

Oct 17th 2010: 'The Reason I still believe' series #2. Job 2:11-3:26
"Overwhelmed by Darkness but not Overcome"

There is no doubt from the Scriptures that Job was a really nice guy. Throughout the pages of his book he is shown to be a godly person who both worshipped God and respected His ways. He was a good father to all his children, caring for their spiritual as well as their material needs. He went out of his way to be gracious and helpful to the poor, sick, and needy. People respected him and were delighted when he came into their presence. He was admired by the other Elders in the city who gladly deferred to his wisdom. He was extremely wealthy, yet one of those wealthy people who others liked because he used his wealth in a good way, never ceasing to bless others through it.

That's why his sudden and extreme change in circumstances was so hard for him to bear and others to understand. It took just 4 messengers on one day, each carrying bad news, and one sudden but catastrophic change in his health to wreck his life completely.

It doesn't take much, does it, to greatly upset the pathway of your life. The news that you or someone close to you has cancer. A horrific car accident. A divorce. The death of a partner or a child. Loosing your job after many years of employment security. Financial ruin. A family member arrested. Heart attack stroke, the list goes on.....If I went around this congregation with a mike today we would soon hear from those who lives have been changed in a moment by the unexpected. And Job endured the most of anyone.

So we pop back in time to see him and to ask the question that we asked Abraham last week. And when we find him he is sitting in the same place where he has sat for several days surrounded by four rather important looking guys. Just outside his village where the rubbish and the excrement was taken and burnt. This is worst than Tamala Park. It stinks, and Job is covered with ugly open sores from head to toe. He has been banished there because what he has looks extremely infectious, and who wants a neighbor around with whom the gods are obviously really angry, anyhow?

Now we don't realize it but we have arrived there just before the Lord Himself speaks. Job and his mates are all talked out. They are just sitting with their separate thoughts waiting for something to happen.

So we get as close to Job as we can bear. He don't look too good and he don't smell too good. He's still scrapping away at his sores with a bit of broken pottery and we do our best to hide our pity and our revulsion from him. So Job, we say, 'Why are you still a believer in Almighty God?'

And I reckon Job would look at us with eyes that showed his weariness, but still are able to pierce right through us, and he would say something like this.

"Despite all that has happened to me and all the bad things that I'm going through, I've never yet broken the connection I have with God by cursing Him and turning my back on Him, and I never will. And there are in fact, many reasons I could give you why I am still following Him. But there is one major reason that keeps me holding tight to this Almighty One whom I cannot yet see, and I will share that with you in a moment. But before I tell you that one reason there is something else really surprising that you need to know."

Now at this point I can imagine Job leaning forward with an intense look on his face as he says, "I've learnt more about God and me in these last several days of terrible suffering and loss than I had learnt in all of my previous years as a believer in Him".

I reckon we might crack a smile at that. Because we have read the whole story, and we know that the Lord is about to speak directly to Job and Job's friends. Job has still got a lot more coming as far as knowledge about God and him is concerned! But we are very interested in what it was in particular that Job learnt through his suffering, so we simply say to him, "Tell us more".

"Well", says Job, "For the very first time I felt that I had a complaint against God. I didn't feel that God had treated me fairly. Of course all my friends had to have their say, and as soon as I started to put my thoughts into words they started to defend God's actions by suggesting that I had obviously done something wrong. Whether I admitted it or not the proof of my wrongdoing against Almighty God was being made obvious by all I was suffering. Now that really stirred me up, because I knew I hadn't. I had lived my whole life up to that point on the premise that it would be a life lived to please God. All I did was in accordance with what I knew of His character, and I knew from what others said about me that I had done ok. And of

course I expected God to do His part for me, and for so many years He had. Then everything went pear shaped, and I mean everything. Children, servants, life stock, gone in a flash. Destroyed. Some by enemies and some of it by natural disasters. And look at me. A horrible mess of open sores and dead flesh. Rejected and abandoned. I am overwhelmed by this present darkness. But I am not overcome by it because of what I have learnt in these past several days.

