

Sunday Evening 6th April 2014. Kenneth Gray - Job 42 "Now my eyes have seen you".

Kenneth commented that we are all prone to self-pity. "Why me?" "It's so unfair!" we cry when life brings hardships. To think this way indicates a loss of perspective and when we find ourselves thinking like that we should remember Job. Sometimes we snap out of the 'slough of despond' when we see someone in a worse predicament than we remember to count our blessings. Self-pity cuts us off from God and Satan likes that. When we do recover our sense of perspective we realise how far removed from God we have allowed ourselves to drift.

We all need a sense of direction. It's easy to get our bearings in a location with significant features like a prominent landmark or a river running through it in a known direction. In our faith journey we can also become disorientated and lose sight of biblical truth.

The book of Job is not some historical description of one man's situation. At times we can all experience spiritual disorientation.

God has spoken to Job and Job has replied.

God asked "Who is this who obscures my counsel without knowledge? Job replied "Surely, I spoke of things too wonderful to understand".

This reminded Kenneth of a time when, as a 1st year student, he took a look at the information written on the blackboard in a 3rd year students' classroom. None of the first years could make sense of the lesson depicted on the board at that time but they did come to understand it a couple of years later after they had received the appropriate 2 years of teaching. So it is with Job. Under God's instruction he is growing in his knowledge about God and deepening his relationship with God. He has come to a point where he recognises he has huge amounts still to learn but he also recognises that he does not need to know everything. God will let us understand what we need to understand.

Kenneth commented that as he looks out at members of the congregation on a Sunday he sees many who have been through hardship and grief in their lives that could have made them bitter with God. They have not become embittered because God has been teaching them year after year.

"Listen and I will speak"

This verse is in a sense an early description of what it means to be 'converted'. Job knew about God before but now he knows God and he despises in himself those things that have kept him from a closer relationship with God. God does not require us to despise ourselves or repent in ashes. He only requires us to call on the name of Jesus and to kneel at the foot of the Cross. God wishes us to know him as someone who loves us but who is nonetheless wholly other and completely holy- one who chooses to do his will not ours. Job is broken to become fulfilled, knowing what is important and what is unimportant.

Now Job's 3 friends need to be converted.

Their stupid opinions need to be rubbished and their 'understanding' challenged. They have not yet come to the point where they recognise they are wrong.

It is interesting how God chooses to have Job do the praying and it is helpful for us. So many in Bridge of Weir will not pray, or pray properly, for themselves. It is the Christian people who must be prayer warriors on behalf of those who do not know God. Quite often evangelists refer to discovering, after they have given their lives to Christ's service, that someone has been praying for them for years beforehand unknown to them. These people have prayed for those individuals' lives to be transformed and God has answered their prayers.

As Job prays for his friends he is doubly blessed by God.

There is no sin in prosperity - Job finishes twice as rich as he was before - but we must use God's gifts to us in ways of which God approves. We all have gifts we can use in God's service but we need to ask

ourselves “Are we using them to the full, in a God-honouring way?”

Job's 3 daughters also receive an inheritance, a revolutionary concept introduced in the book of Job.

What we must remember above all though is that the message of this book would have been no less true if God's purpose for Job had been different. We must accept that God's purpose is perfect.

Sunday Evening 16th March 2014 Jack McHugh - Job 12

Job is to be admired for not caving in to the views of his friends - their strong rebukes are met by Job's strong resistance. Jack observed that in the Church the 'legalists' have been having a field day but now have to be thwarted by the 'spiritualists'.

Job's response to Zophar is forthright and robust: “I have a mind as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know all these things?”

Job knows much better than his friends how awesome and powerful God is. He gives a creative description of God's works and his power and it is before this God alone that Job is prepared to bow. Regardless of all that has befallen himself Job remains convinced that God is still in control. Like CS Lewis when pondering the question “Why do the righteous suffer” Job concludes “Why not?” Who are better equipped to take suffering than the righteous who trust in the Lord?

It is helpful for us to know that God is full of care and compassion for mankind and that Jesus was not simply transported immediately back into heaven when the world turned its viciousness upon him.

Jack commented that we would make a world of difference if we looked for someone every day to whom we could offer our help in some way. For example, we could talk to someone each day about Jesus.

People will not care how much we know until they come to know how much we care.

Job's ironic response here is the closest he has come to ridiculing his friends. He is quite sarcastic: ‘I know - I have a brain- it doesn't take an expert to recognise God's power'.

We can hide nothing from God. The Bible tells us we have all sinned - we have all fallen short of God's standards. Zophar has insinuated that Job is stupid. He and Job's other friends are trying to help but they are less 'in tune' with God than he is. Like Balaam whose donkey was more perceptive than he was, the friends' motivations are questionable. They have been conditioned by the society in which they live and though they try to help Job they really make matters worse for him and judge him by society's standards rather than God's.

Though mocked and ridiculed by his friends Job knows God will be the final judge and it is God whom he must seek to please, not man. Jack observed that our toughest critics are often other Christians who feel we are too earnest. Job teaches that the closer we are to God, the more 'in tune', then the more ridicule and criticism we can expect.

