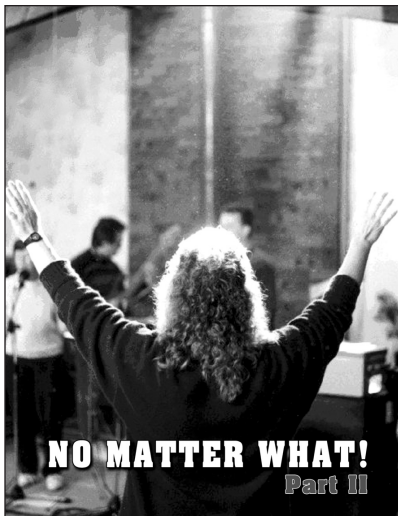


Keith Shady

PRESSIN' IN

The Teaching Letter of **Toward the Mark**

The topic of praising God no matter what reminds me of the Bible account of a man named Job. If there was ever a person who modeled for us just how a mature man or woman of God should conduct themselves in times of trial it was Job. He suffered through things that would be unbearable to most people and he did not blame God or anyone else for his troubles. As you may remember from Part I, the Apostle Peter was quick to deny Jesus on three different occasions after he had assured Jesus that he never would. Job was quick to praise God while in the midst of his troubles.



However, to really appreciate this and learn from his example, we need to better understand the severity of his situation. The Bible introduces Job to us in this manner:

“There was a man in the land of

Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed (avoided) evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of

the east. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.” (Job 1:1-5)

From this short introduction we gather that Job was a God-fearing, family man with ten children. He was also the richest man around. Life for Job and for his family was very good. All of this was about to change. “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth (avoids) evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.” (Job 1:6-12)

The scene switches from Earth to Heaven where we are confronted with an extraordinary exchange between God and Satan. God asks two questions of Satan. This fact is quite interesting in itself. God is omniscient, so why would He ask questions? The answer is that He uses questions to focus someone’s attention on a matter that God wants addressed. In this case, God directs Satan’s attention to Job. The exchange can be paraphrased as follows: God

says, speaking to Satan: “Where have you been?” Satan replies: “Walking around on the Earth.” (Parenthetically speaking, 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” From this we conclude that Satan was walking around on the Earth looking for people to devour - that is, destroy.) God, knowing that Satan wanted to find people to destroy, directs Satan attention to Job by asking: “Have you considered Job, that there is no one else like him on the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and avoids evil?” Satan answers, “Have I considered Job!?! I’d like to get my hands on that guy, but You won’t let me near him! That’s why it only looks like he fears You! He has nothing to fear from me.” God tells Satan, “All that Job has is in your power. However, you must not touch Job himself.” Thus, immediately after extolling the praises of His servant Job God sets him up to be severely tested by Satan. So, Satan left Heaven and returned to the Earth to kill, steal, and destroy. The

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Scripture records the following concerning all of this:

“And there was a day when his (Job’s) sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was

yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.” (Job 1:13-19)

In one day, the wealthy, God-fearing, family man loses all of his wealth and all of his children. He learns about all of this in less than five minutes. His reaction is immediate and instructive: “Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I 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 1:20-22) The Devil had boasted that he could get Job to curse God to His face, if all that Job had was taken away. God allowed Satan to do just that, and Job responded by adopting a posture of mourning for his children while simultaneously worshipping the LORD.

Wow, this is a man who knew, loved and was faithful to God, no matter what! Like the sponge analogy in part one of this message, the true character of a person is revealed when they are exposed to life's pressures. Just ask a goldsmith how gold is purified and he will tell you that it must be heated up to a very high temperature so that the impurities can be revealed and they can then be removed. This is how the impurities in our own hearts are revealed. Expose the human heart to the heat of life's conflicts and all that is not firmly grounded in Christ Jesus will come to the surface. This is what makes Job's life such a remarkable example for us to follow. His heart was so pure before God that when the intense flames of his trials first came, all that came forth from his mouth were pure praises for God. “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the

abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” (Luke 6:45)

Continuing with the account of Job, we find that once again the scene shifts from the Earth to Heaven with another exchange between God and Satan: “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.” (Job 2:1-3)

The beginning of this second exchange is the same as the first up to a point. Then God points out the Devil’s failure to get Job to curse God to His face. “And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath

“Expose the human heart to the heat of life’s conflicts and all that is not firmly grounded in Christ Jesus will come to the surface.”

will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.” (Job 2:4-5)

Now we see that Satan has upped the ante: Let me attack Job’s health and then he’ll curse God. “And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.” (Job 2:6) God permits the request, but does not allow Satan the satisfaction of killing Job. “So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.” (Job 2:7-8) Job is smitten with a foul illness that drives him away from his home. He ends up sitting among the ashes, the words signifying a refuse heap. “Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he

said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.” (Job 2:9-10)

Now even Job’s wife has turned against him, but still Job will not curse God. The Devil lost again! However, Satan has one more trick up his sleeve: Job’s friends. “Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him. And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.” (Job 2:1-13)

Upon hearing of the multiple calamities that have befallen Job, three of his friends agree to come to Job and comfort him. Upon their arrival, they too are overcome by how overwhelming the disaster truly is and they do nothing more than sit silently with their friend for seven whole days. At the end of those seven days, the Scripture records this: “After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day.” (Job 3:1) A full sponge when squeezed gives up that with which it has been saturated. When the trials first came, Job’s muttered uttered only words worthy of a righteous man. However, when Job was squeezed more and more, eventually his words changed from praising God to extolling Job’s own virtue. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks: Job said things he may not have thought he would ever say. In fact, like the character James Stewart played in the famous movie, “It’s A Wonderful Life”, Job even cursed the day he was born and wished that he had never been alive.

