

SITTING IN THE ASHES

(WAITING ON GOD)

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Text: Job 2:7-8

■ Philip Yancey writes, "Once a friend of mine went swimming in a large lake at dusk. As he was paddling at a leisurely pace about 100 yards offshore, a freak evening fog rolled in across the water. Suddenly he could see nothing: no horizon, no landmarks, no objects or lights on shore. Because the fog diffused all light, he could not even discern which direction the sun was setting.

For thirty minutes my friend splashed around in panic. He would start off in one direction, lose confidence, and turn ninety degrees to the right. Or left--it made no difference which way he turned. He would stop and float, trying to conserve energy, and concentrate on breathing slower. Then he would strike out again, blindly, of course, for he had lost all orientation. He was utterly lost until, finally, he heard voices calling from shore and was able to guide himself by the sounds.

Something like that feeling of utter lostness must have settled in on poor Job as he sat in the ashes and tried to comprehend what had happened. He too had lost all landmarks, all points of orientation. Where should he turn? God, the one Person who could guide him through the fog, kept silent.

The whole point of the "wager," in fact, was to keep Job in the dark. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan had asked. Anyone will trust in a God who spoils his favorite with the greatest wealth in the Middle East. But remove all props, withdraw into the darkness, and then see what happens. The moment God accepted the terms of the wager, the Fog rolled in around Job.

God ultimately "won the wager." Although Job questioned everything about God in a stream of angry outbursts and bitter complaints, and although he despaired of life and longed for death, still he stubbornly refused to give up on God. "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him," Job defiantly maintained. He believed when there was no reason to believe, when nothing at all made sense. He believed in the midst of the Fog.

Job stands as merely the most extreme example of what appears to be a universal law of faith. The kind of faith God wants seems to develop best when everything fuzzes over, when the lights get turned off, when the Fog rolls in. As Paul Tournier said, "Where there is no longer any opportunity for doubt, there is no longer any opportunity for faith either."

-- Philip Yancey. From the files of Leadership.

There are times in each of our lives that we feel as if all is lost. At times, all of our hopes and dreams seem to end in disappointments, and we wonder if things can get any worse.

The thing that bothers us the most, however, is that we have lived and done our best and we still are in the midst of heartache and trouble.

It might be easier to take if we just knew "why" or if everyone was sympathetic to our plight. But that is rarely the case. ■ *One cynical soul remarked, "Don't bother telling people your troubles. Half of them don't care, and the other half figure you probably had it coming."*

It's rarely ever that bad, but it seems that's the predicament in which Job found himself.

Yet, the Bible says he was a "perfect" and "upright" man that "feared God" and shunned evil. But still Job lost all that he had including his family, and his health. After having his body afflicted with boils, the scripture says he took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself with and sat down among the ashes.

Get a mental picture of Job in your mind as:

I. HE SAT IN THE ASHES OF HIS LIFE.

A. He had done all he could to ensure a good life.

He had lived good and offered sacrifices often. He had served God and been faithful.

B. He had lost virtually all he held dear for a reason he did not know.

In one day his children, livestock, possessions, everything - it was gone.

II. HE WAITED ON GOD.

A. He waiting patiently for understanding from the Lord.

■ *Job 2:9-10* "His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

He said to his "friends"...

■ *Job 19:25-27*, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

B. He waited expectantly for deliverance.

■ **Job 23:8-10**, "But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold."

■ "Sweeping across Germany at the end of World War II, Allied forces searched farms and houses looking for snipers. At one abandoned house, almost a heap of rubble, searchers with flashlights found their way to the basement. There, on the crumbling wall, a victim of the Holocaust had scratched a Star of David. And beneath it, in rough lettering, the message:

I believe in the sun--even when it does not shine;
I believe in love -- even when it is not shown;
I believe in God -- even when he does not speak.

Robert Schuller

III. HE HEARD FROM GOD.

However, God did not give Job the explanation that he wanted. Instead...

A. God spoke of His sovereignty.

God has supreme authority. He is not subject to any rule or law that can be considered as superior to himself. ***God Answers to NO ONE!***

■ **Chapter 38:1-7** "Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"

B. God spoke of His power.

His creative power (in the previous scripture) **His power to judge**

■ **Job 37:23**, "The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress."

His power to save

C. Finally, God Blessed Job.

■ *Chapter 42:10 & 12a*

"And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends, also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning;"

CONCLUSION

■ A man confined to bed because of a lingering illness had on his sunlit windowsill a cocoon of a beautiful species of butterfly. As nature took its course, the butterfly began its struggle to emerge from the cocoon. But it was a long, hard battle. As the hours went by, the struggling insect seemed to make almost no progress. Finally, the human observer, thinking that "the powers that be" had erred, took a pair of scissors and snipped the opening larger. The butterfly crawled out, but that's all it ever did - crawl. The pressure of the struggle was intended to push colorful, life-giving juices back into the wings, but the man in his supposed mercy prevented this. The insect never was anything but a stunted abortion, and instead of flying on rainbow wings above the beautiful gardens, it was condemned to spend its brief life crawling in the dust. That gives me the idea that God knows what He is doing. It's a fact that you can depend on Him—even when it seems the struggle is hard and meaningless.

Christ did not come to do away with suffering; He did not come to explain it; He came to fill it with His presence.

Paul Claudel

Sometimes it is when we are sitting in the ashes that we learn the most about God, and sometimes we have to walk through the ashes to get to God's greater blessings.