

JUNE 2021

Doug Resler was on a mission trip for the last few days of May and continued his Bible in a Year commentaries below. Please see his [Morning Communion with God](#) sharing for those days when he was on the trip serving others.

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June 21, 2021
God of the Impossible

Readings for today: Nehemiah 1-5, Acts 2:1-41

I just returned home after 24 days in Africa. We hosted four training conferences in four different regions of Uganda and Ethiopia. We trained and interviewed and prayed over 743 indigenous church planters from South Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia. 351 of those are brand new church planters who were commissioned and sent out to villages where they have never heard the gospel. These men and women go out as sheep amidst wolves. They contend against very real spiritual forces of evil. They are often persecuted and beaten and imprisoned and threatened with death by witch doctors, Muslim imams, and other followers of pagan, tribal religions. Some even pay the ultimate price for their faithfulness. From a human perspective, the task they face is impossible. The challenges are insurmountable. There is no rational way they can possibly succeed. They have no political power. Very little in the way of worldly wealth. They lack education. And yet God is using them to change the world, one village at a time.

Our God specializes in doing the impossible. Our God loves to show up when the odds are stacked against us. He does His best work when all hope seems lost. Consider the dire straits of the people living in Jerusalem. They had been faithful. They had answered God's call. They had left their lives in Babylon to return home to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. They had rededicated themselves to living according to God's Law under the leadership of Ezra. But they were still oppressed. Still at the mercy of the enemies who surrounded them. They had no protection. No way of defending themselves. The lack of a city wall was an open invitation to marauders to come in and destroy all they had worked so hard to build. I am sure many requests had been made over the years to the Persian kings to rebuild the city. All had been turned aside. The rebellious reputation of their city was well-known. The Persians purposefully left it in ruins to serve as a deterrent to the region. Decades of royal precedent stood in their way. The sheer size and scope of a potential rebuilding project was overwhelming. The political opposition was powerful and well-connected. In short, a change seemed impossible.

But Nehemiah believed God could do the impossible. So he prayed for the impossible. For days he prayed and fasted and wept before the Lord. He cried out to God on behalf of his people. He cried out to God on behalf of his city. He cried out to God to be faithful to His promises. But Nehemiah didn't just pray for the impossible, he also prepared for the impossible. He prepared for the day when he would be given the opportunity to present his request to the king. He put together a timeline for the project. Made a list of the materials he would need. When Artaxerxes asked him what he needed to make it all happen, he was ready and the king agreed. Finally, Nehemiah didn't just pray for the impossible. He didn't just prepare for the impossible. When the time came, he stepped out in faith to do the impossible. Like Noah building the ark before the rain or Moses stepping into the Red Sea before it parted or the widow of Zeraphath feeding Elijah her last cake before her jars of oil and flour refilled; Nehemiah went forward trusting the hand of the Lord to be upon him. He knew the project would be daunting. He knew the people would get discouraged. He knew the opposition would be fierce. But he never wavered in his faith. He knew God could do the impossible. "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build..." (Nehemiah 2:20)

Jesus once said, "Ask and you will receive." James once said, "You have not because you ask not or you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions." You see, the reason we do not see God do the impossible is often because we do not ask for it or we do not ask for it rightly. We are far too content with our lives. We settle for comfort and security when all the while Jesus is calling us to risk everything for

Kingdom-greatness. The men and women I train have nothing so they rely on God for everything. They pray in expectation for miracles to take place and God answers their prayers. He does the impossible by healing the sick, delivering the demonic, and raising the dead. He does the impossible by converting witch doctors and Muslim imams. Sacred trees are cut down to build church buildings. Mosques become Christian houses of worship. Yes, they suffer. Yes, some of them even die. But they keep their eyes on Christ. They belong to a Kingdom that is not of this world. It's simply incredible to witness. Nehemiah risked it all as well. He gave up the comfort and security of the king's court to take on the impossible task of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. He prayed in expectation that God would be faithful. He prepared in expectation that God would answer his prayers and change the heart of the king. He took action in expectation that the hand of God would be with him until the project was complete.

