

Title: When Life is Unfair and God Seems Not to Care (Part 1)

Number: 0122Job23:1-17(24)

Text: 23.1-17

Central Idea: *Trust and obey for there IS no other way*

Date: January 30, 2022

{Read Selected Text / Prayer}

23:13-17 13 “But He is unique and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, that He does. 14 “For He performs what is appointed for me, And many such decrees are with Him. 15 “Therefore, I would be dismayed at His presence; When I consider, I am terrified of Him. 16 “It is God who has made my heart faint, And the Almighty who has dismayed me, 17 But I am not silenced by the darkness, Nor deep gloom which covers me.

[i] Where’s Waldo?

1986, illustrator Martin Handford, was asked by his art director at Walker Books (London) to develop a picture book namely for children. Handford came up w/idea of cartoon world traveler donning red & white whose image is hard to find w/i a crowd of other charctrs.

In Engl. he’s known as “Wally.”

We refer to him as “Waldo” as in “Where’s Waldo?”

Maybe you, as a child, or your own children,
have spent time searching for little Waldo.

Pic. a scene where Waldo so hidden that hours go by w/o locating him

“Where’s Waldo? I cannot find him no matter how hard I try.”

Amusing picture of Job who cannot find G. in t/midst of t/multitudes of his suffering.

[ii] Return to God

In chapt. 22 (covered 2 wks ago) Eliphaz exhorted Job to return to G. Here in chapt. 23 Job declares “Return? *I can’t even find Him.*”

“Believers sometimes find themselves in terrain where they feel abandoned and God seems to be absent. It is not virgin territory. Job pioneered it for us long ago.” [Layton Talbert, 133]

That’s what we see in Job’s response that covers chaps 23-24. G. is absent // Cannot be found. To make matters worse, He doesn’t seem to care. Job paints a pic of (AA) Absence & Apathy on G’s part.

[iii] I encapsulate these 2 chapters under this heading ==>

“When Life is Unfair and God Seems Not to Care” [x2]

Ever felt that way? If you have suffered, really suffered, you have. Losing r daughter to a drunk driver on Xmas Eve didn’t seem fair. He walked away from t/wreckage. Agonizing w/her for mos in rehab, R hopes finally crushed in her unexpected death . . .

Does G. care? *What do we do as believers when we feel that way?*

[iv] I’m not a fan of 19th c. revival hymns — but one of them came to mind as I was studying Job: “Trust and Obey”

Song was inspired by t/words of a young man converted during 1 of D.L. Moody’s revival meetings.

During a time of testimony he declared, *“I’m not quite sure. But I am going to trust and obey.”* Those words were recorded by t/man who later wrote t/music to t/hymn, which includes t/line:

“trust & obey for there’s no other way.”

I think that line, w/a slight change of emphasis, is t/challenge believers face in their suffering & doubt. It’s t/lesson Job event. learns

Here’s how I change t/line ==>

Trust and obey for there IS no other way

In my suffering I didn’t always trust well. I certainly didn’t always obey well. Dark moments where I felt G. was Absent & Apathetic.

But like t/disciples in John 6, after many stopped following Jesus, He asks them, “Do you want to go away also?” What does Peter say? ...

Trust and obey for there IS no other way

None of t/great issues of life make any sense apart from God & His Word. *Trust and obey for there IS no other way.*

[v] As far as our outline is concerned . . .

5 points. Each point of t/outline contains 2 parts:

Statement related to Job’s belief & a relevant question for us.

statement

relevant question

I. Job Believes He Cannot Find God (23:1–9) - Will I Trust God when I Don’t Perceive Him?

II. Job Believes He is Innocent (23:10–12) - Will I Trust God when Life Seems Unfair?

III. Job Believes God's Sovereignty is Capricious (23:13–17) - Will I Trust God in His Wise Sovereignty?

IV. Job Believes the Wicked Triumph (24:1–17) - Will I Trust God when Evil Triumphs?

V. Job Believes Righteousness will Eventually Prevail (24:18-25) - Will I Trust God in His Timing?

Along w/that t/challenge: *Trust and obey for there IS no other way.*

[vi] Chapters 23 & 24 comprise Job's 8th speech

Like his 1st speech in chapt. 3, these 2 chapt. are a soliloquy.

These are Job's thoughts spoken out loud to no one in particular.

Been a progression in that regard.

In Job's prev. replies to t/3 friends he often directly addresses them. Sometimes he directly addresses God. He does neither here.

Sees himself in a courtroom as a defendant facing an invis. opponent
He seeks acquittal from his Judge (v. 7)

Life is unfair and God seems not to care . . .

