

“What’s It All About? . . . Job?”

Sermon for 6 August 2017

Texts: Ephesians 2:8-10

It is probable that Job lived in the age of the patriarchs, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And likely that he dwelt in the land of Aram, where pastoral economies prevailed at that time period. Job was saved through faith—and so are we. There is no one saved who is not saved by faith. **For by grace you have been saved through faith.** (Ephesians 2:8) marks where we have arrived in this series through Ephesians. There are three elements to the gift of salvation, the whole of the gift. There’s the grace, the salvation and the faith component, Spiritually dead people do not know this about salvation. Faith is part of the awakening process; faith comes and quickens us to salvation and as we are filled with wonder at this transformation, this coming to be alive, we apply the word “grace” to it all. That is why Paul’s writes **by grace . . . you are saved . . . through faith.**

It came up in Sunday School: what people commonly say the book of Job is all about (Suffering—especially acute and unfair suffering) isn’t necessarily the theme of the first written book of the Bible. We get closer to that mark when we suggest that Job is about the faith of a man who is **blameless and upright** . . . a man who **fears God** (faith) **and turns away from evil.** (Job 1:8) Verse 8 reiterates v.1 but it bears repeating because this is God’s own estimation of the man Job. We also learn that he had seven sons and three daughters and a fortune in flocks of sheep, camel, 500 yoke of oxen and half as many female donkeys (beasts of burden to move his goods, produce in trade). *We would say, he was a wealthy man in spite of his living in rather primitive pastoral conditions.* But Job’s many servants and animals and great wealth have not hindered him in being **blameless and upright.** He was a careful and wise, though generous and religiously observant man. *We would say he was “a good man.”* Now that would be our opinion, not his, and as for God, God says he was **blameless and upright.** When it comes down to it, God’s opinion is the only one that really counts. So we might assume that possessing all this Job would be a shoo-in candidate for heaven (*he was a moral person who did good things*) and, again, we would be mistaken for it is Job’s faith that gets him into heaven, not his character (though exemplary), not his wise management of family and business (impressive), not his great wealth and posterity (the children who might have nurtured, preserved and honored his memory, in the family annals as it were, or in the minds of his descendants were all tragically killed by **a great wind** (1:19). Being well thought of is not a ticket of admission to heaven any way—*faith is.* Job’s faith is what secured his blessings, and sustained him in adversity, and it is his steadfast faith that permits us to assume that Job is in heaven. Job was saved through faith.

We may be fairly certain that *nothing has changed* since the days of Job with regard to salvation by faith. But the second half of verse 8 introduces a critical distinction: **And this is not your own doing . . . not the result of works** (v.9) because **we are God’s workmanship.** (v.10) We are God’s masterpiece—His poem to write, if you like (for the Greek word used here is the one and the same). We are God’s landscape. He “paints” us, we do not paint ourselves! We do not design, create or even render ourselves. Those who like to think of themselves as self-made men and women will, no doubt, find this shocking. *It’s meant to be.* Salvation is a free gift of God. It is “free” as in unearned (by us!); it is unowed and undeserved—otherwise it would be a debt, or wage *and it is neither of those!* Salvation is neither an entitlement, nor a reward; it is a gift.

Therefore, a moral person who lives a good life . . . or a good person who lives a moral life has no inside track to heaven—*no assurance that this will get him in*. It might only seem fair that it be something of a *quid pro quo*—that something (heaven) for this something (being a good or moral person)—but getting to heaven is a matter of faith, not a matter of fairness! Heaven is not the ultimate achievement award! *It is something we attain, but not something we achieve!* That is the lesson which the whole narrative of Job teaches us! We are saved by faith, and faith alone. And, besides, if there were the *quid pro quo* arrangement (which it isn't) there would be no need for a Savior, a cross, an atoning sacrifice or even for the church, for that matter, to exist! After all who needs the church to be either "good, or moral" when it is a matter of observation that many who do go to church are neither, neither "good, nor moral!"

I do humbly suggest that those of us who do go to church take note of this last point and strive not to be caught short in our accounts, nor to be guilty of being a flaming hypocrite. If we are living a Christlike existence, people may well use weak words like "good" and "moral" to describe us and we can take advantage of that to point out that whatsoever goodness we have comes of Him living in and through us. Or we might talk about the "moral edge" they see being "the open display" of His "sinlessness." He is expressing Himself through us. *We are His workmanship, remember?* We have to do what we can to break through the folly of depending on the flesh, or of our works to prevail with God on obtaining eternal life! We should strive to be Christlike lives!

