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THE FAILURES OF JOB

In the first message we considered how various people treated Job rather badly and regarded him to be in a poor state during the trials because he appeared that way to them. In reality, God appreciated Job and, as we saw at the end of the Book of Job, vindicated and commended him.

We also considered Job's context and the severity of the trials that he went through to appreciate how difficult it was for him so that we could understand why James 5:11 commends him as one who endured patiently in spite of the fact that he did falter in the midst of the trials and said various things which were improper, and why Ezekiel 14:14 holds him up as an example of a man of righteousness. Under the very difficult circumstances, though he faltered, he fared relatively well.

In the second message, we considered what ought to be our posture, response and attitude towards God under all circumstances. We saw that this is a crucial issue for us to grasp and to settle clearly in our own lives. The proper posture that we should adopt is one of unwavering faith and confidence in God and in His ways, accompanied by unceasing worship, praise, thanksgiving, appreciation and joyful submission to God and to His perfect wisdom, together with steadfast love and commitment to Him and to the truth whatever the circumstances. This is the basis for a proper, deep and stable relationship with God.

In this message, we shall concentrate on analysing Job's failures. Specifically, we want to seek answers from the Scriptures to the questions, "Why did Job falter? What were the areas of weakness in him?"

Job's commitment to truth and righteousness

It is helpful for us to remind ourselves that there were significant positive qualities in Job's life. In particular, Job had a deep love for and commitment to truth and righteousness. This was a strong point in his life. We can see this aspect of his life from several verses in the Scriptures.

Job 1:1 describes him as a man who was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. We read of God's appreciation and commendation of Job in like manner in Job 1:8 and 2:3. The words used to describe Job in these verses give a clear indication of righteous living and commitment to righteousness and goodness. In Ezekiel 14:14, Job was held up as an example of a man of righteousness.

This quality of righteousness in the life of Job was likely to be a major factor that enabled him to fare rather well even though the trials were very difficult. Job 27 reveals more on this aspect of Job's life.

Job 27:5-6

5 "Far be it from me that I should declare you right;
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
6 "I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go.
My heart does not reproach any of my days.

Righteousness and integrity meant much to Job and he held fast to the fact that he had been basically living righteously. This enabled him to continue in the ways of God generally, because the ways of God are righteous and good. Note the following words Job uttered when he was going through the difficulties.

Job 23:11-12

11 "My foot has held fast to His path;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.
12 "I have not departed from the command of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.

Though he could not find God (Job 23:3), and was troubled by various queries in his mind as to why God allowed him to go through the difficulties, he continued to keep the ways of God and did not depart from God's commandments because he loved righteousness and goodness. He treasured the words of God's mouth because he recognised that God's ways are righteous and good. From his recollection of the past as narrated by him in Job 29, a strong feature that comes through is Job's sense of justice and concern for the poor and the oppressed. He was a man deeply committed to righteousness and goodness.

Deficiencies in Job

However, Job did falter in the midst of the severe testing because there were deficiencies in him. We can identify three related areas of weakness:

1. Deficiency in knowledge of God

Job apparently had difficulties in this area. We see evidence of this in Job 9:

Job 9:20-24

20 "Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me;
Though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty.
21 "I am guiltless;
I do not take notice of myself;
I despise my life.

22 "It is all one; therefore I say,
'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.'
23 "If the scourge kills suddenly,
He mocks the despair of the innocent.
24 "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
He covers the faces of its judges.
If it is not He, then who is it?

Job thought that God was against him even though he had been living righteously. He also thought that God was unfairly afflicting him though he was guiltless. These thoughts about God were wrong because the perfect God will neither go against those who are truly righteous nor declare the guiltless guilty. Job was not sufficiently clear and steadfast in his knowledge of God and faith in Him as the perfect Almighty God, One who does not make mistakes. If he were clear, he would have known that the words he had spoken were not right and he would not have said that God had wronged him (Job 19:6).

Such misconceptions, misunderstandings and wrong ideas affected Job's confidence in God and his posture towards God during the trials. In other words, Job did not have unwavering and unquestioning faith in God. Instead, he wavered with regard to the being of God and His ways.

However, Job did not hold such wrong notions of God in a firm way; neither was his faith and confidence in God that shaky. In reality, Job had a reasonably deep faith in God and confidence in Him. We have already seen how at the beginning, despite facing severe trials, he continued to worship God and how God commended and appreciated him. In the first message, we referred to several verses that indicate that even as Job wavered and faltered in the midst of the severe testing, he still affirmed from time to time his faith in God and God's justice, ways and words. It is worth referring once again to some of these verses to highlight this point.