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's the same over here as He is over in Africa. He's the same today as He was back in Nehemiah's time. He's still the God of the impossible. So what impossible thing are you facing in your life today? What insurmountable challenge is confronting you right now? Are you willing to give it to God? Are you willing to surrender it to God? Are you willing to leave it in God's hands and trust Him with the outcome? Will you commit to pray for the impossible? Prepare for the impossible? And when God calls, step out in faith to do the impossible?

Readings for tomorrow: Nehemiah 6-8, Acts 2:42-3:10

June 22, 2021
Fundamentals

Readings for today: Nehemiah 6-8, Acts 2:42-3:10

I love it when both New and Old Testament passages come together to convey the same eternal message. Today, the people of Israel gather to hear the reading of the Law. They build Ezra a pulpit and he preaches for days. Teaching. Exhorting. Encouraging. Challenging the people to submit their lives to God's Word and live according to His ways. The Levites are there alongside him. Interpreting the Law so God's people can understand and apply it to their lives. It's not a hard sell. The Spirit of God has clearly been at work in the hearts of His people, preparing them for this moment. I love how the Bible describes their reaction...

“And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.” (Neh. 8:3)

“And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” (Neh. 8:6)

“And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.” (Neh. 8:9-12)

Then I flip over to our New Testament reading. These are some of my favorite verses in all the Bible. It describes the heart of the first church. They've just heard the first Christian sermon ever preached. Miraculously, they each heard it in their own heart language. They were cut to the heart. Thousands were baptized. And then they must have looked at each other and said, “Now what?” There was no history to rely on. No tradition to fall back on. This whole “church” was brand new. At the same time, they were Jews. Their people had been walking with God for ages. They remembered their history. Perhaps Peter's preaching reminded them of Ezra! So they do what's natural for them. They devote themselves to the apostle's teaching. They devote themselves to each other in deep, spiritual fellowship. They share meals together, especially the Lord's Supper. And they pray. They don't need programs. They don't need some big vision. They don't set hairy, audacious goals. They simply commit themselves to the same ancient spiritual disciplines that have always guided God's people.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

I talk to people all the time who long for a deeper life with God. They always seem to be looking for the silver bullet or some magic formula. They want to know the secret. The key. The one thing that will help them pierce the veil that they believe separates them from experiencing the fullness of God's love. But here's the honest truth. There are no shortcuts. There is no easy five-step process. It requires a life-long obedience in the same direction. It requires a faithful, consistent, daily engagement over the long haul with God's Word and God's people to grow in our faith. Yes, God is always there for us. But He is no cosmic bellhop. Yes, God always loves us. But He is not co-dependent. He doesn't need us in the way we need Him. Yes, God's grace is endless, boundless, and free. But He will not save us from the consequences of our sin. Instead, He promises to use even our pain to grow us into the image of His Son.

Friends, you may think you don't have time to add one more thing to your already overloaded day. You may believe you don't have the bandwidth to spend time with God each day or gather with God's people each week. You may think it's enough that you raised your hand and invited Christ into your heart. But if you want to experience then fullness of God's presence. If you want to experience the greatest depth of communion with your Creator. If you want to live in the confidence of knowing you are loved with an everlasting love, you must re-orient your life around the fundamental spiritual disciplines of prayer, God's Word, worship, and fellowship with other believers.

Readings for tomorrow: Nehemiah 9-11, Acts 3:11-4:22

June 23, 2021
Signs and Wonders

Readings for today: Nehemiah 9-11, Acts 3:11-4:22

The signs and wonders of God are a marvel to behold. I have seen the sick miraculously healed. I have seen the chains of addiction be loosed in a person's life. I have seen the demonized set free. I have seen relationships irreparably broken by restored. I have seen the hardest of hearts be softened by the gospel. I have even seen the dead raised with my own two eyes. Each and every one a miracle. Each and every one a divine intervention by Almighty God. It's easy to be dazzled by such displays of power. It's easy to get caught up in the joy and excitement of it all. It's easy to fall into the trap of craving more and more of God's blessings. More and more of God's good gifts. More and more of God's eschatological goodies and miss out on the main point of it all. The Giver is greater than the gift. The Blessed One is more than His blessings. A relationship with God is more precious than all the silver and gold in the world.