I. Job Believes He Cannot Find God (23:1–9) - Will I Trust God when I Don't Perceive Him?

A. For Job - God is Absent

1. Like a missing Waldo in a crowd of spectators . . .

God is no where to be found.

1 Then Job replied, 2 “Even today my complaint is rebellion [better understood “bitter”]; His hand is heavy despite my groaning.

3 “Oh that I knew where I might find Him, That I might come to His seat! Picture of a judge seated in a courtroom

4 “I would present my case before Him And fill my mouth with arguments. “I would serve as defendant & defense attorney!”

2. “Present” = “spread out” as in presenting a legal case

How do you address an opponent who is not there?

What do you do when heaven is as brass?

Will I Trust God when I Don't Perceive Him?

You may not understand // not think G. is at work in your life // not see — but you can trust.

a. What was the darkest hour that ever struck this earth?

When was it that God seemed most to be absent //

Seemed that wickedness won t/day?

Was when JC hung on t/Cross dying; from his lips t/suffering cry: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46)

Evil appeared to have won. Disciple's hopes were crushed!!

But we know what came after t/Cross: Empty Tomb.

Darkest hour of history gave birth to t/brightest light — JOY! HOPE!

G. was neither Absent nor Apathetic. Triune G. was at work reconciling lost, hell-bound sinners to Himself for eternity.

Times we feel like crying out, “God, why have You forsaken me?”
He hasn’t. He knows t/most intimate details of your life.

Rem. in t/Gospels, when Jesus asked, “Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

Xn, G. has not forgotten you. He’s working in your life.
"Our light affliction . . . is but for a moment" (II Cor. 4:17).

Was true of Job. But at this point in t/book, he can’t see it ==>

3. Job envisions what would happen if he could get a legal hearing before God

5 “I would learn the words which He would answer, And perceive what He would say to me. “I am anticipating my acquittal!”

See that as Job answers his own question in verse 6==>

6 “Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power? No, surely He would pay attention to me. 7 “There the upright would reason with Him; And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.

a. Verse 7, “upright,” cf. 1:1 (same word - ‘yashar’)

4. So much for dreaming: Job cannot find God anyway

a. Job gives directions that parallel our 4 points of the compass
8 “Behold, I go forward but He is not there, And backward, but I cannot perceive Him; 9 When He acts on the left, I cannot behold Him; He turns on the right, I cannot see Him.

(1) Merism: Figure of speech common in Job where extremes describe the whole

Eg.G. is called “The Lord of heaven & earth” = everything!

Here merism: forward, backward, left, right.

N,S,E,W. I’ve searched everywhere, but G. is nowhere!

(2) Feels that way sometimes (times of intense suffering)

5 years ago I memorized Psalm 10:1 ==>

Psa 10:1 “Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?”

I. Job Believes He Cannot Find God (23:1–9) - Will I Trust God when I Don’t Perceive Him?

II. Job Believes He is Innocent (23:10–12) - Will I Trust God when Life Seems Unfair?

A. Job's Declaration of Innocence

1. Throughout the book so far we’ve seen two things:

- 1) Job is innocent (he did nothing to deserve his calamity).
- 2) 3 friends assume he’s guilty (his calamity must be result of his sin).

a. Eliphaz in the last chapter went so far as to falsely accuse Job of specific crimes

22:5-7,9 5 “Is not your wickedness great, And your iniquities without end? 6 “For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause, And stripped men naked. 7 “To the weary you have given no water to drink, And from the hungry you have withheld bread.... 9 “You have sent widows away empty, & t/strength of t/orphans has been crushed.

(1) We called that “The Fallacy of Assuming the Cause”

Often involves *a priori* assumptions. BTIM, based on what I won’t accept as a logical reason that something happened, I will accept what I think is t/best alternative.

Naturalists w/question of creation (how did we get here?): If we outright reject t/fact of a Creator, what cause do we assume? Naturalistic Darwinism.

If Job’s friends outright reject that God’s ppl. do suffer undeservedly, What cause do they assume? You had to do something to deserve it!

2. Job knows he didn’t commit crimes that caused his calamity

a. He knows that based on 2 things: God’s knowledge & his own

(1) Based on God’s knowledge (10)

10 “But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

(a) This is an oft-quoted verse — but not always understood in its rightful context

“God knows my life. When I go thru trials, it will be for my good & I will come out purified as gold thru a fire.”

Hymn, “How Firm a Foundation”

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

That true for t/believer? Yes. Not exactly what Job was thinking here.