Job 6:10

"But it is still my consolation,
And I rejoice in unsparing pain,
That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

Job 13:15

"Though He slay me,
I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

Job 13:18

"Behold now, I have prepared my case;
I know that I will be vindicated.

Job 23: 10-11

10 "But He knows the way I take;

When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
11 "My foot has held fast to His path;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.

Job believed that God knew what he was going through and that when God had tried him, he would come forth as gold. He believed all that he had been going through would make him a better person. Although he was perplexed, disturbed and had expressed doubts about the character and being of God and His ways, there were also firm positive affirmations. Job continued to treasure the words of God; he still expressed an attitude of trust in Him.

As we reflect on the total picture, one thing about Job stands out, and that is, although Job had faith in God, he was not sufficiently steadfast in his knowledge of God and confidence in Him. This was one main reason why he wavered.

We should of course bear in mind that Job did not have the Scriptures as we have today. There is much revelation in the Scriptures about God that Job did not have access to. Apparently Job was unaware of the activities of Satan and the powers of darkness. He lacked knowledge in many areas that we can have today. However, although much precious truth has been revealed in the Scriptures for our understanding, many believers today are sadly lacking in knowledge and conviction pertaining to various basic issues of the Christian faith.

I will move on to another area where Job failed in the midst of the severe testing.

2. Deficiency in spirit of humility before God

We shall examine a few passages.

Job 21:4

"As for me, is my complaint to man?
And why should I not be impatient?

The spirit of Job's words was not right. Job felt that he had the right to be impatient. His complaints and impatience indicated that he lacked a spirit of humble submission to God and His ways.

In Job 3, when Job cursed the day he was born, both the content of his words and the spirit in which they were spoken were wrong. This also revealed Job's improper posture towards God. If he had properly understood his relationship with God, he would have realised that it was wrong for him to have that kind of attitude. Though some may say that it was his pain, suffering and frustration that made him utter such words, his response did indicate deficiency in the spirit of humility and humble submission to God. Let's consider another verse, Job 19:6.

Job 19:6

Know then that God has wronged me

And has closed His net around me.

The manner of utterance of these words was not proper. If Job had maintained his proper position before God, he would not have spoken in this way. Job could have said, "I don't understand why God is allowing these things to happen to me or why God is doing these things to me." We see a similar failure in the following verses:

Job 10:1-3

1 "I loathe my own life;
I will give full vent to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
2 "I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me;
Let me know why You contend with me.
3 'Is it right for You indeed to oppress,
To reject the labor of Your hands,
And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?"

Job gave vent to complaints and the bitterness of his soul. When we read Job 1 and 2, we could see that, compared to many others, there was a relatively meaningful reality of the spirit of humility and humble submission to God within the heart of Job. However, it was not sufficiently wholesome, deep and unwavering to withstand the prolonged severe testing he went through.

There is a place to ask God to help us understand the perplexities that we are going through, but the spirit with which we do so is important. We must take care to nurture a spirit of humility in our relationship with God. If we can understand this area well and attain a high quality of humility in our lives, it would have a significant bearing on the freedom with which God relates with us and on the depth of our relationship with Him. If the quality of humility lacks depth, in the midst of severe testing and baffling circumstances, the powers of darkness can easily magnify and manipulate this area of weakness.

We see how this deficiency in the spirit of humility affected Job in his response and how as the situation developed, his spirit, as seen in his interactions with his friends, became worse. Had he maintained a spirit of humility, Job would have fared better.

In the end, Job recognised that he had uttered improper words about things he did not understand. He then repented in dust and ashes, retracting the wrong words he uttered and regretting that he had a wrong spirit and posture.

Having a spirit of humility is very critical not only in a proper relationship with God but also in our relationship with others. It also has a significant bearing on a person's general well-being because it is an important aspect of the state of his being.

We shall now consider the third related area of weakness.

3. Deficiency in posture of unquestioning submission to God

We took some time to consider this important issue in the second message. We saw how Job failed to maintain a posture of healthy worship and submission to God during the severe testing and the perplexing situations that disturbed him greatly.

What I wish to draw your attention to is the point that Job's improper responses to God during the trials bore significance beyond just those specific occasional lapses. The failures were likely to be evidence of something deficient in the heart of Job, that is, in the very area of adopting a clear, settled posture of unwavering, wholehearted love for and commitment to God and humble submission to Him and His ways.

It is likely that these deficiencies were present within the heart of Job all along although he appeared to be going on rather well before the trials. During the trials, these deficiencies became manifest. Because these areas in Job's life were not sufficiently deeply settled within his heart, he wavered and faltered in the midst of the severe testing.

The posture that Job could have adopted

Job could have adopted a clear, settled posture even before the trials and then affirm that posture in the midst of the trials. It is helpful to distinguish such a posture from the posture that we might adopt on a specific occasion.

Before the trials, Job's deficiencies within his heart might not have been apparent to those around him or even to Job himself. And this is true also in many different areas of our lives. At times we are not aware of our own deficiencies until they are manifested during difficulties and trials.

It would appear that Job failed to properly reflect on his relationship with God and to adopt a sufficiently high degree of healthy posture of unwavering commitment and submission to God and His ways. He had sufficient knowledge of God to be able to adopt this posture before and during the trials, and God also expected it of him. He knew that God is great and good and he loved truth and righteousness. Thus, he could have done better. But he failed to do so and God rebuked him for his failure.

It is very important for us to deliberately and firmly adopt this posture in our hearts; it is an important basis for a deep and stable relationship with God. We should not merely try to submit to God as each difficult situation or issue confronts us. Rather, before difficulties arise, we should have thought through our relationship with God and come to this definite commitment and posture towards Him.

After adopting such a stand and posture, we must continue to be prayerful and work out this posture accordingly by choosing to submit to God as each situation confronts

us. The meaning and importance of adopting this kind of posture is the main subject matter of the second message.

The deficiency in this stand and posture adopted is related to a deficiency in the spirit of humility and in our knowledge of God. When the spirit of humility is deficient, it affects the quality of our submission to God. The less definite and clear we are in our knowledge of God as the perfect and almighty God, the more difficult it would be for us to wholeheartedly commit ourselves to Him and submit to His ways.

It is feasible for us today to have more knowledge than Job and so it can be easier for us to adopt this kind of posture. However, even for Job, he could have done so because he had sufficient knowledge of God for him to adopt this posture. He knew the existence of God and that He is the great, almighty and good God. Let us look at a few scriptural passages that speak of this.

Job 23:6, 13, 16

6 "Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power?...

13 "But He is unique and who can turn Him?

And what His soul desires, that He does.

16 "It is God who has made my heart faint,

And the Almighty who has dismayed me,

Notice in these verses that Job had knowledge that God is almighty. At the same time, he also recognised God's moral goodness and moral qualities, and that God is one to whom worship is due.

In Job 1, we see Job being described as one who was "blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil". These qualities are all related. Why do we turn away from evil when there is fear of God in our heart? It is because God is a moral being with a morally perfect character. Job knew that and it had a bearing on his turning away from evil and carrying on in the path of uprightness (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Job also loved truth and righteousness and was committed to that path.

In Job 1:20, we read that when calamities befell him, and even though he thought that God was behind them, he still worshipped God. Why did he do so? Clearly, although he did not understand what was happening to him, he knew that the posture of humble submission to God and His ways was the proper posture to take before God. Job continued to adopt this posture in spite of his wife's instigation to curse God and die.

In Job 29, we see evidence that Job understood the moral qualities that God requires of men. He knew that because God is morally perfect, He blesses those who live righteously. Here, we read that Job recognised God's watching over him, God's blessings and God's friendship with him are associated with his righteous life and positive moral qualities.

The main point to note then is this, that Job had sufficient recognition of God as one who is great and good, and one of perfect moral character and moral qualities. He had sufficient knowledge to enable him to adopt the proper posture of unwavering, wholehearted commitment to God and to the ways of God, especially as he was a man who loved righteousness and truth. However, he failed to come to that deep, definite posture of commitment to God and His ways. He had failed to adopt this posture to a sufficiently high degree, and that was a primary reason he faltered.

In the midst of severe testing and perplexing situations, Job could not reconcile what he was going through with the goodness and justice of God, and thus he began to waver and to question God and His ways.

He should not have questioned God in such an improper manner. If the correct posture was adopted, he could have expressed to God that he could not understand the meaning of what he was going through. But because of deficiency in his posture, he went to the extent of attributing improper conduct to God, saying that God was unjust, and that God had wronged and punished him although he was guiltless. This deficiency in the posture adopted was related to and aggravated by his deficiency in the spirit of humility and knowledge in the sense explained earlier in this message.

