

Job #2: The Soul's Searching

by Stephen Kaung

The sermon explores Job's profound spiritual journey through suffering and the search for understanding amidst confusion and debate with his friends.

Duration: 48:56

Scripture: Job 1:21, Job 2:10, Psalm 22:6

Topics: "Suffering And Faith", "Spiritual Struggle"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Job and his friends in the Bible. He suggests that the conversations between Job and his friends can be seen as an allegory or parable representing the inner struggles of the human soul before God. The preacher emphasizes the importance of having a naked soul before God, stripped of all external factors, in order to truly understand oneself. He also highlights the conflict between the will of Job and the will of his friends, representing the internal battle within a person. The sermon concludes with Job expressing his deep anguish and questioning the purpose of his suffering.

Transcript

Dear brothers and sisters, when Job was plunged into this spiritual crisis, he was able to stand up spiritually and say, naked I came and naked I return. God gives and God takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

When he was tested, he could say, shall we not receive evil as we have received good from God? Very courageous. Very victorious. Satan was silenced.

God was honored. At the spur of the moment, when all these things suddenly came to him, he was able to stand for God. He was able to show and love, disinterested love, pure love to us.

He was able to do that out of all the spiritual reserves. You know, he didn't have a time to reflect. All things came so suddenly.

You do not even have the time to reflect. He reacted almost automatically, spontaneously. And you find this reaction was of God.

Naked I came, naked I return. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Why is it that Job has such instantaneous reaction, such marvelous reaction? At the spur of the moment, it shows there was spiritual reserve.

You know, if you say something after reflection, that does not represent you. But what you say at the spur of the moment shows what? It shows that Job has spiritual reserve in him. Oh, but dear God, this reserve is nothing.

He was able to withstand the attacks of the enemy. He was able to withstand the assault of the adversary. But you'll find when his three friends come from chapter 3 to chapter 31, we call it soul search.

Now, of course, I do believe that Job is a real person. I do believe that his three friends are real people. I do believe that what is recorded in these chapters are true.

There is no doubt there is a discussion going on, a debate going on among these friends. And you'll find the discussion is most interesting, and the debate is very heated. But dear brothers and sisters, may I suggest a way to read these chapters.

Now remember, I do believe these are historical records put in poetical form. But these are facts, real persons, real discussions, real debates. But I would like to put it in an allegorical or parable form.

By parable, I do not mean that it is not true and real. Because this is the way Job used the word parable. He continued his parable, and yet his parable relates to his real experience.

But what I mean is this. I would like to present these chapters in the form of a naked soul as it stands before God. It goes through a time of deep searching.

The words of Job and the words of his three friends represent what are going on within one's own being. The voice of Job and the voices of his three friends are the voices of his soul. He was musing with himself.

Things were going on within that soul. His soul being naked is being searched. Whether that makes sense to you or not, I don't know.

It makes sense to me. A soul naked. Brothers and sisters, you'll never know your soul until it is stripped naked.

When you have all your sons and daughters and all your possessions, when you have all your virtues, when you have all your works and knowledge, you're not able to penetrate to the very depths of your soul and know it. That is the reason why God has to strip us. And when we are in a state of nakedness, then you'll find a deep soul searching and we are being cut out.

I find it very difficult. I have to go to chapter 30 now. You see, if you want to know exactly what's going on, you have to compare chapter 29 and chapter 30.

There in chapter 29, Job tried to tell us in the days of his prosperity, when the Lord preserved him, oh what a life he lived. A life of enlightenment, of illumination. A life full of good works.

And he thought he could go on peacefully to the end. But there was a secret fear, fearing it might not be so. You see the point? But when you read chapter 30, you'll find that it was just a picture.

Entirely different. He became the song of all people. He was mocked, despised.

Someone suggests it's almost like a picture of the suffering of our Lord Jesus. If you try to compare chapter 30 with some of the verses in Psalms concerning the Messiah, how the Lord will suffer, you'll find

there are parallels all along. All along.

Here you'll find a person is stripped of everything. And he is going through a period. If only God will remain with him.

If only God will make him known that he is with him, he can bear all these things. But he cannot. He's confused.

Puzzled. Some people will like to call this the dark night of the soul. Or you may call it the deeper working of the soul.

It is when a person is put under such, then you'll find he begins to know the real condition. Well, let's begin. His three friends come, came to see him.

They were his friends. His best friends. They love him very much.

They came from great distances. They came with a purpose of comforting him. But of course, before they arrive at the site, they must have talked among themselves.

And they had come to a common agreement, even before they came. When they came and saw Job sitting in the dung hill among the ashes, they could not recognize. How a prince! They saw his agony was so great.

