

Sunday August 29, 2021

Lesson 13: Acceptance

Scripture: Job 40: 1-5; 41:1-10; 42: 1-6

Context:

This week we conclude our series and have our final lesson in the book of Job. This week's theme is on Acceptance and how we can learn to live faithfully without knowing all the answers. Our focus will be on the final dialogue from Job and God to understand how we might too live in a grey area and find hope in discovering things as we go on in life.

For the past several weeks, we have seen how Job has responded to God with worship, resignation, protests, and angry despair. After losing nearly everything and becoming extremely sick with no comfort from remaining family or friends, God and Job eventually share a dialogue with one another. We saw snippets in last week's lesson as Job named the anger and despair he felt from God's lack of response.

The text begins with a response from the Lord Almighty. Much like God conversed with the prophets such as Jeremiah when they cry out in pain, God gives Job a question. Much like other divine responses to the prophets, the point of the response is not to put the prophet down with an impossible question, but to express surprise over the quickness by which the prophet succumbs to discouragement and disillusionment and is followed with a challenge to a deeper loyalty and vocational endurance.¹ The same type of conversation follows with Job as God tries to extract out of Job what he searches for in his despair and protests.

Job's initial response to God may appear submissive as he speaks of being of little worth and indicating he may not speak again in the presence of God. Yet, a closer examination of the word "Look," or "Behold" in the different versions point to another translation of the is open response to be: "if."² This changes the dynamic as now we see Job may know his feelings will not change God and thus, he may resign to keep his resentment to himself.

In response, God speaks in a whirlwind and then gives a concluding challenge to him, calling on mythic creatures such as the Leviathan. Yes, God made them and owns them; even if they are not aware of it.³ The same goes for Job. Job may not know the justice of God and yet he may find his human vocation changes over time.

What follows is a confession and renewal of covenant from Job. While Job does not wrap everything up in a nice, neat bow, his answers reveal two things he has learned. To be dust in God's image is to enjoy the order in creation and it is to enjoy the freedom

¹Janzen, Gerald J., "Job," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 242.

² Ibid., 243.

³ Ibid., 246.

which is offered to humans as God's gift in the human soul.⁴ God gives us a voice in how we tell our story of faith and life offering hope in its midst.

Application

The word "acceptance" can be a tricky one. An initial glance at the word might lead one to believe acceptance means one is okay with how things turned out and there is a peace. Yet as we look at the story of Job, we might see perhaps how there is a nuance with "acceptance." To accept something means perhaps to live in an area of grey, a place where we can make some type of peace and find some meaning, even in the more difficult places we sit in life.

Once when I was in counseling after the death of my father, I read several books after talking to the counselor and the grief group. One of the things to stay with me after the sessions and some of the books was to learn how to see acceptance in a new light. Acceptance was not some type of magic wand to make everything better instantly.

Acceptance did not mean a quick fix and tying up everything to happen in some nice, neat Guidepost's story. It did not mean I would accept or allow people to tell me the meaning of my father's death or why it happened. I could make my boundaries and allow myself to grieve. It did not mean I would ever feel free from the grief or escape the triggers of losing someone I loved so tragically. As someone once said, "grief is the price we pay for love."

Instead, acceptance meant I was allowed to see the events differently and see how it still unfolds over time. God gave me the gifts and graces and the space to figure out how to live in the place without all the answers and to discover ways of living in faith. Acceptance allowed me the space to process.

Acceptance is not something related to just those with trauma. Most people will go through something difficult in their lives. Perhaps it is the unfair release from work led by questionable politics and manipulative power plays. Maybe it's a difficult relationship where one discovers the best thing is to cut ties so both parties can live in peace. It might even be something like a natural disaster to wreck our lives and ways of being.

Acceptance is the place where hopefully we can find some peace amid our story, or if not peace, at least a place where we can live in the grey and not have all the answers, able to adapt and do what needs to be done. When we read the story of Job, there are no neat answers to the events to transpire. Job wrestled with God and modeled for us what it means to question God, to ask the hard question of "why," and to name the messier feelings found in the human experience. As we read, we also learn how God gives us the freedom to process and to wrestle with God. We discover how there is hope even for the most lost among us because of God's deep abiding love for us.

Some of the wisest and most spiritually discerning people I know have gone through painful things in their lives. For many of them, the greatest gift they offer is a steadfast presence to others as they go through painful or hard things. My prayer is how all of us might find these souls on our journey. These are the people who show us how acceptance is not some instant status to achieve. Instead, acceptance is a journey as we find how to live faithfully with God in the black and white as well as grey areas of our

⁴ Ibid. 259.

lives. As we go through life, we will all discover how God leads us to new places of acceptance and perhaps we discover new things about God and ourselves on the journey.

What does the word acceptance mean to you? How have you learned to live in faith when you didn't have all the answers? Who are the people God has placed in your life to walk with you? Why do you think God gives us freedoms in our faith journey? How can you support people who may be in a "grey place" on their journey with God currently?

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