

“Praying as Job Prayed”

Job 1: 1-5

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Sunday March 27, 2011

Text: Job 1:1-5 (NIV) ¹ In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. ² He had seven sons and three daughters, ³ and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. ⁴ His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Many scholars believe that the Book of Job is the oldest book in the Bible. Considering that, it is remarkable that this great account opens in its first five verses telling us that this upright man had seven sons and three daughters who liked to “feast.” And that he prayed for them! Feasting was an ancient way of saying “Having a good time.” This tells us that Job had great wealth and that his children shared in it. And Job was the “High Priest” of his family. Thus, we read:

⁵ When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for

each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Job was concerned that his grown children may have "cursed God in their hearts." Interesting. This is actually a euphemism and is figurative language because the text literally says "Perhaps my children have sinned and blessed God!" He is using "bless" in a sarcastic way here. Job says "bless" meaning to offend God in the same way we might say "Oh that was real nice!" when we mean the opposite. Perhaps his children had grieved God even though they thought they were living righteously.

Ironically, later in his life Job would be tempted to curse God himself. But at this point we see Job worship God with sacrifices for the sins of his children. In that sense, they would be purified at the slaying of a lamb for each grown child. Now we might ask...why would Job do this? If any of his sons or daughters had sinned with drunkenness or promiscuity why would they not burn a sacrifice for themselves? Why did he do it for them? Why did Job pray for his children to be kept by God and forgiven for their sins? Good questions. Today, we consider the Prayer of Job. First, let *us* pray.

Before proceeding to study this prayer of Job, let's review what we know about Job himself. Too often, the very name "Job" is just used as a way of saying a "Hard Luck Guy." But Job was more than that. He was successful and prominent. More importantly, he had an excellent theological sense of who God was and how this troubled world really works. Indeed, we see later in the book that Job says to his wife:

Job 2:10 (NIV) "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

Job's prayer was undergirded by his correct understanding of God. Job did not love God conditionally. More importantly, Job did not fall into the common mistake of re-making God as he thought God should be! Here is the key to what that means: man is always defining how God should be and what His nature must be. ***IT'S BEEN SAID THAT GOD MADE MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE AND MAN IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TRYING TO RETURN THE FAVOR!*** If we are to ever grow in our walk with the Lord we must be aware of the temptation to make an idol to worship...a God of our imaginations...instead of the true God of Scripture. Now...you might say "What is Pastor Alberta talking about? I don't make idols?" But maybe you do. Maybe I do.

For example, some say that a "good God" would never have designed a world with death and suffering. But He did. Look around...the world we live in is filled with death and suffering. And even if we say "Well God did not want it that way...man brought on death and suffering with sin...." Think about it...that is irrelevant when we speak of God. God is not a man who does not know the future or who cannot know the consequences of His own actions. God is not Dr. Frankenstein who made the monster and it turned out badly and now he does not know what to do with it! No, when God made His world He knew it would include death and suffering and that was part of His will or He would have kept it from happening! Think of what God said to Moses:

Exodus 4:11 (NIV) ¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

We would say "Oh blindness or deafness must be definitely from the Devil! God would not want such things for any of His image-bearers!" But that contradicts what God Himself said! And likewise we might say "Oh God would never want

the innocent to suffer.” But that also contradicts the Word of God. Think of how God spoke thru Peter to the Jews about Jesus:

Acts 2:23 (NIV) ²³ “This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the Cross.”

Friends, God sometimes purposes blindness and even Crucifixion! We must not re-define God according to our own understanding of how He should be and how He should behave. When we re-define God, we will also re-define the Gospel itself. For example, I've been asked why Cornerstone is not participating in a popular program in which churches are training their people to go out and share the Gospel. Sounds great, right? But I ask “What Gospel are they sharing?” When I read thru some of their materials, I find talk about relationships, loneliness, and the love of God, and how nice it is to know Jesus. But the problem is that the real Gospel is about picking up our cross, denying ourselves and following the one who had no place to lay his head! Jesus himself did not present the Gospel as all about how nice it is to be a Christian. When I pray and ask the Lord Jesus Christ how he wants me to share the Gospel, he says “The same way I did! Repent, and hear the Good News!” [Mark 1:15] Any Gospel presentation that speaks of God's love but not the need to repent of sin is not the real thing. It is like decaffeinated coffee! Even though it tastes like coffee and looks like coffee, the main thing...caffeine is missing. The thing that makes the Gospel the real Gospel is that Jesus Christ came to save sinners! Without that, the main thing, repentance of sin and re-birth is missing. But we are living in an age when Paul said people will want “their ears tickled!” Job never heard the name of Jesus but he understood salvation by faith.

