

Fighting For Presence

Job 23

Introduction

- Trying to play football with older kids
 - One of my favorite memories as a kid
 - Probably 7-8 years old
 - Neighborhood kids would play football in our front yard
 - I was one of the smallest in my neighborhood; at least 4-5 years younger
 - No two-hand touch; all tackle with no pads or helmets
 - The older kids would let me play but I didn't quite match up
 - There was no question about how hard I played
 - I would run as hard as I could when the ball came my way
 - As I got closer to the older kids they would at times just pick me up and sit me down on the ground
 - Other times they would just run me right over!
 - Even though I didn't quite match up to the older kids, I fought hard to have a spot in the game.
 - If there is one memory that I could relive it would be those neighborhood football games!
- Sermon Series: Where is God?
 - Each week we have looked at a biblical character who didn't quite match up to the circumstances they were faced against.
 - Each character that we have studied has been faced with the question: Where is God?
 - Through each example, we have seen how God worked through the individual and the circumstances to fulfill God's will.
- As we consider our current circumstances, it's quite possible we may feel that we don't match up
 - The coronavirus and the quarantine have presented the most unusual challenges many of us have ever faced
 - While we begin to see business open up around us, there still remains a nervous fear as to what impact this will have on the over-all health and well-being of our society.

- Even as your pastor, as we consider the possibility of resuming worship services, there is a lot of anticipation and yet a real anxiety as to what are the right steps are in order for us to move forward.
- I ask for your continued patience and prayers as we navigate all the challenges required for us to resume worship together.
- Today we are going to examine another biblical character: Job
 - Many of you may be familiar with the story of Job
 - Job was a man of great wealth, a good family, and by all accounts a blessed life
 - Until, everything was taken away from him
 - Job not only lost all he had, but his wife and friends turned on him by blaming Job for his plight.
 - All that was spared was his own life and even that he was not without severe illness
 - At first Job appears to hold it together, but eventually Job hits his breaking point
 - He asks the question that we have been asking throughout this sermon series: “Where is God?”
 - Job wants one moment with God, not to blame God but to defend himself.
 - He wants a moment of justice so that he can be vindicated from the hardships he has endured.
 - Job reminds me of when I was a kid running as hard as I could toward the obstacles in my way (the older kids) only to discover that he didn’t quite match up.
 - Job was fighting to have a hearing in the presence of God.
- As we study Job’s life today I believe that we will discover the three guiding principles that we have referred to throughout this series
 - We may feel forsaken, but God has not abandoned us.
 - We find God through obedience.
 - We find God as we cultivate our relationship with God especially when God feels absent.
 - Ultimately, I think we will discover the same opportunity that Job was presented with: This is an opportunity for us to bear witness to God’s presence as we trust in God’s promises.
- So I hope that your faith might be strengthened as we continue to answer the question: Where is God?

Integrity Is The Key to Any Fight

- **Job 1:1**
 - Verse 1 offers us a description that all of us should want to aspire to
 - Before anything is mentioned about Job's wealth and good fortunes, it is his integrity that stands out
 - It is his integrity that will be the key ingredient not only before the trials he will face, but especially during his trials.
- **Job 1:8**
 - God affirms the description regarding Job
 - God affirms this description as God is challenged by Satan.
 - Satan's challenge is that anyone could live as faithfully as Job is that had the resources that Job has, but could someone have faith if everything was taken away?
- I think the question that Satan poses to God is something we need to pose to ourselves
 - Is our faith based on what we have, our circumstances and our terms and conditions?
 - OR, is our faith based on who God is?- even when God doesn't act as we expect!
 - Remember example last week of Shadrach, Meshach and Abendgo-
 - They stood for their faith even when the consequence was a fiery furnace
 - We said our faith is worthless if it can't stand the fires of life.
 - It is when our faith is tested that we find out what kind of faith we really have.
- The key ingredient to any fight is our integrity
 - Integrity is a word that gets thrown around a lot in part because it seems to be something difficult to live by
 - Integrity is remaining consistent in character no matter the circumstances
 - Integrity is what is described of Job in verse 1
 - Job's integrity is tested when his health, wealth, and family are all destroyed
 - The true evidence of Job's integrity is what is found in **verses 20-22**
- I must confess to you that I don't have this kind of integrity
 - When my faith is challenged I don't always respond in the same way Job does
 - I envy Job's strength and resolve
 - I'm reminded as we all need to be: Integrity is the key to any fight!

