

## *Time for Deep Thinking*

*...stop and consider the wondrous works of God. Job 37.14*

There is an interesting line in Lewis Carroll's story, *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice meets the Queen of Hearts who tells her "My dear, here we must run as fast as we can, just to stay in place. And if you wish to go anywhere you must run twice as fast as that."

If you spend much time watching or listening to the news lately, and I encourage you to not do that, you may feel like you just can't keep up with what is going on in our world. And worse, you just don't have the energy to run any faster.

The recent election results—or non-results, as the case may be. The pandemic that seems to be getting renewed strength itself and the related lockdowns, past, present and into the future. Recent riots in the streets, increasing crime, increasing unemployment rate, whether or not there will be a bailout from the government that already doesn't have money, and so we print more.

Do you feel better now that I have listed but a few of the items on your worry list?

I think this is probably a good time for us to follow Elihu's counsel to Job in the passage we just read: *stop and consider...*

Quite often when I meet with a new hospice patient, I read a psalm. When I tell them that most of the time they expect me to read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. I don't, but I tell them why: they already know it. Then I read Psalm 121, and most of the time stop after the first verse and have them imagine the setting of that verse.

A shepherd, like David in Psalm 23, is tending his sheep on a hillside outside Bethlehem. He looks across the hills—what does he see? Another shepherd, with his flock, coming to this hill to encroach on the pasture land? Perhaps he sees a mountain lion who wants dinner in the form of lamb or mutton. Perhaps it's worse than that—he sees a Philistine raiding party coming to kill the shepherd and take all of his sheep.

*I lift up my eyes unto the hills; from whence cometh my help?*

Fair question. Where does his help come from? the second verse answers the question.

*My help cometh from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

The psalmist looks to the one infallible source of help. Not a sword, not a spear, not a government edict or an army. The LORD, who made heaven and earth.

This is exactly the approach that Elihu is taking with Job at this point. The answers are clearly not found with Job's other friends, not in the wisdom of the sages, no matter how helpful they are at other times. This situation needs different answers, better answers, the Creator's answers.

And so Elihu has just brought one part of creation to Job's attention: the weather. Rain, wind, thunder, lightning, snow, clouds, cold, heat. All of this which man struggles to predict with reasonable accuracy more than a few hours ahead of time.

He reminds Job that God *does great things that we cannot comprehend (v. 5)*. I don't think he is just talking about the weather at this point—he is describing the whole range

of God's works of providence in our world. Not only can we not comprehend the great things that God does, we don't know why he does what he does (v. 13). It is beyond us.

Many people that I meet are willing to blame God with the hard times that they are going through, and either think that he is cruel, having targeted them, or that he is just incompetent, unable to stop the spread of viruses or establish peace in the Middle East—or peace in their own hearts.

When we find ourselves in that condition—whether we admit it or not to anyone else—Elihu's counsel stands: *stop and consider the wondrous works of God*.

It certainly won't hurt us to reflect on God's wondrous works in creation and providence as he governs this world and continues to work out the kinks that man has worked into it. And he does it not just for good people, as if there were a great number of them.

It is a great manifestation of God's glory that he has compassion for all of his creation. Think of the extent of his mercy even to those who deny his existence: he has his sun shine on both evil and good; he has his rain fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:44-45).

But it would also do us much good to reflect on God's work of redemption, his saving work.

### **The Works of God in Redemption**

Consider even at the beginning, in the Garden, how God not only provided more permanent coverings than leaves, but also promised that there would be a Savior who would crush the head of the serpent.

Remember also his great saving work in rescuing his people from Egypt in the Exodus through the 10 plagues, the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, the guidance through the wilderness, the supplies of food, water, with clothes that didn't wear out, sandals lasted the entire journey.

Consider also what God did for his people when he subjected them to the Babylon captivity because of their continued disobedience. The captivity period was chastisement, yes, but it was also protection and nurturing, for he then opened the doors for them to experience a second Exodus to return to the land promised to them.

We would be most remiss if we did not also consider the great work of salvation at Calvary culminating with the empty tomb. To be rescued from 400 years of slavery is impressive. To be preserved through the captivity period is remarkable. But to have God take on human flesh and blood, to suffer the death on the cross and the torment in those 3 dark hours, for the sake of sinners who not only have rebelled in the past, but continue to fall short—that is as close to unbelievable as anything can be. And yet it must be believed—trusted—for us to understand the mighty work of God.

In one sense it is hard for us to separate God's work of providence for us and his saving work—for he is the ultimate multitasker, working all things after the counsel of his own will. And so the question comes, not just Calvary, but what are the other works of God in your life?

## **The Works of God in Your Life**

Paying attention to what goes on in life—what has he done for you, with you, in you? Let me prime your thoughts for you with Psalm 103.1-5:

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

As you ponder this psalm, remember that David is encouraging his soul—his inner being. The body will decline. Decay. Die. The soul does not. The soul is what is renewed by God himself (Psalm 23.3).

So here is your assignment: stop and consider the wondrous works of God. Works of creation, works of providence, works of salvation, but works, even now, for your soul.

What does it mean to ponder? It means to think deeply and thoroughly about something; to weigh in the mind; to meditate.

This is not something that our current society does at all, much less well. We have become use to buying into what others tell us to think and do. It certainly happens in schools, in the broader society, in our news media, even in our churches. Things don't add up for us, like they didn't add up for Job. And so our questions come like his: why is this happening to us? To me?

And then when we do begin to ponder, we then wonder what God has to do with any of this stuff going on around us. Which leads us to opposite extremes if we aren't careful.

### **The Dangers of Deism and Micromanagement In Understanding Providence**

Deism tells us that God made the world, set up the laws of nature, and then left it all to run on its own, perhaps coming back to intervene from time to time.

Micromanagement implies that God controls every detail of every thing that happens throughout the universe.

Both have an element of truth—God does govern by fixed laws, and he controls all things—yet to try to figure out every little detail is tedium—and foolish without a true interpretation of those events. And that is when we get into trouble with either blaming God for everything that we think is bad in the world, or we think that he is not involved at all.

### **Solution: The Middle Ground of Mystery**

The better way is to realize that not everything can be understood from this side of life—and thus to hold to the idea of mystery. Job 37.24b in essence tells us to not pretend to be wiser than we really are. Admit that you don't understand.

You may remember the tsunami of 2004 that occurred in the Indian Ocean. The death toll was a quarter of a million people. In one of the devastated area of Indonesia there

had been a village of Christians who had Muslim neighbors who became belligerent and began to persecute the Christians. It got so bad that the Christians moved inland, away from their homes, just to survive.

That was before the tsunami, which struck with little warning, and wiped out the population of the oppressors.

Was this the justice of God? Was it time for the Christian survivors to cheer?

Their pastor knew better than to try to judge whether what happened to the Muslims was God's justice for the persecution or not.

He did, however, insist that the tsunami was the opportunity for the believers to show love to their enemies by coming to their aid, which they did with food, medical supplies, shelter.

Perhaps God has been using the pandemic as an act of judgment. Perhaps not. Either way, our role is not to sit next to the Judge of all the earth who does what is right. Our role is to ponder his works, and to respond with grace and mercy, as he has already responded to us.

It is time to stop running as fast as we can to stay in one place. It is time to stop and consider the wondrous works of God.

Ponder his works of creation, of providence, of salvation.

In your pondering, remember beauty of his creation, the beauty of his holiness. Ponder his control of all things for his own glory, and for his people's good. In your pondering, remember mystery—you won't be able to figure it all out.

Ponder.

Worship.

Find comfort.

Give comfort.