Of course, the ultimate error in that regard is to say that a loving God would never send people to eternal Hell. That is the nonsense that a noted Pastor and

writer from Michigan has fallen into lately. He was recently on MSNBC offering up a different Gospel that says Christianity was never meant to teach that millions of people would spend eternity in Hell separated from God. A loving God would not do that. But that contradicts Jesus himself who said one day to a group of hardened unbelievers:

John 8:24 (NIV) ²⁴ "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins."

Matthew 13:42 (NIV) ⁴² "They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The truth is that life is brutal and the lost do go to Hell! The road to salvation is very narrow. As we see our world honestly, we must agree with the poet Tennyson who said that "nature is red in tooth and claw." The world that God made is mysteriously terrifying and when we bring children into it we had better be fully committed to covering them over with ongoing prayer! And nothing is less helpful than re-defining God when we feel life's pain and live thru life's heartaches.

Job saw the world honestly so he prayed that God would forgive his grown children for their sins. Job knew of the reality of sin and the eternal question of Judgment. Job knew that the true God allows suffering into His creation and Job did not try to re-define God.

That is tempting. In 1981, a book came out called **"When Bad Things Happen to Good People."** It was written by a Rabbi named Harold Kushner from New York. Kushner wrote it after losing his son to a long wasting disease. At last count, the

book, considered an inspirational best seller, was in its twentieth printing. Unfortunately, Kushner's theology is sub-biblical and tragic. In effect, he says that God is finite and is doing the best He can. Thus, good people get harmed and die young etc. but God can't help that. Kushner's book was one the first modern attempts to insist that if God was truly all-powerful as well as good, He would not allow pain and suffering. These kinds of theologies that insist what God must do and what God must be are actually quite obnoxious. God created a world into which He allowed death and suffering and He makes no apology for it.

Job was totally aware that this world is brutal and that eternity is in the balance and so he worried enough about his children...to pray regularly for them. Do we? And do we pray for them right on into adulthood? Let's consider **THREE REASONS** Job prayed for his grown children:

FIRST: JOB PRAYED THAT HIS CHILDREN WOULD BE COVERED BY GRACE:

We read:

Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

At first you may not see a prayer in here but that was what Job was doing. As Job sacrificed an animal for each of his children, he would pray that God would receive his loss as a payment for their sins. This was the role of the High Priest in ancient Israel to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. That was the macro picture of the ancient Jewish family. On the micro level, the family had its own High Priest and that was the father. Oh that God's people in Christ would recognize this TRUTH that the father in the home is to be the High Priest. We just set that idea aside because we trust in Jesus for our sins and to be our Mediator. But really I see no evidence that the father's role has changed. Fathers, if you do not act as High Priest in your families then a Godly wife will step in and do it...we hope. Or no one will do it but it is your job!

Job is praying for his grown kids to be covered by grace. If you are a single mother who wants her children covered by grace...and you do not have a Godly husband and the children have no High Priest in the home in the way of a Godly Father...then you need the church all the more. And up until now I have failed you and so has the church. So, here is what I would say to any of you mothers out there who do not have a High Priest father in your home to cover your children with prayer: write to me and I will take you and your kid's names to the Elders. They will assign an Elder to pray for your children in the days ahead. We promise. It will be a new ministry of prayer.

Job prayed for his children to be covered over in prayer....leading to our second point about praying for our children. I believe that Job understood the reality that his children had a certain indifference to God and His requirements. Remember Job said: **"Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts."** We might ask if they had done that why were they not praying for themselves? Why not? Because without a work of the Holy Spirit no one sees their sin or cares about it! Leading to our next point...

SECOND: WE MUST PRAY THAT OUR CHILDREN WILL BE CONVICTED OF SIN!

No one ever cries out to God for salvation until and unless they understand that they are sinners! One of the most important steps to take as you pray for anyone who is unsaved, including your children, is this: PRAY THAT THEY COME UNDER CONVICTION FOR THEIR SINS! Remember friends that man in his natural state is indifferent to his sins! Consider the Psalmist who said:

Psalms 36:1-2 (NIV) ¹ An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. ² For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

Actually, conviction of sin and repentance for sin are gifts from God! The Apostle Paul wrote to his young colleague Timothy about this very thing. Timothy had been preaching the Gospel to people who were filled with resistance and contention. So, Paul instructed Timothy about how this process works. Watch closely:

2 Timothy 2:25-26 (NIV) ²⁵ Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Paul just said pray that God “will grant them repentance!” He uses the Greek word for “give” [didomai] as if he is speaking of a “gift.” I can recall my own father resisting the Gospel years ago by politely saying to me that he understood it...but it had nothing to do with him because he was not a sinner! I was speechless at the time and as I drove home I simply prayed “Oh Lord...please show him that he is indeed a sinner in need of redemption!” I was blessed years later to learn that only a week or so before his death, he told my stepmother that he was getting

ready to die...and that he had sinned against others and did not know how he could make it right before he stood before God! Happily, my stepmother told him that he needed to take his sins to Jesus...and he did! But it took years for my father to come under the conviction of sin!

