to God. He admitted that he did not see God’s fatherly hand testing him and making his faith stronger. He had to admit that He served his own “god” which he thought was in existence.

He had to admit that He did not see God for whom He was: the creator of Heaven and earth, the Almighty God who can do everything He wants to. “Job” was stunned by the powerful presence of God. He actually confesses that it was so wrong of him to question the actions of God.

He must have known better to know that God will not desert or punish him. God is too merciful and loving just to harm him. God had a reason and “Job” accepted that God’s actions were the best for him. Although he was hurt, and still had no earthly riches, he knew that God was in control. He did the right thing to say “sorry”. It is as though “Job” true character comes to the fore when he humbles himself before God.

I think we can learn a lot from this man’s life story. And in many ways we can associate our lives, struggles, fears and despair with that of Job. But we can learn even more about God and his relation with humanity. The biggest lesson we must learn from his life story is:

- that we are all finite creatures who do not have the authority over life and death,
- that we do not have the power over sickness and health,
- and that we are the creatures who cannot grasp the greatness of God’s existence.

We are speechless in the presence of God and must remain speechless. Job’s encounter with God started first with a silence, and then God spoke to him. Our “communication”/prayers to God must start with a silence where He speaks to us first. And when we answer we must always do so in humble adoration like it is fitting of finite human creatures.

The life story of Job also gives us an insight into how God is ever present in our lives. God is merciful and loving and will never hurt his children. However He will use his children or situations to get a message across. In the case of Job I think He wanted to tell Job and his friends that they did not understand His Godly Being. God taught them the meaning of endurance.

His existence was greater than their expectations. They had to eat the humble pie when they realised that God is totally different from humankind. He is the totally Other God who acts totally different from any human being in his love, justice, forgiveness and righteousness. And how true this is; to imagine that God gave humanity, you and me a second chance in Jesus Christ. God did the unthinkable; in stead of punishment for our sins He showed compassion. Instead of damnation He showed mercy and love. He chose to free us from the bondages of sin and death. He overpowered death to give all the faithful the hope of everlasting life!

And when we experience difficult situations like Job did then we have the certainty of God’s presence through his Holy Spirit. We have the comfort of his Word which can sustain and help us in times of tribulation, struggle and crisis.

Job’s confession in verse 5 is also fitting to us. We have “**SEEN**” God’s mercy and love in Jesus Christ and daily we “**HEAR**” stories of people who have been witnesses of God’s miraculous interventions. We have no reason to doubt God’s presence in our daily living. We have no excuse not to have faith in the God who made heaven and earth. We have no reason not to trust God:

- when we are sick,
- when our loved ones dies,
- when we loose our jobs,
- when we loose our sense of living,
- when we experience only tribulation and struggle,
- when our children go off track and worship other gods,
- when we struggle with depression, fear and anxieties,

They tell the story of this old woman who was not used to electricity. Although she made great effort to install it in her home she hardly ever used it. So when the engineer went to her home to check why she was not using the full capacity of her electricity, she said; I switch on my lights in the evening just to see how to light the lamps and then I switch it off again”

I think the same is true of us when it comes to our recognition of God's powerful existence in our lives. We read our Bibles and acknowledge that God can do great things and that He sustains everything by his Fatherly hand. However, when we put our Bibles down it seems as if we go in default mode of doubt and feelings of hopelessness. It is as though we need the Bible to show us who God really is, but when it comes to our actions in life we totally lose sight of God's power and might!

May we never ever play God and think that we have all the answers. May God help us through his Holy Spirit to accept through faith the things we cannot change, to change the things that we can and to have the wisdom which only God can give - to know the difference..

Amen

Readings for the week.

Old Testament Job 1:1 ; 2: 1-10

If God is good, what is the source of evil? Through the Book of Job we shall explore this great mystery over the coming weeks. It is a book for all times and all people. Job is not an Israelite, and the book contains no references to either the Covenant or to Jewish Law and traditions. Ancient Israelite wisdom was considered a shared international legacy, and the problem which it addresses is a perennial one. Job is a literary figure. No one should imagine that the carefully constructed speeches which constitute this lengthy work could have been composed under the conditions of suffering described here. Satan's exclamation 'Skin for skin' is an evil celebration of the opportunity to inflict excruciating pain which would drive out all possibility of connected thought. What we have here is an exposition of the problem of evil and of undeserved suffering. Job is, therefore, an ideal rather than a real figure. He is, like Noah, the blameless person who survives the deluge. The initial problem presented is the temptation to blame the suffering on God: 'Curse God, and die' as Job's wife graphically puts it. The temptation is to regard a good God as the source of the evil, and in the face of this temptation Job knows that it cannot be so. His initial reply is simply. 'Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?' (Job 2.10). Previously, in response to the loss of his children and property, he had only said, memorably. 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1.20). The scene is set. Job has seen that God is good and that the perfect human response to such goodness is to reflect this goodness. And, if the good is taken away, this is only a temptation to turn away from God, rather than evidence that God is less than good. For the God-fearing person, the temptation is there to be confronted.

Prayer

Loving God.
help us to seek you in all situations.
to serve you in all times and places
and to speak of your goodness and mercy.
as we begin the week anew
with all it presents to us.

Amen

Next week's suggested readings.

Job 23:1-9
Job 23:16-17
Psalm 22:1-15
Hebrews 4:12-16
Mark 10:17-31