



Set Your Hope on Christ

Ephesians 1:3-14

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

July 12, 2015

Thought for the Week

Scriptures: Job 38: 1, 8-11 • 2 Corinthians 5: 14-17 • Mark 4: 35-41

Not so long ago, during a week in late April, the *New York Times* told us that thousands of people from the coast of Libya were trying to cross the stormy waters of the Mediterranean sea to find refuge on the European continent. Over fifteen hundred people had already lost their lives in a futile attempt to find safe refuge somewhere. Many of these people were Muslims so, I should imagine, they must have been pleading with the God of their ancestors (Allah) to save them from peril. Regrettably, it does not often come about as they might have hoped. Of course, I am sure it's true of many of us whether or not we happen to embrace a certain faith. In the dark night of peril we spontaneously appeal to our God for deliverance. It seems to us that we have no other option than this.

Interestingly, however, such prayer or pleading does not flow so freely when the waters of life are calm. At those times we often feel fully in control of our lives, so what need is there to intercede with our God, or so it may seem?

So, the question that rises out of two of our captioned scripture lessons today is this: How does OUR faith in God fare in the face of the mystery of peril or worldly danger? Our first answer comes from the classic *Book of Job*, a man who had once been wealthy beyond measure, not a care in the world. At a certain point in time, however, the tables of fortune sudden fall in upon him: he loses property, family and fame in that order. In that perilous situation three of Job's friends, theologians all, come to him and try to explain that these disasters fell upon him because of some hidden fault in his life. God, who obviously is just, is simply responding to his careless faith and his assumption that his possessions protect him from punishment.

"Ah, not so," says Job. "I have always been a just person. I have thanked my God for these many advantages. It is a great mystery to me why these should now be taken from me. God gives and God takes away, blessed be God"

The lesson lies in Job's deep faith: whether in good times or bad, he believed that there must be a reason why life happens as it does, whether for good or ill. God does not reward for goodness nor punish for selfishness. God is God whether in fortune or in peril.

The lesson from Mark's gospel makes a similar point. Again, it is a story of a storm at sea and the disciples are in dread fear of their lives. It is at this point that Jesus comes on the scene walking over the waves. He asks the disciples whether they have no faith and then calms their fears and stills the

waves washing over the boat.

So, in both instances we have a human response to a situation of peril. In the first story Job simply says: I have no idea why things in this life happen. They just happen; it's a great unfathomable mystery. God knows and that's all that counts.

In the gospel story, Jesus simply asks the disciples whether their faith only comes to the surface when the waves start to threaten their lives? Have they no sense that God cares for his people in all of life's situations, whether calm or turbulent. Once again, Job's words come to mind: "God gives and God takes away, blessed be God."

Returning once again to the perilous journeys the people from Libya are making to find safety and the many other disasters that occur around the world almost everyday: it must be said that these disasters do not occur because God has some mysterious intent in mind. There is no saying why such events take place; this is simply the way the variables of our universe happen. There is no point in trying to discover whether God has some malevolent intent. On this planet there seems to be a constant rising and falling, a death and resurrection. That's simply the way it is. Amidst the rising and falling in this world, however, we must believe the words of Job hold true: "God gives and God takes away. Blessed be God."

Stewardship Thoughts

Learning To Live God's Way

I recently read about a young family in Miami that were floundering with their family financials. They were faithful church members and decided to do something about their financial problems. They decided to attend a Faith and Finance seminar, which changed their lives forever.

They were married in 2002, and both the husband and wife had children from previous marriages. It was a struggle to agree on how to cover their children's expenses as well as their own. Both the husband and wife had a separate bank account, and this brought friction to their marriage.

A few months ago, their church, decided to offer a 10-week seminar based on the book, *Faith and Finance*, by Edward Reid. From the start, the husband felt this seminar was sent by God. At the time, his wife was on disability. "Why should we share," the husband said, "if she is not bringing any money home? If we could not manage our finances when we both were working, why do it now?" The husband was also struggling with faithfulness in tithing. His mentality was, "I don't feel like it," but his wife was always faithful in this matter.

During the first seminar session, nothing was said about money. It was all about God. He is the Creator, and He owns everything. We are just His stewards. Little by little, conviction came to their hearts that this was going to be a life-changing event. They had to learn to completely trust in God and in each other!

After several weeks, the reality hit home, and the husband declared, "The hardest part is putting my ego into my pocket," yet he was not ready for a full commitment. Among the 10 couples taking the seminar, six had separate bank accounts. A short while later, they decided, "We are going to have only one bank account."

"What a major shift in our relationship! Now, no more arguing about how to spend the money. We are consulting each other before paying expenses, purchasing items, and how to help our children. Credit cards were paid off or put in a drawer." "This was the hardest part for me," confessed the wife.

Through prayer and commitment, they learned that it's about doing things God's way and not our way. God had blessed them in so many ways that are not necessarily monetary. They came to understand that faithfulness to God includes returning a faithful tithe. Their relatives and friends have noticed the

tremendous change in their relationship—especially the fact that there were no more family quarrels. They communicated better and on a deeper level. “There is peace and happiness in our home.” “We recommend that all churches consider offering some form of financial seminar for their members. It is such a great blessing, and it will change lives for the better!”