WITH FRIENDS LIKE THIS…

JOB 23:1-9, 16-17

OCTOBER 17, 2021

IN MY FIRST CHURCH A YOUNG BOY WAS KICKED IN THE HEAD BY A BULL WAS IN A COMA AND THEN DIED. I HELPED WITH THE SERVICE. ANOTHER PASTOR, MUCH MORE CONSERVATIVE THAN I GAVE THE MESSAGE AND IT WENT SOMETHING LIKE “*THIS IS A WAKE UP CALL FOR ALL OF YOU TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD. GOD IS TRYING TO TEACH YOU SOMETHING AND IF GOD HAS TO TAKE YOUR YOUNG SON, GOD WILL.”* THE ONLY REDEEMING THING ABOUT THIS SERMON WAS THE FACT THAT THE SOUND SYSTEM WENT OUT JUST AS HE BEGAN TALKING AND ONLY THE PEOPLE FRONT COULD HEAR IT, THE FAMILY COULDN’T. THANK THE LORD.

WITH FRIENDS OR PASTORS LIKE THAT, WHO NEEDS ENEMIES? FOR 20 CHAPTERS OF JOB, JOB HAS LISTENED TO HIS FRIENDS TRY AND COMFORT HIM IN SOME OF THE SAME WAYS THIS PASTOR TRIED TO “COMFORT” THIS YOUNG MAN’S FAMILY. WHAT WE HEAR TODAY IS JOB’S RESPONSE TO ALL THAT, SO CALLED COMFORT. FRIENDS, POOR JOB IS LOOKING FOR GOD IN ALL HIS SUFFERING AND IN CHAPTER 23 HE CAN’T FIND GOD ANYWHERE. MAYBE YOU’VE FELT LIKE THAT, I KNOW I HAVE. LET’S LISTEN IN ON HIS FRIENDS AND THEIR ATTEMPT TO COMFORT AND GLEAN SOME GOOD INFORMATION ON HOW TO BE A FRIEND TO YOURSELF AND OR WHEN OTHERS ARE SUFFERING.

THE BOOK OF JOB SAYS THAT JOBS FRIENDS CAME AND SAT WITH HIM…. THAT’S A GOOD THING TO DO WHEN SOMEONE IS SUFFERING AND THEN THEY OPENED THEIR MOUTHS. THEN THAT PASTOR OPENED HIS MOUTH….

ELIPHAZ: “*JOB YOU’VE SUPPORTED AND ENCOURAGED SO MANY PEOPLE, NOW WHEN YOU ARE STUGGLING YOU CAN’T HANDLE IT. DON’T YOU KNOW GOD IS TRYING TO TEACH YOU SOMETHING. YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION. BLESSED IS THE PERSON THAT GOD CORRECTS.”*

DON’T EVER SAY THIS TO SOMEONE WHO IS SUFFERING. YOU ARE BASICALLY SAYING “COME ON, YOU’VE HELPED OTHERS HELP YOURSELF.” AND FEELING CORRECTED BY GOD AND LEARNING SOMETHING FROM IT IS NOT WHAT ANYONE NEEDS TO HEAR IN THE MIDDLE OF SUFFERING.

JAMES 1:2-4 “*MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHENEVER YOU FACE****TRIALS****OF ANY KIND, CONSIDER IT NOTHING BUT JOY, BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE; AND LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS FULL EFFECT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE MATURE AND COMPLETE, LACKING IN NOTHING*. PLEASE DON’T SHARE THIS SCRIPTURE EITHER….. KNOW THAT IN THE OT AND NT THERE ARE SCRIPTURE THAT APPEAR TO SAY THAT GOD DISCIPLINES US LIKE THE FOLLOWING, HEBREWS 12:6-7 *FOR THE LORD DISCIPLINES THOSE WHOM HE LOVES, AND CHASTISES EVERY CHILD WHOM HE ACCEPTS.” ENDURE****TRIALS****FOR THE SAKE OF DISCIPLINE. GOD IS TREATING YOU AS CHILDREN; FOR WHAT CHILD IS THERE WHOM A PARENT DOES NOT DISCIPLINE?* I AM STILL NOT CONVINCED THAT GOD CAUSES THINGS TO HAPPEN BUT ALLOWS THINGS TO HAPPEN TO US AND DOESN’T INTERVENE. THAT IS NOT THE SAME THING.