You see” says Job to us, “I began with the belief grounded in me from my birth that this life is all there is to hope for. That my responsibility to please God and help others ends with my death, and God’s responsibility to respond to that by blessing me for pleasing Him and disciplining me when I didn’t, naturally has to take place in my lifetime.

I remember saying to God one day: Job 7:7-9(Contemp English Version)

I beg you, God, don't forget!

My life is just a breath,

and trouble lies ahead.

I will vanish from sight,

and no one, including you,

will ever see me again.

I will disappear in the grave

or vanish from sight

like a passing cloud.

Then I even went on to say to Him: Job 7:20-21(NIV)

***If I have sinned, what have I done to you,
O watcher of men?***

***Why have you made me your target?
Have I become a burden to you?***

***Why do you not pardon my offenses
and forgive my sins?***

***For I will soon lie down in the dust;
you will search for me, but I will be no more."***

But says Job. "As I continued with my debate with God and heard more from my friends, I found my thoughts beginning to shift. I started to yearn for a friend in heaven; someone close to God who could speak to God on my behalf. And then it came to me that the reason God could justly hold back His hand of blessing from me. The reason that He could with integrity allow me—one who is so faithful to Him—to struggle with this overwhelming darkness, is because this life is not all that there is. That there is a life that will follow during which He plans to bless His own without limit.

That's what I have learnt along the pathway of suffering", says Job, "although it has been a difficult lesson and at times I still struggle with all that I am going through now. But deep in my heart I now know that:-

Job 16:19-21

***Even now my witness is in heaven;
my advocate is on high.***

***My intercessor is my friend
as my eyes pour out tears to God;***

***on behalf of a man he pleads with God
as a man pleads for his friend.***

And even more than that (Job 19:25-27)

***I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.***

***And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;***

***I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!***

Indeed, it is this learning experience that has made my reason for continuing to believe In Almighty God more firmer than ever. It hasn't weakened or decreased it but strengthened it.

For the reason I am still a follower of Almighty God, is because there is no other like Him in His power or faithfulness. He who is an Awesome God is the only one with whom I can trust my future."

So we can leave Job now, knowing that very soon things will change dramatically for him. And we take away this understanding that in the end there is none other whom man can rely upon. Only Almighty God can keep a soul safe through the rigours of this life and the glory of the next.

That is so good to know. For what Job only saw the edge of we have seen so clearly in Jesus. That He is that special friend of ours who intercedes for us constantly with the Father. And we also know that whatever this life pours upon us in the way of darkness, we have this Awesome God in whose hands our future is secure.

This was confirmed to me the other day when I sat and talked to my friend Colin Attwood. I said to him, "Colin, you are a bit of a Job character as far as your suffering is concerned." For Colin was going great guns in life, as far as he was concerned, with grand plans for early retirement and a good long life. Then he was stricken down with terminal cancer, bouts of horrible sickness, and a lot of the joy of living stripped from him. Yet Colin has come alive spiritually during his illness with a hunger for God's Word.

So I said to him, Colin, I like to ask you as a Job type character, Why are you still a believer. And Colin shared with me the story of how he became a Christian as a youth but through certain things in his life he turned away from being active as a Christian. Then the dreaded cancer hit him and within the darkness he sensed the closeness of God again. And he told me that it was easy for him to re-affirm his faith because there is no higher purpose for his life than knowing God. God is the only one that is big enough to trust with one's life, and the fact that his life is still here on earth is for him a sign that God has a purpose still for him here, before He takes Him to that place where He has a purpose for Colin forever.

Today you may be cruising through life or you may be having it hard. The same principle applies. We need an Awesome God, so when the dark periods come, we may be overwhelmed but not overcome. Not because of anything in us, but because our God is mighty to keep us safe for ever.

