

“THE ONE AND ONLY YOU”

Job 38:1-11

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PRAYER: O God our Father, known through the Son, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, may we love you in all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all imagining. We ask that the written Word of faith may become alive in our hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As you listened to the scathing questions God asked Job in the Old Testament lesson read a few moments ago, you might conclude that Job's friends were right - Job is ignorant of God's will and purposes, and further - Job is a failure in his relationship with other people. Nothing is going right in his life. His problems are monumental. His obstacles to change the situation seem almost insurmountable.

By all the usual measurement of success - a wholesome family life and good health, financial security, and the respect of others - Job IS a failure. Job appears to be a failure on the surface of things. His life presents a study of what not to do if you want to succeed.

But there are two important facts which must be stated. First, God doesn't see Job as a failure. And secondly, Job doesn't think he is a failure either. Several years ago a painting by the great artist, Rembrandt was sold in Dallas, Texas, for over a million dollars. I ask you...what would make one piece of canvas worth over a million dollars?

Well, this was obviously a unique painting. Of all the billions of pictures since the beginning of time, this was the only one like it in existence. It was a Rembrandt original. And most people agree that Rembrandt was a genius. He had a special talent, unique in history, and the rarity of the painting was being recognized in the purchase price.

But let us not forget that even though Rembrandt possessed incredible talent, he was mortal. There will never be another Rembrandt, another Job, or another you. Each person is unique with special gifts. It is God who created Rembrandt, and the same God created Job, and created each of us. That in itself makes human life very special.

I once saw a bumper sticker that said, "God loves you whether you like it or not." The Bible tells us in Genesis that human beings are created in God's image, only a little lower than the angel. Jesus told his disciples in his farewell address recorded in John's Gospel (14:12), "the one who believes in me will do the works that I do and in fact, will do greater works because I am with you." Jesus puts no restrictions on his statement.

There are no restrictions as to age, sex, size, skin color, height, or anything else. Jesus asks only for faith. Trust in his power to draw you and me closer to the Eternal Father God.

Job did not know Jesus. His story comes out of the Old Testament period many years before Jesus' birth. But Job did know God. Indeed, his faith in God is what is being tested. And Job's faith is strong. Job knows his creator is a just and fair and loving God. He knows he is important to God even in the midst of all that seems to be dragging him down. Job maintains his faith, and his faith is rewarded.

I remember a statement the late Ethel Waters made during a Billy Graham crusade in London in the 1950s. Some people expressed amazement that Dr. Graham was getting such a tremendous response from people as he presented the Gospel of Christ in simple language. Ethel Waters with her big beautiful smile answered, "Honey, God don't sponsor no flops!"

What about you and me? Do we recognize our own uniqueness? Do we believe each life has great value? Job not only believes in God, he believes in himself.

I would invite us to look back to the Job, chapter 27, verses 3,4, 6: "as long as my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit ... I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go.

Job's belief in himself is impressive. Confronted with intense negatives, criticism, significant loss, great pressure, and almost unimaginable crises one after another, he is able to hang on, to persevere, and to transform his "apparent" failure into real triumph.

Perhaps you know people who have experiences similar to Job. They are beset by problems and challenges in body, mind and spirit. They believe in God, yet like Job, they continue to suffer. They wait for relief, but relief doesn't come.

These problem beset people who believe in God, but unlike Job, they often do not believe in themselves. They give in to the badgering of friends, to public opinion, or to the criticism of other people. They surrender to the negative, faithless thinking of those around them.

Eventually, it is their surrender and not the circumstances or lack of faith in God that limits them in life. It is their surrender that cripples them in life and keeps them from the blessing that could be theirs. It is their surrender to a lack of self confidence that is of the world and not from God that holds them in bondage to the pain they experience.

We have looked at Job this morning in order for all of us to see Job's triumph. Take heart all of you that see yourselves as modern-day Jobs. Let me remind everyone of the life of Eleanor Roosevelt - a homely woman with large buck teeth, self-conscious with people for most of the early years of her life, and fearful of the limelight.

She had listened to negative comments about herself and her abilities for years, and when her husband, Franklin, was struck down by polio, apparently doomed to retirement as an invalid, Eleanor took stock of her assets. She began to believe in herself despite the carping by her husband's political enemies, and unceasing ridicule by the public press. Her husband was elected four times to the U.S. presidency, and Eleanor was First Lady traveling throughout this nation and around the world. Franklin died in April 1945. She became First Lady of the World in her service as U.S. Representative in the United Nations. Perhaps some of us have forgotten in this age of media hype and mediocrity in political leaders and entertainment "stars," what it was like to have a homely woman with a high-pitched voice, someone who cared nothing for comfort or fashion, traveling the world and speaking out as an ambassador for human rights, and the dignity of the human family, despite skin color or economic status.

But we must move on from Job and Eleanor Roosevelt to Jesus Christ. He too believed in God, he believed in himself, and in his faithfulness to God's plan and purpose for life. His powerful belief carried him through many trials, rejection, scorn, criticism, ridicule to the abundant resurrection life.

Our belief in God, affirmation of the value of ourselves, will carry us through life's demands also. The story of Job has a positive conclusion using words the ancient world could understand, words that reflect the abundance of God: "The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning." (Job 42: 12).

God restored to Job his family, material wealth, and his circle of friends. In God's eyes - in his plan and purpose there is the One and Only You - a unique person created for God's love and friendship.

PRAYER: O Lord, as we have sung our hymns and spiritual songs to the praise of your powerful name, we would give thanks always and for everything that you have called us to be in your forever family. Amen.