In the passage we read today, the people marvel at the healing power that flowed through Peter when he made the lame man walk. The man had been crippled from birth. Everyone knew him because he was carried each day to the Beautiful Gate of the Temple where he would ask for alms. For forty years, he had been in this condition and now the people see him dancing and singing and shouting praises to God. It must be a wonder to behold! Immediately a crowd gathers. They want to know how and why this happened. They want to meet the man who could perform such miracles. But Peter is quick to point them beyond himself. "And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?" (Acts 3:12) Peter knows he's just God's instrument. He's just the conduit through which God has made Himself known. He also knows why God performed the miracle. Signs and wonders are never an end in themselves. They are designed by God to create an opportunity for the preaching of the gospel.

One of the things we get to do when we are over in Africa is interview church planters. We only send them to unreached villages. To people who have never heard the name of Jesus. They are often attacked. Persecuted. Beaten. Imprisoned for their faith. But usually somewhere along the way there is a power encounter. A sign is performed. Someone is healed. The dead are raised. The demonized are set free. And such miracles draw a crowd as you can imagine. That's the moment the church planter has been praying and waiting for. The gospel is preached. Many come to Christ. A church is planted. It's amazing to witness.

Friends, the same God who is at work over in Uganda and Ethiopia is at work in America as well. The same God who performs miracles in villages and communities all across Africa is performing miracles in places like Parker and Elizabeth and Denver as well. He is at work in our homes. He is at work in our communities. He is at work in our lives. He is making Himself known through signs and wonders so that we will get the opportunity to share the gospel with those who do not yet believe. God wants to make Himself known for there is salvation in no one else. There is no other name given under heaven by which we might be saved but the name of Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: Nehemiah 12-13, Acts 4:23-37

June 24, 2021
The Danger of Compromise

Readings for today: Nehemiah 12-13, Acts 4:23-37

It usually starts small. A tiny step. A shift of one degree. One little compromise. We justify it in all sorts of ways. Surely God will understand. Surely God will make an exception this one time. Surely God knows we aren't perfect. But then the compromises keep coming. A tiny step turns into several larger steps. One degree turns into two degrees then three. One little compromise opens the door to other, more significant compromises and the next thing we know, we are in full rebellion against God's commands.

The last chapter of Nehemiah details a list of reforms he instituted for the people of Israel. It's a startling way to end a book. No "happily ever after." No "riding off into the sunset" for Nehemiah. His story ends in conflict. His story ends in confrontation. He even loses his temper and starts beating people and tearing out their hair! All this coming after an amazing time of worship where the entire population of Jerusalem gathered to sing the praises of God!

It is so easy for us to compromise. So easy for us to slide back into old habits. Someone once told me that humanity's ability to sin is only surpassed by her ability to justify her sin. I believe it. I see it in my own life. The people of God compromised in all sorts of ways. They allowed people of foreign descent, people who worshipped other gods, to join them in worship at the Temple. For the sake of political expediency, they gave Tobiah - one of their sworn enemies - his own room in the Temple. They neglected to care for the Levites and other Temple servants by refusing to tithe, forcing them to fend for themselves. They refused to honor the Sabbath. They married foreign women. Even their spiritual leaders desecrated their priestly office by intermarrying with those who did not worship Yahweh. In each case, I can almost hear the justifications. I can imagine the rationale. Our wives promised to put away their foreign gods! We're trying to rebuild our lives and local economy and have work on the Sabbath! If we give Tobiah a place of honor, perhaps he'll leave us alone. From a human perspective, it all makes sense.

If I am honest, I too fall into these same traps. It's easy for me to justify neglecting my time with God. It's easy for me to enter into worship and make it all about me and what I get out of it. It's easy for me to justify working 24/7 without ever taking a break. It's easy for me to give in to certain people in my life simply to avoid conflict. It's easy for me to compromise my convictions for the sake of those I love. Frankly, it never ends well. Eventually all the little compromises I make start to stack up along the way, creating a burden far too heavy for me to bear. Eventually, the house of cards I build comes crashing down around me, leaving me far worse off than I could have imagined. God demands my obedience. Jesus Himself says, "If you love Me, you will obey My commands." Following Christ is not easy. Following Christ requires great sacrifice. Following Christ means dying to "Self" with all its disordered desires and unrestrained passions. Take an honest assessment of your life. Where are you compromising? Where are you rationalizing away your sin? Turn and confess, knowing God is faithful and just to forgive you for your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Readings for tomorrow: Esther 1-3, Acts 5:1-16