Pray for your children not to embrace the Good News of Jesus because you do....and not embrace the Good News of Jesus because being religious is nice...and not to embrace the Good News of Jesus because it will get you off their backs. Pray that they will embrace the Good News of Jesus because they are convicted that they are sinners and without Jesus they will spend forever separated from God and His Kingdom!

And do not be discouraged when you see them resist the conviction of sin. I love that account of Henry Venn the great British preacher on the 1800's. Venn and his sons were all in the ministry and serving God well. But Venn noticed that his granddaughter Charlotte seemed too proud to receive the true Gospel. He prayed for her to come under conviction. In her thirties, her health failed and she became depressed and withdrawn. A family friend gently asked her where she stood with God. She became defensive and angry. Then she paused and said "...I want to be saved. I want to come to Jesus, but I don't know how." The friend said "Come to him just as you are!"

Charlotte Elliott was saved that day. Her depression did not ever fully lift and her physical problems even grew worse. Feeling she could do nothing to serve the Lord, she felt led to at least write down her thoughts. So she penned these words:

"Just as I am without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"

A wealthy woman read that poem sometime later and published it. Charlotte knew nothing of that until one day while sharing her discouragement with a

friend, that friend handed her a leaflet and said "Here, this will encourage you!" The leaflet opened with her own words.... "Just as I am." But please note: her salvation began because her grandfather and father and mother were praying not only for her health but that she would be convicted of sin! Job prayed for his children to be **COVERED** until they were **CONVICTED**. Then I'm sure of something more....

THIRD: WE MUST PRAY THAT OUR CHILDREN WILL BE CONVERTED!

What does that really mean..."converted?" It means that entrance to Heaven requires that we be born again! Knowing God means giving your life to Him and asking for the sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross to take your sins! It means humbly receiving the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin!

All Job was doing before his grown children were truly converted was covering them in prayer until they would cry out to be saved for themselves. Donna and I begin every day and end every day with the same prayer: "Heavenly Father, we give you our kids! Please let none be lost before they are found! Please bring them to their knees and save them thru Jesus Christ!" Then we name each child and grandchild and the ones to come whom we will not know in this life. Why? Because the Lord Jesus Christ said to Nicodemus:

John 3:5-8 (NIV) ⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

It is the Holy Spirit who covers our children and who brings the conviction of sin and who converts their hearts. And the Holy Spirit uses us! Do not think I am saying we have no role in this! Rather, we are God's instruments to bring the Gospel. We cannot make them respond but we should plead for their souls and remind them to consider eternity when the opportunity is there to do so.

I found a powerful account of a father imploring the church to look after the souls of their children. It took place in 1745 when Jonathan Edwards lost his beautiful young daughter not yet twenty to an overwhelming fever. At her funeral service, without apology Edwards described Jerusha this way:

“...a young person in the bloom of life, with amiable and pleasant qualifications, not only with a blooming body but mind also...remarkably weaned from the world...” [Jonathan Edwards, Marsden. P. 327].

But then Edwards turned to the parents of those living and asked what comfort would it be to a parent who lost a child, even a grown child if they had to say to themselves “This my departed child was an eminent frolicker, a gallant, a jolly companion?” But eternally lost. Pray for your children and their eternal souls. Covering and conviction and conversion are essential!

I’ll close with a story. A true story. A woman died in 1731. A Godly woman who had a little son only six years old. Every day she had prayed for him to not only be converted and won to Christ, but to preach the Gospel as a minister. On her deathbed, she uttered final prayers for his little soul.

In the years that followed, he grew into a man filled with wickedness. A sailor who captured many innocent blacks and sold them into slavery. A lustful man who personally abused more of them than he could recall. A man who even late in life said he was always in the company of a thousand ghosts reminding him of his sins. Yet, his mother’s prayers were answered years later...as John Newton prepared to die in a storm at sea. In the midst of it he asked himself “What mercy can there be for me?” He was saved that day....and his mother’s prayers were answered.

Years later, Newton wrote: “I stood in need of an Almighty Savior...I was no longer an infidel; I heartily renounced my former profaneness and I was sincerely touched with a sense of underserved mercy...” That same John Newton later wrote these words:

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me....I once was lost but now
I'm found, was blind but now I see."

One last thing. When Job's fortunes were restored, God gave him double the number of everything he had lost. Except children. We read in the end of Job:

Job 42:12-13 (NIV) ¹² The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. ¹³ And he also had seven sons and three daughters.

Why did God not double the number of Job's children? Because the first ten were alive in Heaven with him. Job's prayers were answered. Pray for your children to be COVERED and CONVICTED and CONVERTED! And so...we pray!