As one writer observes ==>

“Job maintained an unshakable faith in God, a confidence in His sovereign control over all his experiences, and a belief that he would someday see and hear God for himself. But nowhere does Job express any inkling that his circumstances are only a temporary hardship through which he will pass perfected and purified. To take 23:10 in that way is to make it a schizophrenic exception to Job’s unwavering attitude throughout the book. . . . God has simply turned against him for unknown reasons Job is not saying, ‘God knows what I am going through, and when He is done testing me, I will be the better for it, purified like gold.’ He is saying, ‘God sees me and knows me. He knows I am innocent. When he tests me I will come through like gold.’ Not because the process will purify him but because he is already ‘gold’—innocent, blameless, righteous—as he has been claiming throughout the book.” [Talbert, 140-41]

Again, look at it from context of a courtroom: Job believes he will come thru “like gold” in that t/verdict will be “not guilty.”

This isn’t hope in G’s work of sanctification.

This is t/hope of G’s vindication.

It is true that his suffering will conform him into greater godliness—we will see at the end of the book. Not where Job is now.

2. Job knows he didn't commit crimes that caused his calamity

(1) Based on God's knowledge (10)

(2) Based on Job's knowledge (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.

(a) 4 descriptions that fall into 2 categories (God's Way and God's Word) In both of these vv. t/2d statement elaborates on t/1st.

i. God's Way (11)

11 “My foot has held fast to His path; ==> I have kept His way and not turned aside.

*** Idea of a “path” or “way” was a common metaphor in OT wisdom literature of which Job is a part**

Psa 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

Prov 4:14 Do not enter the path of the wicked And do not proceed in the way of evil men.

i. God's Way (11)

ii. God's Word (12)

12 “I have not departed from the command of His lips; ==> I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.

Job claims he has kept God's way according to God's Word.

*** Astute question would be: “How did Job know “the words of God’s mouth?”**

Did he have a Bible? He didn’t even have t/1st 5 books!

This was during t/time of Abraham, B4 Moses.

We do know that God revealed Himself in other ways (apart from creation): Dreams, visions, direct speech. Cf. Rom. 2:15.

Gen 26:5 . . . Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.”

That was 5 centuries before Moses wrote anything!

Job didn’t have a Bible. But he did know God’s Word in keeping w/the means of revelation G. used at that time.

Back to our 2d main point ==>

II. Job Believes He is Innocent (23:10–12) - Will I Trust God when Life Seems Unfair?

What do we do when things happen to us, to others, that seem so unfair, so undeserved?

I recently read the story of great Amer. missionary to Burma (now Myanmar) Adoniram Judson who translated t/Bible into Burmese & whose influence cont. to resonate there.

Sometime in 1824 Judson was imprisoned by Burma under suspicion of espionage Was during t/time of war between England & Burma.

Prisoners were routinely tortured & executed. Judson was hung upside down by t/ankles until his shoulders touched t/ground.

After his release he received word that his wife died, followed by his infant daughter.

One biographer picks up the story:

“Judson’s instinctive reaction was to throw himself relentlessly into translation work. Inwardly he wrestled with loneliness, guilt and grief [which] gave way to despair and doubt. He left mission work, built a hut in the jungle, and dug a grave where he perched for long periods of morbid meditation. Lost in a desolate wasteland of mind and soul, this veteran missionary penned a pathetic plea to his dead wife’s parents: ‘have either of you learned the art of real communion with God, and can you teach me the first principles? God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in Him, but I find him not.’” [cited in Talbert, 135]

Judson recovered, remarried, but lost his second wife to illness.

John Piper writes of this loss ==>

“This time, Adoniram did not descend into the depths of depression as before. He had his children. But even more, his sufferings had disengaged him from hoping for too much in this world. He was learning how to hate his life in this world without bitterness or depression (John 12:25). And now, he had one passion: to return and give his life for Burma.”

In the meantime, Judson married a 3d time to a woman 18 yrs his junior. She was committed to ministering with him & God gave them 4 yrs of happiness during which time they had a child.

In 1850 Judson fell ill and died a miserable death at sea. One of his last sentences was, “How few there are . . . who die so hard!”

10 days later, his wife, Emily, gave birth to their second child, who died at birth. She learned 4 mos later that her husband was dead. She returned to New England that next Jan. & died of tuberculosis 3 yrs later at age 37.

Judson lived in keeping w/the promises of Romans chapt. 8

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*When Life is Unfair and God Seems Not to Care? — He does care!
Trust and obey for there IS no other way*

III. Job Believes God’s Sovereignty is Capricious (23:13–17) - Will I Trust God in His Wise Sovereignty?

Rem. I’ve defined t/attribute of God’s sovereignty as his Kingship over all creation which includes predestination and providence.