June 25, 2021
Powerful Women

Readings for today: Esther 1-3, Acts 5:1-16

I love the women of the Bible. They live in incredibly difficult times. They live in cultures where they are treated more as property than people. They are subject to all kinds of abuse and neglect. They have no rights and no legal recourse. They are prized for their physical beauty and cast aside when it fades. Their worth is determined by the number of male children they bear and they are shamed if they cannot produce. It's a brutal, harsh existence and it would be easy for the women to throw up their hands in despair. It would be easy for them to feel helpless and hopeless. Resign themselves to their lot in life and try to make the best of things. But then you read stories about women like Vashti and Esther. Women who are powerful. Fierce. Courageous. Bold. They dare to stand up to the men in their lives. They dare to be different. They refuse to accept the social and cultural restraints placed upon them.

One of the common mistakes we make when we read the Bible is to assume that because every word is "inspired" it must mean every word has God's endorsement. For example, I've seen our passage from today used to support all sorts of misogynist thinking. Rather than celebrate Queen Vashti's courage for refusing to bow down to the drunken wishes of an abusive king, they take the king's side. They worry that Vashti's example will cause all women to "look on their husbands with contempt" or they use Esther 1:22 where it talks about "every man being master in his own household" as a proof text for hierarchical notions of spiritual leadership. Such thinking is toxic and betrays a lack of understanding on how to appropriately interpret Scripture. Nowhere in the text does the king's behavior receive God's endorsement. In fact, God isn't mentioned a single time in the entire book! The reason this book is included in the Bible is to teach us how God often works behind the scenes through the courage of His people. People He strategically places in pagan culture to carry out His sovereign will. People like Esther for example. "The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity." (Esther 2:17-18) It's important to note the king's lecherous behavior never seems to change. He is a man driven by his unrestrained passions. As such, he is vulnerable to all sorts of manipulation. Left on his own, he would have killed all the Jews in his empire. But thankfully God was at work! Behind the scenes. Under the radar. Hidden from view. He orchestrates things in such a way that Esther is placed on the throne. And though she presumably has to endure some of the same abuse her predecessor Vashti did, she leverages her position to save her people.

We still live in a world full of abuse. A world where women are often dismissed, neglected, or ignored. A world where women are not treated as equals. They often do not receive equal pay or equal access or equal opportunity. Their rights are now being further eroded as more and more men identify as women. I know many men who are intimidated by strong women. I know many men who are afraid of strong women. I know many men who weaponize Scripture in order to subjugate women. Thankfully, Scripture itself attests to the truth that women are made in the image of God. Women are co-heirs to the Kingdom of God. Women are co-equals in the eyes of God. Furthermore, Scripture gives us example after example of women of deep faith who courageously buck their traditional cultural roles as they seek to serve and honor God. Jesus Himself affirmed the women who sacrificed everything to follow Him. They were among His first and most faithful disciples. I myself have been incredibly blessed to be married to a strong, godly woman and to be raising three strong, godly daughters. For the Christian,

“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28)

Readings for tomorrow: Esther 4-6, Acts 5:17-42

June 26, 2021
Suffering for Christ

Readings for today: Esther 4-6, Acts 5:17-42

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:8-11)

Something very powerful takes place when we share in the sufferings of Christ. The Apostle Paul experienced it as did the Apostles Peter and John and the new believers in Jerusalem. Christians throughout the ages have experienced it in places like Russia, China, Uganda, and Ethiopia. I have had the privilege of meeting many of them. Over the past ten years I have personally trained hundreds of church planters in the Horn of Africa. Many of them bear on their bodies the scars of the persecution they face on a daily basis. They’ve been threatened. Beaten. Shot. Stabbed. Imprisoned. Some of them have even died in the field. And still they go. When I ask them how I can pray over them, they never ask for personal safety but always for boldness to preach the gospel in the face of the opposition. It is deeply humbling and inspiring.