ON FB FRIDAY I SAW THAT ONE OF MY FORMER STUDENTS HAD POSTED THAT IF WE DIDN’T EXPERIENCE SUFFERING WE WOULD NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THE GOOD THAT HAPPENS TO US. WHAT?

THEN THERE’S BILDAD: JOB YOU KNOW THAT GOD DOESN’T REJECT SOMEONE WHO IS BLAMELESS, YOU MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING VERY WICKED. AND HE JUST KEEPS ON SAYING IT AND SAYING IT TO THE POINT THAT JOB WISHES HE HAD NEVER BEEN BORN.

BETSY HAD BEEN BROUGHT UP IN THE CHURCH. SHE HAD A BOYFRIEND WHEN SHE WAS IN HER TEENS, THEY HAD SEX AND SHE GOT PREGNANT. HER SON, ELI, HAD SEVERE AUTISM. SHE TOLD ME SHE KNEW THAT WAS GOD’S PUNISHMENT FOR HER SIN. PLEASE NEVER TELL SOMEONE WHO IS SUFFERING, WELL, IF YOU HADN’T DONE SOMETHING BAD, YOU WOULDN’T BE SUFFERING.

THEN THERE IS ZOPHAR: JOB YOU JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND THE MYSTERIES OF GOD. SUBMIT TO GOD, JUST DEVOTE YOUR HEART TO GOD.

DALE HAD BEEN ABUSED BY HIS MOTHER WHEN HE WAS YOUNG. HE STRUGGLED GROWING UP AND WAS OFTEN SUICIDAL. AFTER COLLEGE HE HAD A POWERFUL CONVERSION EXPERIENCE AND THRU THAT DECIDED TO GO TO SEMINARY TO STUDY TO BE A PASTOR. HE HAS SPENT THE LAST 30 YEARS IN AND OUT OF JOBS HAVING BEEN A PASTOR ONLY TWO YEARS BEFORE HE WAS DISGUSTED WITH THE CHURCH AND MAD AT GOD AND LEFT THE MINISTRY. HE CONTINUES TO BLAME GOD FOR EVERY JOB HE LOSES, FOR HIS SUICIDE ATTEMPTS, FOR HIS REALLY DIFFICULT LIFE.

HITTING THE MYSTERY BUTTON WHEN SOMEONE IS SUFFERING IS NOT HELPFUL.

JOB WOULD UNDESTAND BETSY AND DALE AND THAT AWFUL PASTOR. HE SAYS TO HIS FRIENDS IN CHAPTER 17, COME ON, ALL OF YOU….TRY AGAIN. NONE OF YOU ARE WISE. YOU ARE NOT HELPING ME AT ALL.

THE BEST THING I CAN TELL YOU IN THE MIDST OF YOUR SUFFERING AND THOSE AROUND YOU IS TO SAY VERY LITTLE. HERE IS WHERE YOUR MOM’S ADAGE, “YOU HAVE TWO EARS AND ONE MOUTH” COMES INTO PLAY. LISTEN, CRY WITH THEM, SYMPATHIZE WITH THEM DO NOT BE AN ANSWERIZER. DAVID JAMES DUNCAN SAYS THAT ANSWERIZING GROWS OUT OF THE CONVICTION THAT THE ONLY RIGHT WAY TO HANDLE ANY QUESTION IS TO OFFER THE ONE CORRECT ANSWER. JOBS FRIENDS WERE ANSWERIZERS. THEY COULD NOT ACCEPT OR TOLERATE THE INEXPLICABLE COMPLEXITY AND MYSTERY OF JOBS SUFFERING AND THEY WERE SURE THERE WAS ONE CORRECT ANSWER TO HIS PREDICAMENT.

