

## Sermon – 14/02/2010 pm

### Seeking the Sovereign God

Study Text: Job 23

*Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you shall find* (Matthew 7:7). This is the wonderful promise given by Jesus in his sermon on the mount. It is a promise we can cling to in our hour of need. Job was seeking after God but seemed not to be finding him. God was silent. God was not answering his cry. Job felt abandoned by God.

The very fact that Job was crying out to God and seeking after him was, however, evidence of his faith. It was evidence that he was close to God. God was in fact close to him also. God heard every word that Job uttered. God felt Job's pain. But in the bigger picture of God's sovereign plans and purposes, in the bigger picture of God's glory, he chose to remain silent. God will answer Job in his own time, and he will be glorified through his servant Job.

Suffering can be, and should be, like a test that leads us closer to God. We cry out to God saying 'to whom shall I go; you have the words of eternal life'. 'Whom have I in heaven but you alone, O Lord?' In his suffering we have seen Job grow in his understanding of God. We see more growth in his faith and knowledge of God in this his reply to the third speech of Eliphaz.

Job does not directly answer Eliphaz despite his specific allegations about Job's sins. Job's shows restraint, considering it a waste of time to try and defend himself against these accusers. *Vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay* (Romans 12:19). Leaving the Lord to deal with Eliphaz, Job sought the Lord himself. In his reply to Eliphaz, Job continues pouring out his soul to the Lord. *Even today my complaint is bitter* (23:2).

### Seeking God

*My hand is listless because of my groaning* is better read as *His hand is heavy in spite of my groaning* – the Hebrew is not clear (23:3). Job previously spoke of God's hand being upon him (19:21). David also speaks of God's hand being heavy upon him in his suffering (Psalm 32:4). God's hand was heavy upon the Philistines when they captured the Ark from Israel and took it to one of their own cities. *The hand of the Lord was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and he ravaged them and struck them with tumours* (I Samuel 5:6).

In his groaning and suffering Job persisted in seeking after the Lord. He was not put off by his friends. He was not going to give up his integrity by confessing sins he was not guilty of, just so God would let him off the hook as it were. He was intent on finding God in order to present his case before him.

Job imagined presenting his case before God if he did find him. He would declare his innocence. He would seek an explanation. He was uncertain as to how God would answer him. God is all powerful so he might simply dismiss Job. No! 'He would take note of me' says Job. He believed God would show him mercy and would act justly. He was confident God would give him a fair hearing and would deliver him forever (23:6, 7).

Job was confident of being vindicated by God but he could not find him. There are many who do not find God because they do not look. They are too busy in their own selfish lives. That is the challenge Jesus gives to all who hear; 'seek and you will find'. Some do not find God because they

are blinded by their own traditions. *You search the Scriptures ... but you are not willing to come to me that you may have life* (John 5:40). Job was genuine in his search for God. He was crying out from the rubbish heap. He knew that *my Redeemer lives* but he could not find him.

*Look, I go forward but he is not there* (23:8). Some translations say 'if I go to the east he is not there' – and so on to the west, to the north and to the south. Job implies that he has searched to the four corners of the world and still not found God. Job felt abandoned by God. He felt God had left him in his hour of need. This is a man who used to rise early and offer burnt offerings to the Lord.

Job is not alone in this feeling of being alone, of being abandoned by God. Maybe you have felt this way at some time. God does not hear our prayers if we cherish sin in our hearts (Psalm 66:18); but this was not true of Job. It was not true of David either when he was being hunted by Saul. After God promised to make him king, David was pursued by Saul for years. David kept crying out to the Lord to deliver him from this persecution. *How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?* (Psalm 13:1). Notice how this psalm and many other lament psalms close on a note of hope, even rejoicing. David's faith, like that of Job's, remained strong during his suffering.

Although Job was seeking the Lord, the truth was the Lord was very near. Job himself acknowledged *he (God) knows the way that I take* (23:10). Job knew that God is omniscient. Job knew a lot about God because he worshipped God. His knowledge of God was a great help for him in this time of need. God may be silent but what he had spoken in his word remained unchanged (23:12). Job clung to the promises of God.