They couldn't open their mouth. They sat with him seven days. You can see the greatness, the depths Job could stand.

The sudden attacks of the enemy. But he cannot, could not stand the sympathy of something was going on in his soul. All these things he did not understand.

So finally he broke out, incursing the day of his birth. It is better not to live. It is better to die before one lives.

There is comfort and peace in death, in the grave. Why should I see light and love? What is the meaning of all this? Why does not God allow me to die? One who has so bravely said, shall we not receive evil from God as we have received good? And now this very person said, brothers and sisters, is it a contradiction? Why is it that Job could stand so bravely before the enemy and capitulate it before his friend? Is it a contradiction? No. You know in the time of crisis, we may get up all our spiritual reserve and meet the crisis and seem to overcome it.

You begin to reflect. And as you reflect a reaction, very often in our spiritual experiences, being at a great victory, there will be what? Because you have exhausted your reason. The most difficult, the most trying time is not at the time of crisis.

It is at the time immediately as Job began to reflect. And because he could not understand, he could not deny God. He knew God.

He could not overthrow the basic axiom of the universe, that God punishes the evil, but God rewards the righteous. He cannot overthrow that axiom. And yet he feels himself righteous.

How can he reconcile these things? And because all the sufferings outside and the misery within, he would rather die. You know this often happens when we come into a time of confusion and disturbance and perplex. We tend to think that way too.

It is better to die than to live. We do not know the privilege of living. We do not know that God is the God of the living and not the God of the dead.

We tend to forget that there is a meaning to life. Why should we be here? Why is it that God does not take away our life? It is because God has a purpose to fulfill, to accomplish in us. And yet brothers and sisters, sometimes when we are thinking of our own trouble, we become so self-centered that we forget God's purpose.

We rather die to get some comfort for ourselves. Oh, how a mighty prince. Now these three friends, after they had heard Job cursing the day of his birth, they began to tease.

They came as friends, as the best of friends, but they almost departed as the worst of the enemy. Before we go into details, a little detail, you know the principle or the truth that the three friends held over Job was just this. God punished the evil.

God rewarded the good. To them this is a truth that is basic, firm, unchangeable. And when they saw the sufferings of Job, they couldn't understand, but they tried to understand, and to their limited understanding, this was it.

It must be that secretly you had sinned greatly, and that was the reason why you were punished. Confess your sin to God, and the days of comfort will come, days of refreshment will come from God. This was the only thing they couldn't say, and this was the only thing they knew.

Is it truth? If you overthrow this truth, the whole universe will become a chaos. Of course God is just. Of course God is the judge of the whole earth.

Of course God punishes the wicked. Of course God rewards the righteous. This is the basic truth of the universe.

How can you overthrow this? If you overturn this basic truth, everything is chaotic. The three friends hold on, held on to this truth. A truth, but not, it is true, but universally true, but the application of it has to be done by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, in individual cases, there can be exceptions. Not in the sense of overturning the truth, but there may be other truth, truth other than this basic. So dear brothers and sisters, this is something we have to learn.

Sometimes we hold on to a truth, and try to generalize it, and apply it to everybody, but you remember, it is truth, but sometimes the application cannot be generalized. God may have other truth, applying at a certain time to a certain person, other than that basic one. God is dealing with Job, or a higher truth.

Then God has not overturned the basic truth, you will see afterwards, but God is dealing with him at that particular point, with a higher truth, even of child training. It's different. But of course, at that time, they did not know it.

So the three friends insisted that Job must have sinned, and the more they insisted, the more Job rebelled. He said, I was not, I was righteous. The dilemma of Job is, he couldn't overturn this basic truth, and yet he found this cannot be applied to him, and he didn't know why.

That's the reason why all the confusions came about. Sorry, I haven't started. All right, let's get down to business.

Here you'll find a soul, exposed, fully exposed. A soul that was stripped. A soul that entered into a crucible of trial.

A soul that undergoes the process of the deeper working, but a soul that does not. He dares not deny God, nor the righteousness of God, but he cannot give up his own righteousness. So here comes Eliphaz.

You know, Eliphaz represents outwardly mysticism, inwardly the emotion. Eliphaz was the first spokesman. He was the leader.

And he came out trying to instruct Job. And all his instructions were based upon some mystic. If you read the book of Job, you'll find that.

He said, Now to me a word was secretly brought, and my ear received a whisper thereof. In thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on me, fear came on me, and trembling, and made all my bones to shake. And a spirit passed before my face.

The hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still. I could not discern the appearance thereof.

A form was before my eyes. I heard a slight murmur and a voice. Shall a mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be purer than his Maker? Lo, he trusted not his servants, and his angels his charges with folly.