I think about these men and women when I read Acts 5. I love the boldness of those first believers. Peter and John are arrested, imprisoned, and tried for preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. They were not among the elite. They had no wealth. No power. No education. They were just ordinary men whom God used to proclaim an extraordinary message. The gospel stirred up the city - as it always does - and threatened those in power - as it always does. So Peter and John were threatened. They were roughed up. They were imprisoned. They were put on trial. But they return home praising God for the opportunity to share in the sufferings of Christ. They praised God for the persecution. Praised God for His sovereign will and plan. Praised God for the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” (Acts 5:41-42)

What do you pray for when you come against opposition? What do you pray for when you experience suffering and hardship? What do you pray for when you are in pain? For most of us, I imagine we pray for relief. Healing. Safety. Comfort. These are not necessarily bad things to pray but they certainly are not the most important things. The Apostle Paul experienced all these things and more in his life. He was mistreated, abused, left for dead. He gave up his home. His family. His livelihood. He sacrificed everything for the sake of knowing and serving Christ. And what did he gain in return? Christ. Peter and John and the early believers made similar sacrifices. They considered everything “rubbish” when compared to knowing and serving Christ. And what did they gain in return? Christ. What if - instead of safety and security - you prayed for boldness to proclaim the gospel? What if - instead of comfort and peace - you prayed for courage to share your faith? What if - instead of provision and protection - you prayed for God to use all that you are and all that you have - even your sufferings and pain - to grow His Kingdom in this world?

Readings for tomorrow: None

June 28, 2021
Theodicy

Readings for today: Esther 7-10, Job 1-2, Acts 6:1-7:22

Where is God in the midst of suffering? Why does He allow it? Is He complicit in it? Is there a point to it all? These questions are universal. Every single human being from every culture in every time and place has asked them. And all of the religions of the earth have attempted answers. The pagan witch doctors I've met in Ethiopia believe suffering happens because we displease the gods. We fail to make the right sacrifices. Fail to say the right magical incantations. Fail to humble ourselves before the right gods at the right times in the right ways. So they grow angry and they punish. The gods of the fields withhold their crops. The gods of the weather withhold the rain. The gods of the earth shake the very ground. On the flip side are my Buddhist friends for whom suffering is more of an illusion. A sign we are too tied to the cravings of this world. The way we deal with suffering is meditation which leads to a nirvana-like state that places us beyond suffering altogether. So how do Christians handle suffering?

The Book of Job is one, long extended answer to this important question and it forces us to confront some uncomfortable truths. First, God is sovereign. The Book of Job ultimately is not about Job. All agree Job is righteous. All resonate with Job's suffering. All feel Job's pain. He is us. We are him. Everyone who has experienced deep suffering in their lives can identify with this man. But the Book of Job makes it clear that Job's suffering is not the primary point of the story but rather how his suffering points us to the greater reality of God. It forces us to grapple with God's nature and character. It implicitly and intentionally raises fundamental questions like is God sovereign? And if He is, can He be trusted? Job's life is indeed marked by incredible sorrow and pain. He loses everything he has seemingly overnight. All that he has worked his entire life for is gone in an instant. Including his precious children. It's a brutal scene that plays itself out to this day all over the world. Tragedies strike. Natural disasters hit. Lives are lost and livelihoods go up in smoke. So what are we to make of these things? We certainly struggle to make any sense of them in this world so what Job does is give us a glimpse beyond the dimensions of this life into the dimensions of heaven where a scene is playing out that brings us face to face with the sovereignty of God.

Satan appears before God's throne. He has come from walking to and fro on the earth. Destruction and devastation in his wake. We catch a glimpse here into this fallen angel's pride and arrogance. The very fact that God doesn't obliterate him where he stands is itself stunning. But God has a greater end in mind. A greater purpose. He is going to use humankind (as He always does) to demonstrate His glory and power and victory over Satan and sin and death. So He baits Satan by asking him about Job. Satan takes the bait hook, line and sinker. God, in His majestic sovereignty, allows Satan to go after Job but always within limits. "Behold all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." "Behold, he is in your hand. Only do not take his life." And Satan plays his part with gusto. Relentlessly taking away all that Job has. Relentlessly attacking Job's health and well-being. Job's suffering is so great, his own wife tells him to "curse God and die." His three closest friends don't even recognize him. And yet in all these things, Job did not sin.