It was during the conversation that followed that the three men

that we have come to know as “Job’s comforters” wind up taking an already bad situation and, as hard as it may be to imagine, they make it worse for Job. They had come to mourn with him and to comfort him. However, with their depressing, accusatory words they, as recorded in the next 29 chapters of the book of Job, do what amounts to rubbing salt in Job’s many wounds. It is like the old saying, “with friends like that who needs enemies?” These torments continued for many hours of argumentative confrontation in which Job responds by angrily defending his integrity, and although he never once curses God, Job’s words were no longer of worship and praise for His Maker.

You see, what was happening is that Job was being squeezed so hard that things hidden deep within his heart were coming to the surface. Job may not have even been aware that these things were hidden there. Job begins to accuse His maker of treating him unfairly and he demands an audience with God, or at least an audience with a

“Job’s sin was not to be found in what he had done. Job’s sin was pride: self righteousness.”

go-between. In return Job’s Comforters attacked Job, accusing him of having committed secret sins. Job’s arguments in defense of himself eventually wear out his three friends and the Scripture says this: “So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.” (Job 32:1) Job had stopped praising God and began praising himself. Ironically, at the beginning of the book of Job, we find it recorded that Job “rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Job was concerned that his sons might harbor secret sins in their hearts and yet it was Job himself who had Sin hidden deep within. Job’s sin was not to be found in what he had done. Job’s sin was pride: self righteousness.

Now there was one other man present at the time, a younger man

named Elihu. Up until this point he had respectfully maintained his silence while his elders spoke. But when the argument closed out with Job's self righteousness carrying the day, Elihu could refrain himself no longer. "Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he. When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, then his wrath was kindled." (Job 32:2-5) Elihu offers to be the go-between and proceeds to redirect Job's attention to God. Elihu speaks eloquently of God's greatness and of His Sovereignty, things that Job would have said once himself. For when Job had stopped looking at God and instead focused on himself, he became full of bitter and angry words. Instead of responding to Elihu's call to repentance, Job stubbornly clung to his self righteousness. This condition was about to come to an end. As the five men sat together, a whirlwind appeared and "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind." (Job 38:1)

God takes up where Elihu had left off. He spoke of the greatness of His Being, of His Sovereignty, and of His Mighty Acts. Job had boldly declared that if only God would show up, he would tell Him a thing or two. Well, God did show up, and Job only manages to utter the following speech: "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)

When Job was actually confronted with the wonderful Reality of God - His Holiness, His Greatness, His Majesty - Job was speechless except to say that he repented. In this we see the reason God had directed Satan's attention to Job. Although Job's words strayed from worship and praise during his terrible ordeal, Satan was defeated: Job never cursed God to His face. Notice also, that once Satan completes his attacks, as recorded in chapter 2 of the Book of Job, there is never again a mention of Satan through the rest of the book. Satan was allowed to attack Job, but in the end, it is God's purposes that prevail. God wanted Job to see what was hidden in his heart so that it could be removed and so that God could heal him. God also wanted to heal the three well meaning but misguided friends of Job.

“And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against

“Likewise, God does not want us to wallow in guilt for mistakes and misdeeds.”

thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job. So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job.” (Job 42:7-9)

God did not put Job through the wringer to condemn him. No, God put the squeeze on Job so that things that were hidden deep in his heart would come to the surface and be revealed, so that he could be healed. Once they were exposed and Job had realized the truth about himself, he did not wallow in guilt or self pity. Likewise, God does not want us to wallow in guilt for mistakes and misdeeds.

Jesus died on the Cross so that we could receive forgiveness - both eternal and temporal - and cleansing from our sins in this life and in the life to come. The trials in our lives are meant to reveal the contents of our hearts. God is not as interested in what we did during the trials as He is in what we do about what was revealed about us through those trials. This includes the words that come out of our mouths, because our words reveal our hearts.

Job's heart had been revealed and he responded by doing what the Scripture tells all of us to do: he turned to God in humble repentance and asked for forgiveness, and you know what? God forgave him, and healed him, and blessed him. That was His purpose all along, because as amazing as Job's experience has been to this point, the end of the matter is even more so: "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned (expressed grief to) him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Kerenhappuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days." (Job 42:117)

Whenever the trials of life come upon us, we would do well to remember the testimony of Job, because we have an advantage over Job. We know that Satan is the accuser of the brethren, that he goes

about seeking whom he may destroy, and we also know that Satan can do nothing without God's permission. So in the midst of the trials we can remember that God's intention is that we receive His blessing in and through those trials, because "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

For this reason, we can offer the sacrifice of praise while we are in a trial. "And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing." (Psalms 107:22) What makes a sacrifice of praise so pleasing to God? Because a sacrifice of praise is just that, the act of one's offering up thanksgiving to God even while that person is going through the refining pain of a fiery trial, no matter how much they do not feel like praising God. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Hebrews

"So in the midst of the trials we can remember that God's intention is that we receive His blessing in and through those trials"

13:15) It is said that the true beauty of a rose's sweet smelling fragrance can not be fully realized until it has been crushed into many tiny pieces! This is the purest form of praise, the sweet smelling fragrance that emanates from a grateful heart, especially one that has been crushed. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:2-4) True praise can only emanate from a heart that is filled with thanksgiving to God. Not for what He can do but for who He is, He's God!

Remember, when things seem like they can not get any worse, when it feels like your whole world is crashing down around you, lift up your hands and "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath

made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.” (Psalms 100:1-5) “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” (Colossians 3:15) *No Matter What!*

When you finish reading this please pass it on to someone else.
Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'h'.

Would you please stand with us in prayer for the nation of Israel.



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