

## Articles and Sermons :: Contending with the silence of heaven: A study from Job.

**Contending with the silence of heaven: A study from Job., on: 2014/7/20 5:15**

### INTRODUCTION.

Many identify with Job because they see themselves or others as victims, expressing their disappointment towards a silent God, for failing to step in to prevent their suffering, due to not understanding that Job's contention was not over this issue. In this essay, I propose that Job was fully submitted to the will of God, the true remedy for the lack of peace and joy in his people, as Paul writes: I am overjoyed in all affliction 2 Cor. 7.4, and that his grief was due to the loss of his sense of God's presence and therefore the silence of heaven, which resulted from the challenge the accuser made, that the principle of love, under the New Covenant, is not superior to that of control. The challenge was that God should step down from his throne if Job could be proven to be unholy, not serving out of love alone as R. Sutherland said, and the best that God could produce.

### LIGHT.

Job's reaction to sudden and profound loss, was to accept it with grace as if from the hand of God, with thanksgiving and praise. We are presented with a man who walks in the Spirit, a faithful servant of Almighty God. Later he would lament:

Oh that I were as in the months of old  
as in the days when God watched over me  
when his lamp shone over my head and by his light  
I walked through darkness when I was in my prime. 29.2-4.

'It did not matter whether deep darkness might be around him for, by the light of God, he saw the path, and was able to walk with him through darkness' explains J. Penn-Lewis. For Job, each successive blow is accepted magnanimously: The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. 1.21. On recounting his past experiences 29.23, Job does not speak of his worldly loss, but expresses his grief about his loss of light, or in other words, the presence of God.

Paul H. Jones writes that Job believed in the law of karma but I posit that he was demonstrating that he knew that his children were still operating under the old covenant, when he made sacrifice for them, which was also the theology of the 'friends' whereas he himself lived now in the light of the New Covenant or love, which can be shown by his acceptance of evil as being non retributive: Shall we receive the good from the hand of God and not receive the bad? 2.10. Job is shown to be a holy man, walking in the light, having put on the righteousness of God.

### INTO DARKNESS AND SILENCE.

The story moves on to where his 'friends' join him in the ash-pit outside of the city walls. The thing which he had dreaded the most, had occurred, leaving him speechless: The heavens were silent; God had departed, and creation has seemingly been reversed. This situation, known by others who walk closely with God, has been called 'The Dark Night of the Soul' by St John of the Cross. The deserted lover in this case is not at fault and sought him but found him not, Song of Solomon 3.1. Likewise from J.S. Bach:

If each day is filled with sorrow  
And lamentation does not vanish  
Ah, then this pain must  
Pave the way to death  
My dearest God lets me  
Still call in vain.

Job pleads, Make me know my transgressions and my sin, 13.23. All of the understanding of his past dealings with God were being demolished because there is silence regarding his request and readiness to repent, had he inadvertently

y sinned. His claim to sinlessness was due to light given, but now, circumstances lead him to believe that his convictions are in doubt, which brought extreme confusion and despair.

As D. Tidball says 'His theology tells him that he ought not to be ignored by God at such a time as this. His experience tells him that he is being deserted by God. The God whom he has trusted until now, is he believes, a God of power who answers prayer and saves people in need.'<sup>6</sup> But Job feels that God has become his enemy and is attacking him, the name YHWH being changed to El-Shaddai denoting destruction Is. 13.6, in the poetic section of the book 3.1- 42.6. To deal with El-Shaddai is a bitter and terrible experience, as in: Call me Mara (bitter) for El-Shaddai has dealt bitterly with me , Ruth 1.20, noted by J. G. Janzen. <sup>7</sup>

#### VOICES.

I believe that we may interpret the voices of the four friends, as trains of thought personified, which run through Job's mind during this period of utter darkness, as human understanding and the accuser's arrows are pitted against the light which he had previously received, if we consider the following: he claims that he is deserted by family and friends 16.7; 19.13; he is in a place of isolation and shame, where those with infectious diseases dwell, and it seems unlikely to me that his 'friends' would take a risk in entering such a place, showing such loyalty, the reality being, that when calamity strikes, friends are most often, nowhere to be seen; and also because one of the distinguishing marks of being in the 'dark night' is that one finds oneself deserted by all, as the presence of friends would have given a degree of comfort, despite their differing theologies.