What we will learn throughout this book is that what Job treasures most - even amidst his anguish and pain and suffering and anger and questions and doubts and fears - is God Himself. More than his possessions. More than his children. More than his marriage. More than his health. Job treasures God. Job worships God. As John Piper writes, in the suffering of Job, "the superior worth of God becomes evident to all." What God cares most about is His own glory and our primary role as human beings - creatures made in God's own image - is to bring Him glory and declare His praises in this world and the

next. And lest we think we are simply caught up in some divine ego trip, let's remember God is not like us. His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts. He is infinite and we are finite and He sees things from His perspective that we simply cannot know or ever understand.

So where does that leave us? At the mercy of a cold and uncaring God who will strike at us at a whim? No. God loves us. Deeply. Dearly. Completely. And we bring Him great joy when we remain steadfast in our faith amidst our suffering. We bring Him great glory when we praise Him amidst our pain. Imagine the scene in heaven when Job utters his cry of victory, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Imagine the utter shame of Satan as he stands before Lord and the throngs of heaven join Job in his declaration of praise! Imagine his horror as all his evil plans come to naught in the face of true faith! Satan has been defeated!

Now fast forward several centuries. Imagine the same scene playing out before God as Satan comes to test His Son. Imagine the Father giving His Son over into Satan's hands. This time without limits. This time no holds barred. Imagine Satan's delight in the Garden as the Son begs for another way. Imagine Satan's joy as he watches the Son suffer on the Cross. And then imagine Satan's horror as the Son cries out, "It is finished! Into your hands I commit my spirit!" The cry of victorious faith coming at the point of death! Satan is defeated! This time once and for all! As Tim Keller has put it, Jesus is the greater Job who takes on our suffering in order to bring ultimate glory to the Father. And the Father vindicates the Son by raising Him from the dead just He will vindicate Job by restoring all he has and more.

Where you are you struggling today? What suffering have you had to endure in your life? How are you clinging to faith in the midst of it all? Would your perspective change if you saw your life as a trophy through which God displays His glory and grace? Do you believe God is sovereign over your pain? Do you believe God can be trusted even when you suffer?

Readings for tomorrow: Job 3-6, Acts 7:23-34

June 29, 2021
Vulnerable before God

Readings for today: Job 3-6, Acts 7:23-34

The true test of any relationship is vulnerability. How vulnerable can you be before that other person? How much can you share? Can you reveal your doubts and fears to them without being judged or condemned? You know, for years I struggled to be vulnerable before God. I was afraid to raise my doubts. I was afraid to talk to Him about how I was really feeling. I was afraid He would punish me or judge me or condemn me. This impacted my prayer life deeply. I found myself praying prayers that were not truly honest. I found myself speaking words that were not my own. It felt like I was often going through the motions which is probably why my prayer life was so dull and lifeless. I would read passages where Jesus would say things to His disciples like, "O you of little faith!" and it made me wonder if I could be real with God about my fears and failures. I would see so be condemned in the Bible because they doubted God's power or His purpose or they questioned His nature and character. Then I read the Book of Job.

Job is raw. It is real. It is honest. It's why it has such a hold on our imaginations. We love Job because he is us in many ways. Job is me when I lost my first child and railed at God in my grief. Job is me when the church plant I was leading imploded, leaving me broken and wounded and questioning my call. Job is me when my wife came to me during that season to tell me she was feeling so disconnected from me due to my neglect and something needed to change immediately. I remember shaking my fist at God night after night as I paced the living room of our home. I couldn't sleep. I could barely eat. I was so angry. So full of fear and anxiety. So broken over what had happened. And I blamed God for it all. Job is me when I come face to face with extreme suffering in places like Yabelo, Ethiopia or Kitgum, Uganda. Overwhelmed by the needs, I cry out to God. I wonder why He allows such pain. Job is me when I listen to stories of those who've been abused or terrorized or oppressed and I rage at God at the injustice. Why doesn't He step in and do something about all the evil in the world. In my darkest moments, I have even prayed like Job for the Lord to simply take me home. Take me from this world of pain and heartache and suffering to His world where I can be truly free and truly healed.

