



Unlocking the Bible (25)



“What is going on here?”

- an overview of the Book of Job

The first of the “Books of Experience” outlined last month is the Book of Job with its strange story of undeserved deprivation and suffering confounded by the lack of opportunity to defend his cause and further aggravated by inappropriate ‘advice’ from his friends. But the book, unlike the experience, provides the context and with it the explanation of what is happening, and why.

At face value, Job is suffering unjustly and expresses the equivalent of, “*Why is this happening to me, I don’t deserve it and want an explanation.*” Yet, that is precisely what he is not given, neither during the experience, or later when it is all over.

So, what can we learn from this remarkable book? Here are some suggestions.

No personal explanation from God ever seems to be forthcoming for inexplicable adverse experience which befalls a Christian, not for Job, not for Joseph, not for the blind man in John 9, not for Paul; only an assurance that ‘*My grace is sufficient for thee*’.

Basing counsel and advice, however well-meaning and sound, on appearances is inappropriate. We neither see the full picture nor know the whole story. The words of Jesus to Peter: *What I do thou knowest not now*’ are very relevant to these situations and so it is dangerous to presume.

What is made clear is that this – and related human experiences of a similar nature – are not divine punishments but in fact divine demonstrations. God Himself initiated this incident by ‘boasting’ about Job’s righteousness to Satan. He had confidence in Job and twice removed the protective barriers to let Satan attack him.

The church and individual Christians are God’s demonstration models in a fallen world. Isaiah talks of ‘*a people planted by the Lord for the display of His splendour*’ and Paul says in Ephesians that *the wisdom of God is made manifest by the church*’, just as Jesus Himself was the ‘*express image of His person*’. It is part of the cosmic purpose of God and He depends on ‘faithful witnesses’.

The key to such experiences is trust. It is not the justification or explanation of adversity but how we respond to it and behave during it. Paradoxically, although naturally seeking relief and some explanation, deep down Job knew - and trusted, as expressed in the declaration: *I know that my Redeemer liveth and though He slay me, yet I will trust Him.*

In the end, all was restored. Though he suffered devastation - of possessions and health - he lost nothing but gained so much in experience and assurance. And God was vindicated.

That is an encouragement as we face the rigours of seeking to live righteous lives in our contexts: families, home, neighbourhoods, work, even ‘church’, knowing that we are part of God’s great and deliberate experiment of entrusting believers to respond in such a way that speaks of His glory, continuing the effective ministry of Jesus on earth. It is not only the heavens that *declare the glory of God*, but also human believers as they constitute the ‘*church which is His body*’. What a privilege; and what a responsibility. Job’s only real mistake was to become too self-important, an attribute that merited the rebuke of God at the end. We have the added example of Jesus, ‘*meekly enduring sorrow*’ as our inspiration to be ‘*faithful witnesses*’ in whatever situations we find ourselves in or what circumstances we are called to encounter and respond to.