Getting into heaven is not about being smarter, or prettier, or more talented. Maybe talent shows are limited to this side of the pearly gates. But those who think they are good enough to get into heaven on their own steam, or off their own bat, have no idea of the level of goodness that is required to get in on that score. Scripture does name a few exceptionally righteous men, all of whom went to heavenly physically and two of them publicly: Enoch, Elijah and Jesus . . . and that's about it. My point: it is very high bar—*too high for the rest of us! Really, if only three out of billions are recorded as going straight to heaven! Not even Moses made the grade.* Christ lived the life we ought to live but could not, and Christ died the death we ought to die so that we, forgiven and freed, would not have to do so. Now that's mercy! Therefore if we have faith (a gift) that Jesus is who He said He is, and came and did what He came to do (revelation), we are saved by grace. His grace. And we know that it is all about Him, rather than all about us.

That brings us to "works." Works are the fruit of faith, not the root of our salvation. We don't complete a bucket list of good works and turn them in for everlasting life. It is faith working in us that produces, by its own power, works. It is interesting to note that God owns us by creation, by redemption, by occupation and by **preparing good works beforehand . . . that we should walk in.** (v.10) It is rather stunning to consider how restrictive we tend to think this divine plan is, when to know that there is a plan, that Someone is in charge and that He knows what He is doing eliminates so much anxiety . . . and resolves so much confusion!

Recently I was adoring the sunset splendor and the glory of the dawn—things which God enriches the entire world with daily—THEN I pondered this spiritual creation that God has going on on top of the natural creation which He has already put in place. THEN I PRAISED HIM ALL THE MORE. I mean, there is material creation, the physical world, like

the layering of an oil painting(!) and all that is therein, but on top of that God has overlaid this work of spiritual regeneration—which He is doing in the hearts and souls of men. In the history track, as it were, which occurs within the physical universe (the framework, or artist's canvass) which runs according to physical and so-called natural laws—*also known as divine decrees*. Both creations are demonstrations of divine creativity. *Something only God alone can do—indeed, has done.*

It is so wonderful, and beautiful!, that conversion and spiritual growth transpire in and through Him—that when we are united to Him by faith we obtain “life” and that this “life” produces further life by us, through us and among us. We will spend some time in chapters 4-6 looking at these “good works, or fruit of faith.” But we should note the “end goal,” the goal of growing up, of maturing in Christ is a major piece of why we go through the things we do. High winds strengthen trees so that storm, when they come, will not destroy them! *Faith is a divine work*—a provision and a gift, too. When we are born anew of God (John 1), we are taught, given to understand that the Old Adam has to be killed off so that an altogether different man can be raised up in the old man's place. The new Adam who comes to life is us is altered in heart and spirit, mind and power. Such faith is a living, busy, active and mighty thing—a renovating force to be reckoned with.

Of this new life we may note that “good works” are *its instinct*. Such an instinct is congruent with the new nature. It is explosive, and it is compulsory. It is unstoppable. It is almost as if good works happen in spite of us rather than through us. This good works are part of the plan, God's plan. Paul wants us to see ourselves as recruited, equipped and assigned to those good works.

We used to walk in darkness	——	Now we walk in the light.
We used to be controlled by the world, the flesh and the devil	——	Now we are spirit-controlled
We used to be dead, enslaved to the Devil and doing his works	——	Now we are alive doing good works supernaturally—preplanned works.

Perhaps it has occurred to you that *this mortality* of ours is all tangled up with sin and imperfections . . . but soon, perhaps very soon, we will shuck this mortality, with its mortality, sin and imperfection . . . and *step into the next phase of existence*, the new and better life beyond this one. . . this step into life eternal which begins now, by faith, it is fresh and new, and just beginning. And that is why, Job's marriage is restored and they are gifted with new sons and daughters. Job's fortunes are faithfully restored. There is no problem with supply! And even Job's friends are prayed for God's friend and are both blest and forgiven. So each new day is to begin with rejoicing that we are no longer what we used to be . . . we are not yet all that God means for us to be. Not yet, but it is coming on . . . it is going to be astounding! Great goodness, overabundantly great.

Amen