

Sermon – 02/05/2010 pm

Days of Being Despised

Study Text: Job 30

Not long after we went to India I went to visit a village where tribal people lived. The sights, sounds and smells were so different to anything I had experienced back here. One of the things I saw was the farmers threshing the grain crops – rice, wheat, millets. They had no electricity in the village and no access to fuel. Everything was done manually or using oxen. To thresh the grain they drove oxen around and around the threshing floor. In one village I saw a spiked roller being pulled around the threshing floor by an ox. After threshing, the grain was winnowed by tossing it into the air. The wind blew the chaff away.

Job felt like he was being threshed and winnowed as he sat in agony on the rubbish heap, abandoned by friends and tormented by all who passed by.

Mocking Men

When calamity hit Job it did so with great effect. His life was turned upside down overnight. He ended up sitting on the rubbish heap, destitute and in great pain. Three friends came to comfort him, but ended up doing the exact opposite. They eventually gave up, telling him he was suffering because of some sin. They left him to mourn in silence.

In this final speech, Job's summary defence, he remembered days gone by when he was a respected and honoured leader in his community. As if suddenly waking up from day dreaming Job declared *but now they mock me, men younger than I* (30:1). It may be that one of these young men suddenly appeared and started mocking him again.

Job experienced a precipitous fall from grace. From being a dignified and respected man in society he became an object of scorn and derision. He vividly describes his utter humiliation in this chapter. Not just younger men, but younger men whose fathers were not worthy to run with his sheep dogs, had started mocking him (30:1). Their fathers were worthless individuals, the scum of society, and here their children were now mocking Job in his misery.

Job goes on to describe this 'low life', these rejects of society, even further. They wander about in the wasteland eating wild berries or leaves as well as the roots of the broom tree (30:4). The 'mallow' was probably saltwort, a hardy plant that grows in areas east of Sinai. The leaves of this plant were edible, though very bitter. These outcasts camped in the rocks and the caves and even cried out like wild animals. The young men mocking Job were the sons of fools, the sons of the dregs and outcasts of society.

Did you see the recent documentary about the gypsies of Europe? It showed these people living in squalor underneath bridges in cities of Spain and Italy. They lived without access to running water or sanitation. They sent their children out to pickpocket and steal from people in the streets of the city. It was children like this that were mocking Job as he sat in misery on his own rubbish heap.

At one time in his life King David would have known something of how Job felt at this time. David's son Absalom rose up against David forcing him to flee from the king's palace. David went out of the city weeping. He went out barefoot and with his head covered (II Samuel 15:30). As

David went a young man called Shimei started to curse him and throw stones at him (2 Samuel 16:6).

The once mighty king of Israel, the man whom the women of the land praised in song, was reduced to being mocked and cursed in the street by one of Saul's descendants. David experienced a fall from grace much the same as Job, although unlike Job, David largely brought this suffering upon himself.

As if verbal abuse was not enough, Job goes on to describe how these rascals ran from him because his disease had made him so revolting – but not before they spat in his face (30:10). Job had no strength to resist their verbal and physical abuse. He was a thoroughly broken man. They made him their target because he was broken and unable to deal with them as he once did. These delinquents could block his way, trip him up, knock him down or do whatever they wanted to this helpless man. Job now lived in terror. He lived devoid of all human dignity.

Why was this? Because God had *loosed his bowstring and afflicted him* (30:11). If the bowstring is cut the bow becomes useless. It has no power to shoot out the arrow. Job was completely drained of strength, both physical and emotional, because of the way God had afflicted him.

Grinding God

Job continues to outline his present plight. Note the 'but now' of verse 1, the 'and now' of verse 9, and the 'and now' again here in verse 16. In this second half of the chapter Job's attention turns from the youngsters mocking him to the God who was afflicting him. *My soul is poured out* or 'my life ebbs away' said Job (30:16), because God had cast him into the mire or muddy pit. Job had been ground down to dust and ashes (30:19).

Job was sitting on the rubbish heap, the place of dust and ashes. 'Dust and ashes' is usually associated with repentance, and this is the case later in Job (42:6). But it is basically a metaphor for mourning, whether mourning for sin or some other reason. Job had a lot to mourn about. Physically he had been reduced to a bag of bones. *My skin grows black and falls from me, and my bones burn with fever* he said (30:30). People could not bear to look at this miserable wretch nor could they bear the stench that wafted from his worm-infested flesh.

It was not just physical pain that gripped Job but spiritual agony also. His affliction, his unjust suffering, led to depression. He felt as if someone had him by the throat and was choking him. He could not escape. *A great force ... grips me by the collar of my coat* (30:18). 'My garment is disfigured' is thought to mean 'God grabs me by the collar', but may refer to his clothes being changed or his robes being stripped from him, leaving him in an undergarment.

Job was churning inside, unable to rest (30:27). He did not want to go on living. He was ready to give up on life, but with the little strength that remained in his body and mind he cried out to God. *I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer me. You have become cruel to me; you oppose me* Job cried out (30:20, 21). It was God who was afflicting Job and causing him to suffer. Being repulsive to his friends and mocked by street kids was all because of God afflicting him.

Job felt like he was being threshed and winnowed like grain. God was grinding him into the dust. *You lift me to the wind and toss me about in the storm* (30:22). The word 'tribulation' literally means to be pressed, which is what threshing is about. It is the same with pressing the juice out of grapes but we do not call this threshing.

Job was under great pressure. He was being threshed by God. He was being tested by God. *Count it all joy when you fall into various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance* wrote James (James 1:2, 3). Paul wrote *we glory in tribulations knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character and character hope* (Romans 5:4).

It seems to be going a bit far to talk about having ‘joy in tribulations’ but that is what we read. We have joy when we know that God is with us and that he will provide a way out. That is exactly what he promises. God promises that he will not let us be tested beyond what we are able to bear (I Corinthians 10:13). He promises that he will never leave us or forsake us. Although God was silent as Job went through this time of severe testing he had not forsaken Job. God was watching him every moment. God was sharing in Job’s suffering because he was suffering for the glory of God.

Clothed in righteousness and justice Job listened to the cries of the poor and he helped them – that was before calamity struck (29:12, 14). He felt sorry for the poor and wept for the poor and needy (30:25). But was God listening to Job when he cried out? Was God coming to the aid of this poor stricken soul?

Quite the opposite, it appeared to Job. *When I looked for good, evil came, when I waited for light, then darkness came* he said (30: 26). How could God keep hitting a man when he was down? This is what Job did not understand. Job’s heart was in turmoil crying out as it were ‘My God why have you forsaken me’.

Satan has asked for you, that he might sift you as wheat (Luke 22:31). This is what Jesus said to Peter who was so bold as to rebuke Jesus for saying that he must die and be raised on the third day. Peter went on to deny knowing Jesus, just as Jesus predicted. Realizing what he had done, Peter went out and wept bitterly. His suffering was different to Job’s but it was still a time of sifting by Satan, with God’s permission. It was a time of testing from which he would emerge with stronger faith in the Lord.

‘Job will never be the same again’ writes Thomas. ‘He was learning more and more about the Lord and his ways; learning to trust him, to lean on him, to call on him, to cry to him in pain. God set up Job as his champion against Satan. And though the champion was bleeding from the scars of battle, he was winning. God had chosen him, just as Jesus predicted, that he might bear fruit (John 15:16). In that light all the beating and flailing seems worthwhile. And Job is soon to acknowledge this himself’. May the Lord give us the grace and the strength to endure, to persevere in times of suffering just like his servant Job.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon