



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – May 1, 2021

The Lord be with you.

I think of it as one of the perks of the profession of the minister, that I actually get to be with people in the ups and downs of life, to be with people on the mountain tops and to be with them in the valleys. I think of it is holy ground, to be with the people and the extremities of life, and to experience God's presence, and to learn a little bit more about God, and to learn a little bit more about the mystery of suffering. I'm gonna share with you today a brief scripture from the Old Testament Book of Job, whose name is, well, it's synonymous with suffering. And with all the questions that go with suffering, and what we might learn from suffering.

First a word or two about the Book of Job, as we learn from the Book of Job that his suffering is not, it is not the result of sin in his life, but that the most Godly people will in fact experience suffering, and like Job, they probably won't know why they suffer. But we see how God does work all things together for good for those who love him. The Book of Job is a long book. It's 42 chapters long, in which we see Job wrestling with God, complaining to God, struggling with God and as Job suffers not knowing why he suffers, we come to Chapter 42 - the final chapter. We come to that point before Job knows that God is going to end suffering, before Job knows that God is going to restore twice what Job has lost. We see the Job's focus has become clear that through his suffering, Job has come to a greater understanding of God and a greater understanding of himself.

Job chapter 42 verse 5, Job prays to God, "I heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you." This is what has happened with Job, through His suffering, through His questioning, though his struggling with God. I heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. This is obviously poetic language, it's metaphorical language as Job talks about the hearing of his ear and his eye seeing God. When Job talks about what he has heard of God, by the hearing of his ear, well, he's talking about what others have told him about God. It was at a very dark time in my own life that I came to the realization that most everything I believed about God, well, it's what others have told me about God. What I'd heard in sermons, what I read in books, it was, well, it was hearsay. It was second hand. Reminds me of a story that the missionary statesman E. Stanley Jones tells of a day that he was in a used bookstore, and he sees a sign over several volumes of books, and the sign says secondhand theology for sale. And E. Stanley Jones says that that day, he determined that he never wanted a secondhand theology. That he never wanted to just know of God by what others had told him, but he wanted to know God for himself. And I think that is something of what Job is talking about here. I heard of you by the hearing of the ear.



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But you know, when we suffer, and we don't understand why that's when we've got to really know God for ourselves, to know God firsthand. What Job has heard of God from others. Well, it's led him to some false thinking about God, and about the way God works. And so, Job can say, I heard of you by the hearing of the ear. That was before his great suffering. But now... But now my eye sees you. In his suffering, he can say, but now my eye sees you. Again, this is poetry, its metaphor, it's symbolic language, which is Job is not saying that he actually saw God with his physical eye, but he's saying that he has come to greater spiritual insight as if as if he really saw God. He's come to a deeper, more intimate knowing of God, as he sees that God knows what He is doing, even if Job doesn't know. Some of the happiest, most fulfilling years of my life was the years I was a chaplain for hospice and then a chaplain for Mayo Hospital. And I say that because I got to be with people who in their suffering had become able to say, I had heard of God's second hand by the hearing of my ear, but now, but now my eye sees God, now I really know the love and wisdom of God. As people realize that they know God in a greater way than they did, they're suffering. Even though the mystery of suffering is not fully understood, they've come to a greater trust in God and in the love of God.

At the end of the Book of Job, Job feels he has come to a place of privilege. A place where he had never been before. As he has seen God, he has spiritually seen what he had never seen before. Job at this point has lost everything to find that he has God. At this point, Job has stopped asking why, because he doesn't need to know why, because he knows God. He knows God for himself and not second hand. And that's what suffering can do in our lives as we come to know God in a deeper, more intimate way. I can't help but think here of the beloved shepherd psalm, Psalm 23. That begins talking about the shepherd in the third person, the shepherd, he leads to me, He guides me, he cares for me. But it is when David comes to the valley of the shadow of death, notice that David stops talking about the Shepherd, third person, he begins talking to the shepherd. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because you are with me. That is my prayer for you today. As you might be suffering, as you might be wrestling with God, that you will know God's presence with you, that God's presence will become more real to you than ever before. That you can say with Job I heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees you.

I am Tim Smith a fellow traveler. Thanks for listening until next time.