

(Gaining God's Approval) 4. The testing of Job

Zac Poonen:

The biographies of men of God and of those who failed God have been written in the Bible for our instruction and our warning. There is much that we can learn, if we meditate on them, with an ear attuned to the voice of the Spirit.

When reading of people in the Old Testament, one fact that we must bear in mind is that they all lived in a period prior to the coming of 'grace' through Jesus Christ.

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." (Jn.1:17).

Therefore, even God did not expect them to rise to New Testament standards.

Matthew 19:8,9 gives us an illustration of this. There Jesus explained to the Pharisees why Moses permitted divorce under the old covenant. He said, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives". But under the new covenant, God takes away our hard heart and gives us a soft heart instead. And so divorce is not permitted now.

God is called "the God Who tests the righteous" (Jer. 20:12).

He does not tempt any man to do evil. "God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one." (Jas.1:13).

But He does TEST the righteous.

An Exemplary Man

Job was one of God's choice servants. God could point him out to Satan, as one man on earth who feared God in all his ways.

"The Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.'" (Job 1:8).

God says nothing about Job's intelligence or his talents or his wealth - for these have no value to God. He only points out his purity and his uprightness. As in the case of Jesus, it was Job's character and not his accomplishments or his ministry that delighted the heart of God.

Even Satan has supernatural gifts and intelligence. He has Bible-knowledge too!! What God looks for however, is character. When God tests us, He tests our character - not our knowledge of the Bible.

When God looks for a man whom He can boast in, whom He can point out to Satan, He looks for a man of character - a blameless and an upright man, one who fears God and hates evil.

We may have a reputation among other believers for our spirituality. But can God, Who knows us through and through, point us out to Satan? Such a certificate as God gave Job is greater than any earthly honour that we can ever get. All the empty honour of Christendom too is as useless rubbish compared to that.

So the most important question is not "What opinion do others have of my spirituality?" but rather "Can God point me out to Satan as one Whom He can boast in?"

Satan's First Step

When God told Satan about Job, Satan said that Job was serving God because he had benefited and profited thereby.

"Satan answered the Lord, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy

face." (Job 1:9-11).

God refuted that charge and allowed Satan to test Job to find out for himself that his charge was not true. God did that because He knew Job's integrity.

How about us? Do we serve God for material profit? Would God have to acknowledge that Satan was right, if Satan pointed to any of us as one who served God for personal gain?

Alas, India is filled with Christian workers and pastors who are in Christian work for personal gain - some for a salary, some for honour and position, and some in order to get free trips to Western countries. Anyone who does Christian work for personal gain is serving Mammon and not God. True service for the Lord will always cost us something.

Consider the words of David, when he was about to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. He said, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing." (2 Sam.24:24).

How few there are who have that spirit!

True service for the Lord will bring us material loss not gain. The profit will only be spiritual. That which brings material gain, on the other hand, belongs to Babylon and not to the heavenly Jerusalem.

The Bible says concerning spiritual Babylon, "The merchants of these things became rich from her" (Rev.18:15).

In the midst of self-seeking Christian workers, Paul could point to a Timothy as a rare exception. He said concerning him, "I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus." (Phil.2:19-21).

Paul was not deceived. He knew the spiritual condition of his co-workers. God isn't deceived concerning us either.

God had such confidence in Job that he could permit Satan to test him.

Even though Job lost all his children and his property in one day, yet he continued to worship and serve God. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:20-22).

He knew that all that he had - children and property and even health itself - were God's free gifts to him and that God had every right to take these away when He so desired. One cannot truly worship God until one has forsaken all - that is, given up the right to possess anything as one's own.

Satan's Second Step

God then allowed Satan to go one step further and to afflict Job with boils from head to foot.

Sickness is from Satan. But even that can be used by God to sanctify and perfect His servants.

Paul was afflicted by a thorn in the flesh, which he specifically says came from Satan. It was not a messenger of God but a messenger of Satan. Yet God allowed it to remain and would not remove it (despite Paul's repeated prayers), because it served the purpose of keeping Paul humble.

Paul says, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me - to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" (2 Cor.12:7-9).

Satan's Third Step

Satan's third step was to afflict Job through his wife.

"Then Job's wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9).

It can be quite a test of your sanctification, when your own wife turns against you and accuses you.

The Word of God commands: "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against themLove your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."(Col.3:19; Eph.5:25).

A husband must never be bitter against his wife under any circumstances, and he must love her at all times.

If you have a difficult wife, instead of complaining of your lot in life and envying others who have godly wives, you could look at your circumstances as a means to your own sanctification. God tests you under those very circumstances to see if you qualify to get His certificate of approval. He tests you, when your wife shouts at you and taunts you, to see whether you qualify to be a true representative of Jesus Who was even called insane by His own relatives.

The gospel record says, "Jesus' own people.....went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, 'He has lost His senses.'" (Mk.3:21).

Jesus bore that insult with patience. We are called to follow Him and to represent Him.

Satan's Fourth Step

Satan's fourth step was to accuse Job through his preacher-friends (Job chapters 4 to 25).

This was the hardest blow for Job to bear - because those preachers came to him and acted like prophets of God telling him that all his sicknesses were due to his secret sins. Little did those preachers realise that they were unconsciously acting as agents for the 'Accuser of the brethren' (Rev.12:10).

But God permitted them to do that in order to purify Job.

Overcoming Through Grace

Job lived in the pre-grace period and so could not live in constant triumph, as we can today.

Today God's promise is that "sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace."(Rom.6:14). But Job lived in an age when victory over sin was not possible. And so he finally fell a prey to self-pity, self-justification, depression and gloom. Occasionally his faith shone through the darkness. But his was an up-and-down experience.

Now that grace has come through Jesus Christ, if we are tested similarly, there is no need for even a moment of depression or gloom. The commands in the New Testament are "Be anxious for nothingrejoice in the Lord always.....give thanks for everything..." etc., (Phil. 4:6,4).

Such commands were not given in the Old Testament, because grace had not yet come. But now we can see God's hand in everything and now grace is available at every moment to keep us victorious constantly.

Paul's triumphant cry was "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ." (2 Cor.2:14).

We can be overcomers now, even if we lose our property and our children, or if our wives accuse us, or if fellow-believers misunderstand us and criticise us, or if anything else happens that God sees fit to send into our lives.

Thus God demonstrates to Satan that He has a remnant on earth, who will not only submit to all His dealings with them, but who will also accept every trial joyfully, convinced that these light afflictions are designed by God to produce for them an eternal weight of glory.

The Bible says, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." (2

Cor.4:17,18).

A Testimony to Satan and his Hosts

The New Testament tells us that God desires to show His wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies through the church.

Ephesians 3:10 says, "In order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."

Ephesians 6:12 tells us that those rulers are the evils spirits in the heavenly places.

The things that befall us are not accidental, but specifically planned for us and weighed out (so that they will never be beyond our capacity to bear) "according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23) - with the dual aim of transforming us unto the likeness of Christ, and of manifesting to Satanic spirit-rulers in the heavenlies that God still has a people on earth who will love, obey and praise Him, in faith, in all circumstances.

Every trial that we go through is a trial of our faith. Even in Job's time, he could say, "God knows every detail of what is happening to me." (Job. 23:10-Living).

Today we can go one step further and say (on the basis of Romans 8:28) that "God PLANS every detail concerning me."

Do we really believe, concerning everything that comes across our path, that God has planned it all in perfect wisdom and love, and that His power is almighty enough to deliver us from the testing, when the right time comes?

Will God find in you and me those whom He can boldly point out to Satan as men who will never complain or grumble under any circumstance, but who will only give thanks for all things at all times?