

“Overwhelming Circumstances”

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Texts: Job 1:13-22

On the “Simple Faith” broadcast, my friend and host Dale Carlson, said, “You wouldn’t believe the horrifying circumstances that some of the homeless women have been through.” I wanted to blurt out, “Check that, Dale, I would totally believe those horrifying circumstances, I hear about them and see the fall-out of such circumstances every time I visit the Kennebec County Correctional Center for church services.” That scenario is not unfamiliar to me at all! In a timely way, having just completed reading aloud the book of Job Sunday mornings, my wife began the book of Job all over in our devotional time. There are catastrophic circumstances that befall Job in chapter one. Four solitary and grim messengers who appear one after another: messenger one, your oxen and asses were stolen and your servants slain; messenger two, fire fell from heaven and consumed all seven thousand of your sheep along with your shepherd servants; messenger three reported three bands of Chaldeans came upon your camels and carried them away, and slayed the camel herders as well; and finally, a fourth messenger came to announced that a great wind caused the house where Job’s ten children were feasting and drinking, and crushed them all to death. Now that day was a really bad day. A day of overwhelming circumstances no doubt, and the grief of all that loss, death, theft and destruction catapulted Job’s wife into a wild and inconsolable grief—as recorded in chapter two—where we find Job covered with boils as his wife exclaims, **Do you still stand on your integrity? Curse God and die!** This last, I might suggest is the cruelest cut of all, for by it Job is plunged into a terrible, lonely and desolate isolation. All that, I would say, qualifies as overwhelming circumstances—circumstances which exceed what anyone might call, “a very bad and tragic day.”

So where was God in all of that? Friends, he was right smack dab in the middle of it all; he was with Job, sustaining Job, insuring that his integrity could stay intact. Remember, Satan could do all of that only on a leash. Satan was not permitted to touch Job’s life. The contest was over Job’s faith independent of his circumstances. That point is worthy of repetition: Job’s faith, independent of his circumstances was what Satan said was impossible. Surely the hedge of wealth, possessions and prosperity, houses and lands and many servants were props upholding Job’s “faith.” But Job’s faith transcended his stuff. He was no materialist. It is striking that Job doesn’t cry out for his happiness! Job doesn’t lament his lack of freedom. Or the flagrant violation of his rights! How is that even possible?!

Funny how we are aligned with Satan, isn’t it? Faith, saving faith is entirely independent of our circumstances, our ethnic, historical and socio-economic conditions! And the God who will redeem us in it all, and through it all—all the acquisition and all the loss, all the accumulation and all the dispersal of our wealth, our valuables and our stuff. He is God as none other and he alone is worthy of our love, our trust and our worship. He is the God of all that matters, not only the God of trash, clutter and debris; but the God of all. **Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return thither: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this, Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.**(Job 1:21-22)

Job is all Job’s got. And Job is who God loves. His identity is with God, **have you considered my servant Job, there is none like him in all the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that fears God and avoids evil.** (Job 1:8 and Job 2:3) This studded repetition is remarkable. Remember they come before Job lost nearly everything and after his very bad, evil, disastrous day! God’s opinion, or evaluation of the man is unchanged! Remarkable. Wonderful. He is God’s

servant while rich, he is God's servant while disposed and destitute! Circumstances do not define the man!

**Amen**

What does the mean, "circumstances do not the define the man?" It means that although we are shaped by, impacted by and influenced by our circumstances, those circumstances do not—I repeat—do not determine us. That is a liberating thought. Who needs to hear that? We all do. Particularly those who live in their past, who never tire of repeating how awful the life they've been subjected to has been. What a pathetic and unnecessary way to live! Are we condemned to simply repeat the same old, same old? No we are not. However, many of us tend to do so. If you step back from the blame-shifting, excuse making story-line, all the hurtful and traumatic experiences (real and imagined)—you know, that the tiresome tale of resentment ("alas, poor me!") which explains everything by the terms of "oppressor and the oppressed" (or racist, or sexist, or nationalistic) is rationalization (or self-justification) regardless of the truthfulness, or the lack of truthfulness. God's opinion of you is so much more important than the opinion you might summon up for yourself. Do worry more about what God thinks than you do what you think, or what your neighbors think. What God thinks has everlasting consequences—everything else, false, inflated, or self-flattering will pass away.

Now this really comes home to roost when you consider who you are as the blood bought, born against, child of the living God. When we start with the fact of our forgiveness in Christ and build upon that—the flights of fancy I just references dissipate and float away. If Christ has declared, you are mine. That, ultimately, is all that matters. This world is passing away, this world and all its circumstances are temporary and transient; but the word of God never does pass away.

It appears to me that God holds a higher opinion of Job than Job apparently holds of himself. That is commendable. It conveys humility. And it is on a par with not boasting about yourself, but allowing others to voice your commendations. Let others praise you, if they will and if not, take comfort in God saying, "You are my servant."

We can have more wholesome conversation with fellow believers if we check in with such openness as, "Since you have been born again, how is it going as a new creature in Christ? Do you sense you are gaining in your strength? In your wisdom? In your growth in holiness, or sanctification?" Ask questions like, "Have you turned your pet sins out the door? Are you gaining in abstaining from sin? Are you kinder, more patient and hospitable? " Redirects are helpful, "I am not so interested in past and your failures as I am in getting to know what are you looking forward to in Christ? In your future? What are you undertaking for the kingdom's sake? Are you helping, healing and holding each other accountable so that progress is being made?" "Are you feeling less overwhelmed by your circumstances as we share? How can I bless you on your way?"

**Amen.**