Such a situation can easily take place in our lives if the posture of unwavering, wholehearted commitment to God and His ways has not been properly thought through and adopted. If this is the case, as we go through various hardships and bewildering situations in life, the evil one can plant doubts in our minds causing us to murmur, complain and question God. We can easily entertain improper thoughts, and once we do this, our life will start to go downhill, our faith will be shaken and we will no longer be able to continue walking properly with God.

In the case of Job, his commitment to righteousness and goodness helped him to continue in the ways of God. He persevered though he had queries.

Believers in general live lives of a much poorer quality than that of Job. If a person of such commendable character as Job could waver and falter under intense trials, how can we overcome during such times of trial unless we properly resolve this issue in our lives? Otherwise it will be relatively easy for the evil one to overcome us with his attacks and pressures.

If Job had adopted the proper posture and maintained it during the trials, he would have continued to worship God the way he did at the beginning. He could do so without ignoring the perplexing issues or pretending they did not exist. Instead of doubting, murmuring or complaining, there would be the continued posture of worship and expression of his faith in God because of the posture already adopted and reaffirmed from time to time. He could, with a proper basis, entrust himself to the righteous and faithful Creator in doing what is right (1 Pet. 4:19).

If we continue to do what is right to the degree that we understand, we can with proper assurance entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator. Even when events and situations come upon us that we do not quite understand, we can rest in the knowledge that He who is perfect and sovereign knows what we are going through and that He cares and will undertake.

Job could and should have continued in that way. He could express to God that the suffering was great, that he was perplexed and that he found it hard to bear. He could have asked God for a deeper experience of His grace and enabling, and also for understanding, should God see it fitting to reveal.

Similarly, when we are confronted with puzzling issues, we can prayerfully ask God for understanding, if He sees it fitting to help us understand. God may at times not reveal to us because He deems it inappropriate for us to understand at that point in time or even in the future. There could also be other reasons or failures in our lives that cause us not to be in the position to understand.

Even if God does not explain to us after the trials are over or even until the end of our days on earth, we can still humbly submit to Him, recognising that He is the God of perfect wisdom and love.

Such a posture that we have been talking about is reasonable; it can be adopted and worked out. God has demonstrated His love for us beyond any doubt. If we were to adopt this posture and work hard at it, it would lead to an ever-deepening quality of life, faith and walk with God.

In other words, trials and difficulties can, instead of being detrimental to our lives, be instrumental in deepening our walk with God, increasing the quality of our lives and our faith and in helping us learn what God desires to teach us. They could be the means by which our lives are purified, our character developed and our fellowship with God enhanced. But if our attitudes are wrong, we may miss out on many truths and principles that God may desire to teach us in the midst of the trials. This is the thrust of James 1:2-4.

James 1:2-4

- 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,
- 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.
- 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Trials and testing can help us move towards being "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing". They can help us in the development of our being, in learning the truths and principles that God may desire to teach us and in the deepening of the quality of our personal relationship with God.

Job's posture at the end

In the case of Job, though having better understanding would have been helpful, that was not essential to his adopting and maintaining the proper posture, even during the trials. The way God answered and dealt with Job and Job's response to God at the end of the biblical account show that it was not essential for Job to know the answers to the perplexing issues in order to adopt the proper posture. Even at the end of the Book of Job, we see that God neither granted Job understanding of the meaning of what he went through, nor addressed the very perplexing issues that Job raised. Until the end, Job did not recognise Satan was at work in the situation. But by then, his posture was correct. He humbly submitted to God and His ways.

Let us look at some verses in Job 40 and 42 to see Job's posture at the end.

Job 40:3-5

3 Then Job answered the Lord and said,
4 "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
5 "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer;
Even twice, and I will add nothing more."

Job recognised that he had spoken improperly and he would now lay his hand on his mouth. He had allowed words to come forth from his lips that were improper, which indicated that something was amiss in his heart.

Job 42:1-6

1 Then Job answered the Lord, and said,
2 "I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
"Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."
4 'Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will ask You, and You instruct me.'
5 I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;
6 Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes."

In this passage, we see Job "repenting in dust and ashes". His posture before the Almighty God was one of humble submission. Though God did not answer his perplexing questions, Job recognised that this was the proper posture and he adopted it.

But what brought about the change in Job when God did not answer his questions specifically? God did speak at the end, but what was the thrust of His words and how

did those words bring about the change in Job? These are questions we shall address in the next message.

Question for reflection and discussion

Discuss the deficiencies in Job manifested during the trials.

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