How much more than that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed as the moth? He based all his instruction upon secret. My hair stood up. I was frightened.

Then I heard a murmur. Shall a mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be purer than his Maker? So he must be, you have said. Very mystic, isn't it? His whole experience was based upon mysticism.

Something mysterious. A spirit. Now brothers and sisters, in a very broad sense, every Christian is a mystic.

Because by mystic it simply means one who seeks God with his heart. One who seeks an inner experience. So in a very general sense, every Christian is a mystic.

Because we have to know God inwardly. Otherwise we don't know him. Mysticism.

May I use this opportunity just to fellowship with you something on mysticism? Mysticism, as the world knows today, is not restricted to Christianity. But with the mysticism that the world knows today, there are a few things which we should know. They believe there is a spark of divine life in each person.

And all you need to know is to bring out. We do not have life in us. Life is in Christ.

It's only when we believe in the Lord Jesus. So that is where the mystic starts on a wrong problem. Secondly, the mystics, in a sense, trust in the merits of their own suffering.

They think that there is merit in suffering. In other words, they cannot get away from the things of doing penance. We know that.

We are forgiven. Not because of how much we suffer, but because. Thirdly, the mystics do not see the difference between the soul and the spirit.

To them, it's a mixture. Very often you'll find in the writings of the mystics, things highly spiritual mixed with deeply spiritual. The mystics has the tendency of falling into emotion.

They mistake emotion for spiritual. We do not know who that spirit that appeared to Eliphaz. It could not be the right spirit.

It say the right word. Yes. But it might not be the right spirit.

We do not know what spirit is that. All the testing of is something that God wants us to do. If not only every spirit is good, there are good spirits, and you have to.

So outwardly we may say that Eliphaz represents mysticism. When a person has come into a crisis, a spiritual crisis, mysticism tries to explain it. Mysticism tries to solve it.

Saying that there is merit in suffering. That punishment itself is a purification. Yes.

Sometimes you find good things in mysticism. Because Eliphaz mentioned this matter of correction. God may be correcting you, but to him correction is more negative than positive.

It is more punishment than child forming, son forming. But sometimes you find there are lights coming out in mysticism, but it does not solve a spirit. Or you may take Eliphaz as the emotion of the soul.

Here you find one is emotionally involved. Oh, our emotion. When we enter into a kind of crisis, then our emotion will begin to stir.

And we are emotionally involved. We begin by trying to justify God. Our emotion seems to stand for God and with God.

Can a mortal man be more just than God? Impossible. But you'll find our emotion never stalls. In answering Eliphaz, Job also said he was terrified in his dreams and vision.

Yes, you say that you have a mystic experience. Saying that can a man be more just than God? But I have also such dreams and vision. And I was nearly crushed.

One emotion says God is just. The other emotion says, but I'm righteous too. How are you going to reconcile these two things? And you'll find in the third round, Eliphaz, seeing that he could not subdue Job by emotional appeal, saying that you better repent and God will be good to you.

So finally, an accused Job of many things which were un... Isn't that our emotion? Our emotion is fickle and changeable. At one time, we justify God. At another time, we try to justify.

At one time, we try to make appeal. At other times, we get angry. We enter into false accusation even.

We are all emotionally stirred. Can it represent? The conversation between Eliphaz and Job represents the stirring of the emotion. Now, dear brothers and sisters, when you come to your own experience, you'll

find that when you enter into a spiritual crisis, your emotion will be the first thing.

And you'll find your emotion is very changing from one position to another position. And it can be very unreasonable. It's not rational.

But after you have gone through the searching in the emotion of your soul, you come out. Emotion never sows. The second one.

Bildad and Job. Bildad represents outwardly, traditionalism. Inwardly, the mind.

Because you'll find in chapter eight, verse eight, For inquire, I pray thee, of the former generation, and attend to the researchers of their fathers. For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing. For our days upon earth are a shadow.

Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee an utter word out of their heart? Bildad did not base his instruction upon mystic experience. He based his teaching upon the tradition of the fathers. He said, Now, we, we, we, we knew nothing.

But our fathers had made researchers. And surely their conclusion cannot be wrong. And what was their conclusion? God will never pervert his judgment.

The wicked will be punished. And the good will be rewarded. The tradition of the fathers.

Now, brothers and sisters, tradition is not altogether bad. You know, sometimes we can go to extremes. The good thing of tradition is, it does stabilize society, isn't it? If there is no tradition, society is not stabilized.

Of course, the bad thing is, it hinders progress. It can be a strengthening. But it can be a bondage, too.