IOW - G. preordains that which He desires to come to pass & He works in history in keeping w/that plan.

**A. We see an accurate portrayal of God’s sovereignty in vv.13-14
13 “But He is unique and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, that He does. 14 “For He performs what is appointed for me, And many such decrees are with Him.**

1 Thess. 3:3 refers to afflictions that were ordained for Paul & t/Thess. Xns.

. . . our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. Psal15:3

I think t/Bible is clear, as we see here, that whatever happens to God's people comes by God's appointment in keeping w/His sov. Ought to comfort us.

B. But for Job - God's sovereignty seemed capricious
(arbitrary / fickle / without meaning or purpose)

Far from finding comfort . . . ==>

15 "Therefore, I would be dismayed at His presence; When I consider, I am terrified of Him. 16 "It is God who has made my heart faint, And the Almighty who has dismayed me, 17 But I am not silenced by the darkness, Nor deep gloom which covers me.

1. This is another false belief of Job

In t/theology of Islam, God is capricious. He does what He wants & that may be quite arbitrary. But that's not t/Triune God of t/Bible.

Dr. R. Scott Clark, professor of historical theology WTS in CA ==>
"One of the great misconceptions about the Augustinian doctrine of divine sovereignty, which was restated by the Protestant Reformers ... is that it makes God arbitrary or capricious. . . .

The charge that the God of Scripture is capricious rests ultimately on the assumption that unless we can explain his actions then we may sit in judgment upon them and him. In other words, the charge rests upon rationalism. Of course we cannot explain all of God's acts and we cannot explain fully any of them! His ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. . . .

If we consider that God always acts according to his nature, then he cannot be said to be arbitrary, especially if we concede that God's understanding of his justice transcends our ability to comprehend it.

That is a great difference between the Triune God of Holy Scripture revealed in Christ Jesus and Allah or fate. The god of Islam really is capricious. He may forgive or he may not. No one can know. Allah cannot be known. He is utterly hidden. Indeed, he isn't even really personal . . .

The God of Scripture . . . reveals himself to us and what he reveals to us is true. . . . [W]e can know God because he has come to us and made himself known. He has revealed himself in creation and in redemption and chiefly in his Son, the Word: Jesus the Messiah. . . .

Unlike Allah, the God who is, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is not arbitrary. He cannot contradict himself. He cannot be what he is not. He cannot do what is contrary to his nature and his nature is just.” [monergism.com]

2. Sometimes the doctrine of God’s sovereignty is equated to fatalism — far from t/truth!

god of fatalism is impersonal

God of Bible is personal

god of fatalism is arbitrary/capricious

God of Bible works in keeping w/His nature, perfectly holy, good, and consistent.

god of fatalism is to dreaded

God of Bible is to be trusted — loved.

a. God's sovereignty is good—because God is good

(1) C.H. Spurgeon:

"There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. . . . [I]t is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust." [C.H. Spurgeon from a

sermon on Matthew 20:15. Cited by A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 32-33]

Trust and obey for there IS no other way

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Brings us to chapt. 24 (2 more points). As much as I hate to do so; we'll save that for next time.

In a sweet prayer that resonates w/the struggles Job experienced, an anonymous Puritan offered these words to our good, sovereign God (maybe they reflect where you have been or are now):

“I am sadly harassed by doubts, fears, unbelief,
in a felt spiritual darkness.
My heart is full of evil surmisings and disquietude,
and I cannot act faith at all.
My heavenly Pilot has disappeared,
and I have lost my hold on the Rock of Ages;
I sink in deep mire beneath storms and waves,
in horror and distress unutterable,
Help me, O Lord,
to throw myself absolutely and wholly on [you],
for better, for worse, without comfort,
and all but hopeless.
Give me peace of soul, confidence, enlargement
of mind,
morning joy that comes after night heaviness;
Water my soul richly with divine blessings;
Grant that I may welcome [your] humbling in private
so that I might enjoy [you] in public;
Give me a mountain top as high as the valley is low.
[Your] grace can melt the worst sinner, and I am as vile has he;
Yet [you have] made me a monument of mercy,
a trophy of redeeming power;
In my distress let me not forget this.
All wise God,

[Your] never-failing providence orders every event,
sweetens every fear,
reveals evil's presence lurking in seeming good,
brings real good out of seeming evil,
makes unsatisfactory what I set my heart upon,
to show me what a short-sighted creature I am,
and to teach me to live by faith upon
[your] blessed self.

Our of my sorrow and night

give me the name Naphtali —

‘satisfied with favour’—

help me to love [you] as [your] child,

and to walk worthy of my heavenly pedigree.” [Valley of Vision, 184-85]