The things we are learning from the book of Job put us in a good position for when we face difficult times. Knowing the promises of God, the unchanging promises of God, is the best help we can have in our time of need. God's promise to Joshua, *I will never leave you or forsake you*, is taken up in Hebrews 13:5, and we can take hold of it today. You may have already found it a comfort in your time of need. You will find it a great help if you take hold of this and other promises of God today.

## **Sovereign God**

*When he has tested me I shall come forth as gold* (23:10). This verse seems to leap off the page as we read this chapter. It is another of Job's inspired outbursts. We know that God is testing Job, but how does he come to this understanding. His friends did not help him, that's for sure. They kept telling him he was suffering because of some sin. He said he was not guilty and that God was afflicting him without reason. Now he comes up with a reason. God was testing him. Like his other insights about a mediator, and my redeemer, they just flicker for a moment, like moments of divinely given insight.

This understanding came in the context of Job reflecting on the sovereignty of God. *He knows the way that I take* (23:10). Job could not find God and he did not know God's thought. That was because 'his ways are higher than our ways, his thoughts than our thoughts' (Isaiah 55:9). God is unique (23:13). God stands alone. Who can stand against him? He answers to no one. He does whatever he wants.

The sovereignty of God is a humbling truth. The higher he is exalted in our eyes the lower we will feel. Because God is sovereign over all creation and all creatures we must fear him and humble ourselves before him. This is the manner in which we worship God. *God has made my heart faint, and the Almighty terrifies me* (23:16). Job was questioning God. He was speaking openly of his feelings towards God. But he always maintained the sovereignty of God in his life and in his suffering. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, not the end of it as so many think.

In his sovereignty God does as he pleases (23:13). *I am God and there is none like me ... and I will do all my pleasure* (Isaiah 46:10). God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. If he has not done so he would not be sovereign in all things. But this is no reason to become fatalistic. Some Christians fall into this trap. A lady in our Bible study would always say ‘but God has pre-determined whatever happens’. *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations* said Jesus. ‘But God has determined all that happens’ she would say. This is fatalism. This is not what we find with Job. God is sovereign and in his sovereignty he calls upon us to seek him, to obey him, and to serve him.

God’s sovereignty extends to the life of the individual. God was doing what he pleased in the life of Job. What he was doing at this time was not pleasant, but in the big picture, in the picture from God’s perspective, there was a valid reason for what God was doing. Job wanted to know that reason. In this mention of divine testing he comes close to understanding why he was suffering. In response to Satan’s accusation, God was allowing Job to be tested to prove the genuineness of his faith.

*When he has tested me I shall come forth as gold* (23:10). Here is theology that we find in the New Testament. In James we read that *the testing of your faith produces perseverance* (James 1:3). What a great commentary on Job’s life. In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter we read that suffering is like fire that purifies the gold (I Peter 1:7). It is like fire that tempers the metal. Job was not being purified, but his faith was being tempered and strengthened.

Job knew that God could strike him dead at any moment. In his pain and misery he was expecting to die. The fact that he was still alive, that he had not been swallowed up by the darkness of death gave him reason to keep hoping in divine justice (23:17).

## **Silent God**

*I have treasured the words of his mouth, more than my daily food* (23:12). God was not speaking to Job at this time, but he had spoken in the past. *In the past God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son* (Hebrews 1:1, 2). Job knew and believed what God had spoken. The words of God kept him going in his suffering.

There are those crying out to God today who do not bother to read what God has spoken. Some cry out to God wanting to know if they can marry an unbeliever. God has spoken in the Bible on this matter. Some cry out for God to heal them or to take away suffering. God has spoken about this also in the Bible. It is right here in the book of Job. Some cry out for riches but God has spoken about riches in the Bible. He has spoken about work, about seeking him first in all things, about keeping the Lord’s Day holy and assembling together to worship him.

Let the Bible inform your prayers. May the knowledge of God fill your mind and your heart. May the knowledge of God fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea.

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