

209 Because there is hope

May the Lord bless and keep you and yours as we praise God the Father afresh in this season for the gift of His Son, Immanuel, God with us.

We learn near the end of the Book of Job that the Lord is none too impressed with what has been said between Job and his three friends! - as they have struggled with that key question: whatever has righteous Job done to deserve such great and apparently inexplicable suffering? "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?'" (Job 38.1-2 AV). Much of what these ordinary, puzzled men have said along the way has missed the point, but sometimes, in the midst of their mistakes, they have been more on the right track, as with Zophar in Chapter 11.

Zophar's words are simple and well-established. "If you prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward Him; if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and do not let wickedness dwell in your tents; surely then you shall lift up your face without blemish; and you will be steadfast, and will not fear; for you shall forget your misery, and shall remember it as waters that have passed; and your lifetime shall rise more than the noonday; you shall fly; you shall be as the morning. And you shall trust, because there is hope. Yea, you shall look about and you shall lie down in safety. You shall lie down, and no-one shall be terrifying; yea, many shall seek your favour" (Job 11.13-20, JPGreen Literal).

The message is clear. We shall not always understand what is going on, or why, and the Lord has never said that we would so understand on this side of heaven. So while of course, especially in turbulent times such as these, we

instinctively cry out “Why, Lord?”, in a vital sense that is still to miss the point. The fact is, we don’t have to know the “why”, because of that wonderful truth expressed not only by Zophar but elsewhere throughout God’s Word – “And you shall trust, because there is hope”.

Hope! We know that the hope that is truly rooted in the character, promises and deeds of Almighty God in His Son Jesus Christ has nothing to do with a weak “fingers-crossed” mentality. The God’s-Word-grounded hope of any God-fearing soul, be it a Job or a Zophar, or a Mary or a Joseph, or a Jack or a Jill of today, has been defined as “a joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation”. We KNOW, so we TRUST, and live our lives in possession of this precious, strong, certain HOPE.

And this knowledge on which our trust and hope are based has all the solidity of that house built upon the rock. What was it that fired up those apostles after the Lord’s ascension and their being filled with the Holy Spirit? No-one and nothing could shut them up! Apart from old John, they were all called to go through martyrdom rather than deny this crucial knowledge they possessed: the knowledge that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Messiah, born of a virgin, sinless, the Son of God, the image of the invisible God, in whom all fullness should dwell; who was foully put to death, but had risen from the dead, to return to His Father in heaven. They had SEEN Him. They KNEW!

And so to people like us, those seeking today to be faithful sheep of Christ the Good Shepherd in this sinful, hope-lacking, Christ-needing world. As Zophar truly reminded Job, we prepare our hearts, stretching out our hands towards Him. We seek to set aside iniquity from our lives and claim the Father’s forgiveness through the shed blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Then we too are made to be

“without blemish” in God’s sight, steadfast, freed from fear, living in the full light of day and able to lie down in peace and safety each night – come what may.

In short, along with Job and his companions we too know what it means to trust while lacking all the answers, because there is hope - hope in all its fullness and certainty.

One of the best features of this hope is that one day it will be redundant! – when the substance of our hope has been gloriously fulfilled. On that day the hope that will have sustained us throughout our journey can be laid quietly aside, just as the Risen Lord did with that precious napkin in the empty tomb. (I Corinthians 13.9-13 / Ephesians 1.3-23 / Revelation Chapters 19-22 / John 20.7).

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