I KNOW WE WANT TO GIVE PEOPLE THE ANSWER, WE WANT TO DEFEND GOD WHEN WE HEAR THOSE AROUND RANT AND RAVE ABOUT GOD. WE WANT TO KNOW THE ANSWER EVEN IF IT COULD MEAN GOD IS A GIANT CHESS PLAYER WITH OUR LIVES. BECAUSE, IF WE DON’T KNOW THE ANSWER IT COULD HAPPEN TO US.

JOB DIDN’T BUY WHAT HIS FRIENDS WERE SELLING ABOUT SUFFERING, IN FACT OFTEN ANSWERS AREN’T NEEDED OR MAYBE EVEN WANTED BUT THE GREAT ANSWERER IS. IN THE MIDST OF ALL THE “COMFORT” FROM HIS FRIENDS HE SAYS IN CHPT 13:15 “THOUGH GOD SLAY ME, YET WILL I TRUST IN HIM” AND IN CHAPTER 19:25 “I KNOW MY REDEEMER LIVES AND IN THE END HE WILL STAND.”

WOW, JOB. HE IS HOLDING ON FOR DEAR LIFE AS WE ALL TRY TO DO IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULT SUFFERING AND YET, WHILE HE IS RANTING HE FINDS MOMENTS OF CONNECTION TO WHO GOD IS IN HIS LIFE. IT IS NOT UNCOMMON TO BE GOING THRU A TERRIBLE TIME IN LIFE AND FEEL LIKE JOB, “WHERE IS GOD? IF I COULD JUST FIND GOD, I COULD MAKE MY CASE.” IN CHRISTIAN FAITH THIS IS OFTEN CALLED THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL. THAT PLACE WHERE THE LIGHT OF GOD’S PRESENCE ISN’T. OFTEN WE ARE AFRAID OF THIS BUT IT IS A COMMON PLACE FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH. I HAVE EXPERIENCED THIS MYSELF AND ALL I COULD DO WAS TRUST AND GO WITH WHAT I KNOW ABOUT GOD, NOT WHAT I WAS FEELING. THAT WAS TRUE FOR MOTHER THERESA, THAT GREAT WOMAN WHO TOOK CARE OF THE LEAST OF THESE, THAT AMAZING SAINT WROTE IN MANY LETTERS THAT WERE RELEASED AFTER HER DEATH THAT SHE RARELY EXPERIENCED GOD’S PRESENCE OR FELT GOD’S LOVE OR CARE AND YET, SHE STAYED FAITHFUL FOR YEARS AND YEARS. JESUS EXPERIENCED THAT FEELING WHILE HANGING ON THE CROSS, HE QUOTED FROM PSALM 22, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME? WHY ARE YOU SO FAR FROM HELPING ME, FROM THE WORDS OF MY GROANING? THE WRITERS OF JOB MIGHT HAVE BEEN FAMILIAR WITH THIS PSALM AND JOB SURE KNEW HOW THE PSALMIST FELT.

FRIENDS, MAYBE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU CAN’T FIND GOD, YOUR LIFE IS HARD, YOU ARE GOING THRU A DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL WHERE THERE IS NO LIGHT. IT IS OK TO GRUMBLE AT GOD, IT IS OK TO WONDER WHERE GOD IS, IT IS OK TO BE ANGRY AT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES. GOD CAN TAKE IT AND WE SHALL SEE GOD’S ANSWER TO JOB NEXT WEEK. BUT, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO NOT BE AN ANSWERIZER FOR YOURSELF OR FOR THOSE AROUND YOU. SOMETIMES THERE IS NO ANWER, ONLY THE GREAT ANSWER. “I KNOW MY REDEEMER LIVES! THOUGH HE SLAY ME, YET WILL I TRUST HIM.