Job gives us permission - dare I say even encouragement - to be real before God. Vulnerable before the One who loves us more than we can ever imagine. The Book of Job stands as an invitation for us to enter into God's presence as we are. Not as we should be. Not as we ought to be. Not as we so often pretend to be. But as the broken and messed up people we truly are. As much as it hurts to read, I love Job's honesty... "Finally, Job cursed the day of his birth by saying to God: Blot out the day of my birth and the night when my parents created a son. Forget about that day, cover it with darkness, and send thick, gloomy shadows to fill it with dread. Erase that night from the calendar and conceal it with darkness... Why didn't I die at birth? Why was I accepted and allowed to nurse at my mother's breast? Now I would be at peace in the silent world below... I wish I had been born dead and then buried, never to see the light of day. In the world of the dead, the wicked and the weary rest without a worry.... Why does God let me live when life is miserable and so bitter? I keep longing for death more than I would seek a valuable treasure. Nothing could make me happier than to be in the grave." (Job 3:1-6, 11-13, 16-17, 20-22) Job reminds us that faith is a gritty enterprise. It requires us to hold on with a white-knuckle grip when everything around us seems to be falling apart. Sometimes things get to the point where we are barely holding on by our fingernails and yet even that is still faith. This, of course, is what Job's friends fail to understand. Sadly, it's also what the church often fails to understand. Depression doesn't signal a lack of faith. Suffering doesn't mean we've necessarily done something wrong.

Anger doesn't offend or scare God. On the contrary, being gut-wrenchingly honest before God about how we feel is the greatest act of faith one can possibly muster.

In the darkest moments of my life - what the ancients called the "dark night of the soul" - I have found God waiting for me. When I've shaken my fist in anger at Him and raged against how things have turned out in my life, I have found God holding me until I finally collapse in His arms in exhaustion. When I've suffered and been broken and wounded by the tragic events of my life, God has knelt down with me in the ashes and spoken words of comfort and peace over me. Friends, you are safe with God. You are secure with God. He longs to gather you like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. As the wonderful song says, "When I feel my faith will fail, He will hold me fast."

Readings for tomorrow: Job 7-9, Acts 7:35-8:3

June 30, 2021
Fundamental Reality of Grace

Readings for today: Job 7-9, Acts 7:35-8:3

These words from Job served as a helpful if not sobering reminder to me today. I am a blessed man. I live a blessed life. I live in a country where I am given incredible freedoms and opportunity. I live in a community where health and well-being are high values. I serve a church that loves the Lord and loves others well. I work alongside some of my best friends. I am married to one of my spiritual heroes. I have four children that I adore. I could not have charted a better course for my life. At the same time, it is so easy for me to fall into the entitlement trap. It is so easy for me to fall prey to the temptation that I have accomplished these things on my own. It is so easy to assume I must be righteous because of all these blessings. That's where these words from Job come in...

“But how can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times...How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser...If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?...Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself.” (Job 9:2-3, 14-15, 19-20, 32-35)

Job brings me face to face with the fundamental reality that undergirds my life. I am never righteous before God. I cannot contend with God. I have no ground to stand on before God. I have no evidence to plead my case. No justification for my sinful ways. I am not in the right. I can only appeal to God's mercy. I am not strong. I can only appeal to God's grace. I am not just. I can only appeal to God's clemency. I have no appeal. I have no hope. Except for Jesus. The one who pleads my cause. The one who takes up my case. The one who stands as mediator between me and the Father. The one who bled for me. The one who died for me. The one who took my place. He covers me. He atones for my sin. He blots out my transgressions. He cleanses me and makes me white as snow. When I stand before the Father, all I have is Christ. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else. Everything I might bring – my wealth, my position, my power, my achievements – all these things fall to dust before God. They are worthless. Only Christ is worthy.

Some might call such an outlook depressing. I call it beautiful. For life, at it's most fundamental level, is all grace. It's all a gift. Every moment. Every hour. Every day. Everything I've been given. Everything I've experienced. The joy. The pain. All of it is a gift from God's own hand. Something He uses to make me more like Christ if I will be let Him do His work. And if it is all grace, then I do not need to hold onto it. I do not need to grasp after it or cling to it. I can simply walk with open hands before the Lord, trusting Him to guide and direct my steps.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 10-12, Acts 8:4-25