Sermon, October 14, 2018

**Question, “If disciples are students, what kind of students are never put to the test?” Bill story.**

Job was put to the test. He was doing all the right things, but Satan challenged God to prove that Job was truly faithful. So God allowed Satan to bring calamity on Job as a test, a wager…unfair, but instructive. Like Job when we are tested, we can long to present our case to God, to ask our questions and get straight answers. But God does not lay out the plans made for us in a way that we can understand. There is something so frightening in the realization that we don’t know and cannot know or control what God has planned for us. We become anxious when trials come…but surely they are just a test to pass.

Our human nature makes uncertainty a very uncomfortable place. We want to know what will happen. Like Job, we long for the comfort of times past (Chapter 29), when things seemed easy and right. When trouble or change comes we want to build our defenses, amass our resources and prepare **our own way**, leaning on ourselves and our own strength.

In the beginning chapters, Job’s friends reason that Job must be a great sinner to have such bad things happen to him. Job says he just wants to know what is on God’s mind. At the end of the book God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind, teaching him that he need not know and cannot control everything. When presented with the Almighty, Job confesses his error and humbles himself. He passes the test. God then restores his life and blesses him richly. Not because of Job’s righteousness, but because of his humility and acknowledgment of God’s greatness and power.

**Hebrews**

 The Hebrews passage echoes the almighty power of God to see us as we are. Though we cannot see God’s plan for us or what will happen to us in the next moment, God can see everything about us. Our thoughts, our longings, our intentions, our weaknesses. And as his disciples or students, God puts us to the test. Oh, we may be doing and saying all the “right” things, but are we relying on that for our salvation? What test is God allowing to refine us and bring us to the humility that Job found?

**The Rich Young Man and The Disciples**

And as God sees us, Jesus saw through the rich young man who asked him, “what can I **do** to inherit eternal life?” He thought he had it all sewn up. His responses to Jesus questions of faithfulness to the **law** were spot on. In his mind he had it made. But Jesus saw that he was depending on himself alone and needed to give up his security and comfort to depend on God. Jesus loved him and challenged him to put his trust in God alone. Sadly, he turned away.

Then Jesus challenged his disciples by going against the wisdom of their culture. Their society believed that God favored the wealthy (because obviously they are righteous, or God wouldn’t be rewarding them with stuff). But Jesus says it is impossible for those who **trust in riches** to be a part of the kingdom. The disciples were dumbfounded by this statement. They didn’t understand that it is not the wealth that stands in the way, but the trust in whatever we have or can do for ourselves that trips us up. They thought he was only condemning the rich.

Still misunderstanding, Peter rationalizes that since the wealthy cannot on their own power enter the Kingdom, the disciples must be in great shape because they have given up everything. Jesus gives an assurance of their reward. What does it mean that those who leave everything for His sake and the sake of the Gospel will receive a hundredfold:

* Houses—because we give up our own comfort zone, we are welcomed in many homes…Jesus was said to have less of a home than the foxes.
* Brothers and Sisters—because we let go of family we gain a world of spiritual siblings in Christ…Jesus said his mother and siblings were those who had faith in Him
* Mothers—because we become part of a larger family we will be nurtured beyond blood ties…Jesus was comforted by angels and supported by the Holy Spirit
* Children—because we follow Jesus and spread the Gospel, we will have spiritual descendants...though Jesus may have had no biological children, we all belong to Him
* Lands—because we move beyond our little space we will possess much territory in Jesus name. Because Jesus did not establish a physical kingdom, the World is His

But there is also a subtle warning in Jesus’ words. Did you notice the phrase WITH PERSECUTIONS there at the end? It wouldn’t be easy for the disciples. They were tested again and again. They tried and failed (even after the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost). The key to being a disciple is to never be self-satisfied; to be looking constantly at Jesus (who according to the Pharisees and the law of Moses was a great rule-breaker, but that is another sermon). To trust that in turning all over to Him the Kingdom will come.

**Takeaway**

Like Job, we must realize, acknowledge and accept that we are not in control. Like Jesus disciples, we must give everything for Jesus (whether we be wealthy or have little, all is His). And even though it is impossible for us to enter the kingdom on our own human power, we have the powerful ally described in Hebrews of Christ who stands as our advocate before the throne of God’s righteousness and pleads the case of the faithful.

How is God speaking to us today? Are we as individuals and God’s faithful being tested? What is our response? Will we turn away from the challenge as the rich young man did, or will we, as Jesus disciples of old did, keep the faith, surrender all, take up the cross and follow Christ wherever that might lead and whatever uncertainty it might bring?