We should not throw away our traditions. They are Christian traditions, which we have to. And this is the very word used by Paul.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 2, Paul used this very word, tradition. He commanded the people in Corinth, because they keep the tradition. The instruction.

There are traditions coming from the Lord, handed to us by the apostles, which we must keep. For instance, the lost table. When I was in New Zealand, you know, among the saints there, they were so free in the Lord, and they want to free from all bondages, that this matter of the lost table became a problem.

Every Sunday they had the lost table prepared, but put in a corner. Why? Because they never knew whether they would break the bread or not. If the spirit or soul leave, they will break the bread.

If not, they will just leave it unbroken. And the reason was, some young people thought, we shouldn't keep tradition. Therefore, we should not have the lost table every Sunday.

Just as the Lord leads. Is that spiritual? This is one of the traditions that we must keep. Tradition is not altogether bad, if it comes from God.

And in 2 Thessalonians, the second chapter, you'll find the same thing. Paul said you keep the traditions. Things that come down from God through the apostles.

Something we have to keep. Of course, keep in spirit. Not just in form.

That's important. But it is the tradition of the Fathers that we must be freed from. It is the tradition of the Fathers that our Lord Jesus opposed Himself.

Why? Because they keep the tradition of the Fathers to the extent they break the law of God. That becomes a bondage. Brothers and sisters, never be bound by the traditions of the Fathers.

But we have an obligation. Well, Belded based all his teachings on tradition. And it is the tradition of the Fathers.

But Joe found himself not under any obligation towards because he found there are instances, and especially in his own case, that traditional teaching did not apply. Well, inwardly, Belded represents the mind. When we enter into a crisis, our mind begins to, our mind begins to search.

To search for an answer. But brothers and sisters, whether it is the mind represented by Belded, or the mind represented by Joe, the mind influenced by the traditions of the Fathers, or the mind free to move, neither solves. Do not think that because you have a mind that is free from tradition, therefore you find a solution.

You don't. Our light. It is only in His light, no matter how much you search, you won't find.

It will only confuse. And then the third person, Sopha. Sopha represents outwardly dogmatism, inwardly the will.

You know, there is a difference between doctrine and dogma. Sometimes we should be a little bit careful with the use of words. Sometimes we say we don't want any doctrine.

You have to. If you have no doctrine, you have no truth. You have no basis for spiritual experience.

Doctrine is teaching. Doctrine is truth. The doctrine of the New Testament.

That's the basis of our faith. How can you do without doctrine? You cannot. Yes, doctrine alone is not enough.

There must be experience following the doctrine. But you cannot say, I don't want doctrine. If you don't want doctrine, you don't have experience.

Because everything is based upon doctrine, upon truth. But dogma, yes. Dogma is an arrogant assertion of a certain teaching with force, as if it is an established fact.

That's a dogma. We should not be dogmatic, but certainly we should know the truth, and the truth shall set us free. The application of the truth is flexible.

Be in the hand of the Holy Spirit. But dogma is in the hand of man, of human institution. It is fixed in black.

So here you'll find Zophar came with dogmas. God punishes the wicked. God rewards the good.

Therefore, you must have sin. But the more you try to force a person by dogma, the more that person will rebel. It is a test of wills.

The will of Zophar against the will of Job. And both have iron will. None will give up.

It simply represents the two sides of our will. Sometimes I will say, well, let me believe. But that will again rebels.

I cannot. But I'm righteous. I cannot.

You see, it is the conflict of the will. So here you'll find the picture. In these chapters you'll find a soul searching.

This soul that is naked before God is going through deep searchings in the realm of the emotion, in the realm of the mind, and in the of the will. Every department of his soul is being searched. Struggle and strive.

The whole process is not a waste. Because in the process of soul searching, sometimes you... Oh, it is very interesting if you read these chapters and try to find out these sparks of divine light penetrating into the darkened soul. For instance, when Job couldn't argue with his friend, his friend just wouldn't believe him, Job said, but my witness is in heaven.

That's the only hope. And when Job tries to defend himself, he said, if you slay me, I will yet trust him. And he breaks out with my Redeemer living.

And at last, I shall stand. You'll find from time to time these lights breaks out into the darkened soul. So far as the soul is concerned, after the deep searching, nothing there that will the crisis.

Nothing there that will bring the crisis. Dear brothers and sisters, but this process is necessary. When you go through a spiritual crisis, invariably you'll find there will be searchings.

It is not altogether unprofitable. It tells us the utter incompetence in solving spiritual problems. If there is a solution, it has to come.

And that is the second part. I simplify a great deal this morning, but I think that is all we can say for the present. And I do hope that as you read these chapters, maybe you'll bear these in mind and see if they will help you to understand.

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