God's Absence Isn't Always a Result of Cause and Effect

- Newton's Third Law of Motion: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.
 - Cause and Effect
 - Consequences to every decision
- Job's friends and wife respond in relation to this law
 - Add insult to injury
 - Job must have done something to cause all of this calamity
- Job is not arrogant but he knows the man that he is
 - Integrity is the key to any fight
 - Job feels that he must defend himself
- **Job 23:1-9**
 - If only Job could have a hearing with God and defend himself, then justice could be served and Job would be found guiltless!
 - Job can't find God!
 - Where is God?
- We are all prone to ask, "What have I done to deserve this" when we face trials.
 - There must be something that has caused our trials
 - At times, we are guilty.
 - Sin can distance us from God's presence
 - But there are a lot of times when the law of cause and effect doesn't apply
 - Things just happen and God seems absent!!!
- Bring back a previous point: Whenever we feel God's absence it is good that we examine our life to see if there is any unconfessed sin.
 - HOWEVER, God's absence isn't always a result of cause and effect
 - So I'll bring back another point we have made in this series: Sometimes God seems absent because we are looking for God in the wrong place.
- It was assumed that Job's sufferings were a result of something Job did
 - Job examined his life and found no evidence of unconfessed sin
 - So, Job's conclusion was that someone must have gotten things wrong in order for Job to experience suffering.

- Job 23:3-4 (ESV), “Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments.”
- Despite Job’s integrity, he was looking for God in the wrong place
 - God would not be found under Job’s terms and conditions
 - God was at work in ways that Job did not see or understand
- A couple of scripture verses for us to keep in mind when we go through trials that we don’t understand
 - Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV), “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”
 - Romans 8:28 (ESV), “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.”
- Consistent theme throughout scripture of God’s character
- God’s absence isn’t always a result of cause and effect
 - If we look for God under our terms and conditions we may miss God
 - God is always working for our good
 - WHICH is why, Integrity is the key to any fight!

Humbled By the Presence of God

- I’ve noticed church folks, in particular, can act real nice and have the appearance of integrity until they are attacked or feel threatened.
 - It’s like we have this need to defend ourselves and by all accounts when we look at our society this is the example that is set for us
 - In fact, this is the tendency that Job has
 - Now Job doesn’t appear to sin, but when Christians are attacked or feel threatened they can turn into sharks
 - Self-preservation is a powerful temptation!
 - It always has a way of biting us back
 - If integrity is the key to any fight, then we have to trust that God will defend our cause and often times God uses our integrity to fight our cause.
- After Job has defended himself before his wife and friends and he presented his case to God despite God’s absence- God shows up
 - Job 38:1-7
 - Notice that God doesn’t answer any of Job’s questions for why these calamities have come upon Job

- Instead God points to his knowledge and power
- It's not that God is trying to dodge Job's questions
- What God is attempting to do is to point Job's attention in a different direction
- Job is looking for God in the wrong places
- **Job 40:1-5**
 - Job has not response to God's questions
 - You might say that God put Job in his place
 - It's not as if God was being a bully, but there was something more going on than what Job could see or understand
- Job's experience of God's presence is similar to Isaiah's
 - Immediately when God showed up both were humbled by God's presence
 - They saw just how small they were in the presence of God
 - They saw that any amount of integrity they may have had was nothing compared to the holiness of God.
- We have lost the awestruck wonder of God's presence
 - In part, it is because we have become so self-dependent and selfish
 - We have a certain expectation of God that is based on our terms and conditions; our own finite understanding of God
 - When we respond in this way we belittle God and we miss the true essence of God's presence.
- God doesn't question Job's integrity, instead he points Job to God's infinite knowledge and understanding
 - This repositioning puts Job back into a place of worship which is how we were introduced to Job at the beginning of Chapter 1.
 - Job was humbled by the presence of God.
 - **Job 42:1-3**
 - Again it reminds me of running as hard I could as I young kid against the older kids and being laid flat on my back
 - Sometimes we need that in order to look up to God

Conclusion

- **Job 42:7-9**
- God works through Job's integrity to redeem his friends

- This is an opportunity for us to bear witness to God's presence as we trust God's promises
- We need to fight the temptation to defend ourselves- Integrity is the key to any fight.
- Integrity always holds up!
- Job 42:10-12
 - God restored Job
 - God blessed Job more than more so than what Job was blessed in the beginning!
 - God always honors faithfulness!
- How does Job fulfill the 3 guiding principles?
 - We may feel forsaken, but God has not abandoned us
 - Job went through a period of suffering
 - God's plan was bigger than what Job could see or understand
 - God showed up when the time was right to point Job toward God's greater purpose
 - God is found through obedience
 - Job never sinned against God
 - Job lived by integrity before and especially during his trials
 - Integrity is the key to any fight
 - God is found as we cultivate our relationship with God especially when God seems absent
 - Job's faith was not dependent upon the circumstances
 - Cause and effect may not have added up
 - Job continued to remain faithful to God
 - All the time leading up to Job's trial prepared him for the difficult journey
- Do you feel like you are fighting for God's presence?
 - Sometimes there are not always clear answers as to the trials that we face
 - No matter the circumstances; integrity is the key to every fight
 - Remain humble in the presence of God
 - God will be there to defend you at the right time and moment