

Praying To Die But Living To Suffer

"Why did I not perish at birth?"

Job 3:11 (NIV)

When I was in Africa I was taken out into a most primitive village area. It was far from paved roads and electricity and other conveniences I enjoy in Canada. We were met by a group of villagers but they were not the people we came to see. The person we came to meet with was a man who had leprosy for many years. He was blind. He no longer had fingers or toes. His teeth were gone and he looked about 75 years old.

I was amazed at his appearance because I was told he was only about 45-50 years old. We met his mother who had all her faculties and was one of his main helpers. We had to speak to him through a translator. We brought with us a blanket for him and bags of maize the staple food of the country. He was indeed the most pitiful person I had ever met in my life.

We talked with him and spoke of the love of Jesus for us and how we had such a great hope in the future. He was a follower of Jesus and nodded in agreement to all we said. We prayed for him and he asked if he could pray as well. Of course we agreed to him praying and he did. When he prayed he thanked God for people who would drive hours into the wilder part of the country just to see him and give him gifts. There was no hint of self pity in his prayer.

I tried to imagine what it would be like to live in a world of darkness, to have someone feed you like an infant, to have another put your clothes on you and so on. It seemed like a nightmare existence to me. Yet this man was at peace with his problems.

As we climbed back into the jeep and started to head out for our residence some hours away, I said to our guide that we needed to pray that the leper would soon pass away and be at home with Jesus. He agreed and we did. A few months later I heard the news that the man had gone to be with Jesus. I

felt so much better for the man.

Sometimes in life people get to the place where Job was in his suffering. The pain, both physical and emotional, is so heavy that they feel crushed under the load and pray to die but live to suffer another day. The man in Africa did not feel pain so his burden was eased in that way. But those around him sometimes stole from him and he lived a very deprived existence.

Job's suffering involved all the senses anyone has in life. He saw the wasting disease on his body. The pain of his physical suffering racked his mind and clouded his thoughts. All of his loved ones were dead, only his wife was spared and she turned against him and called on him to give up and die. Those friends who should have comforted him attacked him instead and heaped insults on him that were not true.

In his extremity Job cursed the days of his conception and birth. He wondered why he could not have died in the womb or when he was born. He was misery personified.

It is not that hard to find people who have the same sentiments as Job. In their dreadful situation they cry out to God to let them die and be released from the grip of such pain. They wonder when it will all end for them. They ask when they will be at peace, when they will sleep the sleep of death.

No one can blame Job for wishing he had died at birth. Nor can we judge the people around us who long for death.

What we can do with such people is weep with them. Agree that life can be more than we seem able to bear. What we should not do is what was done to Job. His "friends" told him he must have sinned in order for such catastrophes to happen to him. We have no right to judge the person who suffers. Not all suffering is the result

of the person being evil. God Himself had said Job was a good man, yet Job suffered much more than evil people around him.

What is the answer to such a seemingly illogical situation? Well, God asked Job to look around him and think about how the universe came to be. God asked if He needed counsel from anyone to get the world up and running. God pushed the point and asked if Job could state all the remarkable laws of creation. Further God asked Job if he wanted to take over running the world and dispense justice in God's place. The point God was making is that the Creator must be greater than the creation.

Job was silenced by God's reasoning. There was no way that Job wanted to run the universe in God's place. Job concluded by saying Job 42:5 "My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." (NIV). What stabilized Job in his horrific situation was the sight of God Himself.

If you suffer today, pray to see God in all His glory. Ask Him to come to you and make Himself known to you. You need more than some thoughts about God. You need more than to hear about Him. God must come and make Himself known to you and then you will be strengthened.

It may be in seeing the beauties of creation, thinking of how God feeds the birds of the air, recalling some blessing the Lord gave you in the past at just the right time. Whatever it is, look for the Lord today and seek Him. He will come and feed you by the quiet waters David spoke of in Psalm 23. Come to Him and be at peace with your situation.

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