The depth of suffering can be appreciated with more clarity, moreover, if one considers that Job goes through a trial of extreme confusion with the contest taking place in his mind and which enables us to identify with it more easily in a similar trial.

There is also the matter of the style of the speeches, where there is no direct communication, the reasoning going round and round in circles and often called wind 8.2; 15.2; 16.3, and which is confirmed when God speaks out of the whirlwind 38.1 denoting confusion. Gutierrez describes it helpfully as ' the arguments are like a wheel spinning in the air.'

#### TEMPTATION

Job is taunted throughout the speeches, by two thoughts, the first of which has been the temptation of the enemy since the beginning: Did God say? Genesis 3.1. God had declared Job sinless, and the accuser desired that Job would doubt it, losing his testimony. The voices taunted him with the thought that if indeed he was sinless, then God would have no reason to withdraw. If Job admitted he was not, then God would restore him as he desired. The issue was over Job's righteousness, and what is special about Job, is that he brings illumination to the severest of trial in the spiritual realm with which Jesus himself also had to contend, that is the seeming desertion of God in the hour of need of his most devout servants.

In this crucible, the words of the sufferer seem beyond comprehension, being so exaggerated and dramatic. We find the same also with Jeremiah, David, and Christian mystics. Job responds with increasing confusion until he reaches the depth of despair.

#### RESOLUTION

Finally, we see the curtain drawn back as God returns and speaks, as we are given a glimpse of the administration of the heavenly and earthly realms, where love and freedom rules, and not might, as we are shown the freedom that God gives his creation, and which has been denied to him by the demands made by Job in his grief.

Job finally understands the purpose of the silence for himself and also for those who are willing to do all things without murmuring and arguing so that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish, Phil. 2.14-15.

#### CONCLUSION.

Job is convicted and repents. Without the light of God, which was his only claim to holiness, he fell into sudden darkness, because he needed to learn not to lean on his own understanding in his holy state, depending instead on the light of God to guide him, but rather than become angry, he saw that even enjoyment of the presence of God must be given up willingly to worship the giver of the gift and not the gift itself. He is validated in that he had spoken correctly about God, t

hat the trial was not because he sinned, and the accuser(s) were wrong. Finally, 'Job reflects the gratuitous love of God' 6 as P. H. Jones puts it, wanting nothing for himself, happy to allow God to grace with his presence at his choosing, and to embrace darkness. Job's maturity/union is complete.

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**Re: Contending with the silence of heaven: A study from Job. - posted by rookie (), on: 2014/7/20 10:10**

"I believe that we may interpret the voices of the four friends, as trains of thought personified, which run through Job's mind during this period of utter darkness, as human understanding and the accuser's arrows are pitted against the light which he had previously received,"

.....

I believe Scripture clearly states that these are real people who loved Job. I believe that this is an illustration of men acknowledging the ways of God in their attempt to bring healing to their friend. How often do we try to diagnose our fellow believer's unrighteousness?

I believe that the main thing to be learned from the interaction between Job and his friends is that: who can know what God is working out in the one that is being taught? The only One that can heal is Christ.

.....

"Job is convicted and repents. Without the light of God, which was his only claim to holiness, he fell into sudden darkness, because he needed to learn not to lean on his own understanding in his holy state, "

Paul writes:

Phl 3:8

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

Phl 3:9

and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

I believe God's work in Job was to give him this understanding which Paul had also come to realize through his relationship with Christ.....

"and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;"

And what is the nature of the fruit of this precept?

Phl 3:10

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Phl 3:11

if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Phl 3:12

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.