Job reminds his friends that we can lose everything we have in a minute if God decides so. “In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind”. If all afflictions are a result of sin as they claim then why is it that the wicked seem to prosper on this earth? The only security we can have lies in trusting God. No-one but God has power, wisdom and good counsel . Job rejects his friends' counsel and criticism and focuses on God.

The answer to the meaning of life can be found only in God through Jesus Christ - not in our jobs, our wealth, our achievements, our human relationships.

People in modern society do not see the need for God in their lives. The truth is that the purpose of our existence is to glorify God - even in the midst of pain and suffering - trusting in God's perfect plan for the world.

Job prompts us to ask ourselves “are we skimming the surface or getting down deep into a relationship with

God?"

Sadly, many of us are more interested in managing our lives into a comfortable existence rather than letting God transform us through refining hardships. No-one welcomes or seeks hardships but they happen for a reason. As St Augustine observed " Faith begins when man's power ends".

Sin and Satan are real. Pain strengthens endurance and teaches dependence on God. We should all be striving to have a living relationship with Jesus so that we can become true God pleasers. The book of Job is useful because it helps us remember we are God's creatures and to realise that if we trust him we will survive (not avoid) hardships and in the process we will bring honour and glory to his name.

Sunday Evening 9th March 2014. Kenneth Gray Job 11:1-20 " The mysteries of God are higher than the heavens".

Zophar's words seem sound and sensible - Job must know what is his secret sin. Zophar does not put himself on Job's place. He believes Job is a liar. It is very hard to be blamed, particularly by a friend, when we've done nothing wrong. Notice that Zophar doesn't ask Job whether or not he is telling the truth. How like ourselves – in the church we are good at criticising but not so good at getting alongside people.

At a recent debate on euthanasia attended by Kenneth, a pro-euthanasia Humanist justified his view saying that he would find it too hard to condemn someone to endless suffering. Lots of a minister's time is spent sitting with people who are dying, holding their hands. At present our society still believes that killing people is wrong but we are lurching towards decriminalising euthanasia and the time will come when their doctor's terminal diagnosis will add a whole new level of terror to people's suffering.

Zophar's commentary is reminiscent of debaters we see in the political arena or even in church. His response to Job's statements is subtly to 'move the goalposts' to reinforce his own viewpoint. That's what people so often do – they twist your words and turn around the truth and attack you with it. Here Job has never actually said the things Zophar attributes to him. Job remains confounded. He cannot think of anything in his life that has been so bad as to cause such a harsh judgment to fall on him. If he could have been 'honest' Job surely would have been.

Kenneth observed that almost every argument has two sides but we dislike listening to the other side. As Christians we must learn to listen even when we do not like what we hear. We often think we know what the other person is going to say and we are forming our retort even before they say it. We have two ears and one mouth and we should learn to use them in those proportions! Nowadays people are so starved of people to listen that when they do find a willing ear they cannot stop talking. This presents an opportunity for us in the church. Listening is a very useful skill in evangelism.

Sometimes people speak about heaven as a place where we will be forced to watch a kind of 'action replay' of all our past sins. Heaven will not be like that. Rather, as true believers, we will be presented with the grace that has eradicated all our sins.

Zophar should have known Job better. He is more concerned with making beautiful theological observations in the abstract rather than addressing Job's real, practical needs. That's a mistake we too can make.

Kenneth recalled trying to answer a teenager's difficult questions many years ago at an SU camp. The boy wanted to know why a loving God could allow people to have disabilities. He did not want to hear vague theological sound bites. His concern was real because his brother was disabled and he needed to talk about it. So Kenneth let him talk. Zophar should have taken a similar approach with Job.

Zophar exhorts Job by reminding him of the rewards of owning up to his sin." Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning. You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look

about you and take your rest in safety.” Remarkably, for about a thousand years people did not know that Zophar’s words would become true with the coming and the sacrifice of Christ. The Cross has made that hope possible.

It is hard to be found out and to look into the eyes of our accuser. Many people turn away from God because they are too ashamed to face him. Besides, many really do not wish to change their ways and they hope the evil day of judgment will never come.

We, as a church, need to speak about that. There is a God before whom every knee shall bow. Zophar did not know Jesus Christ but he did have some understanding of the nature of God. But everything finds its fulfilment in Christ Jesus. It is not enough to believe in God – it is only in Jesus that everything comes together.

Sunday Evening 2nd March 2014 Kenneth Gray Job 9:1-12 “How can a mortal be righteous?”



In this passage Job responds to Bildad’s analysis of his friend’s plight. Bildad’s words indicate that he misunderstands the nature of God and in his beautifully framed reply Job shows that he has much deeper insight: “But how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?” In these words Job presents the sum and substance of the Gospel. We know what Job says is true, we know that we all need a saviour.

This is a poignant passage because we realise that no-one alive can equal Job - God has described him as a good and blameless man - yet even he cannot stand righteous before God who is perfect and holy. Despite his faithfulness and humility job can only long for the day that God will provide a saviour for the world.

This is the challenge for people of no faith in the world. There are two things we all do only once - we are born and we die. This would be a depressing thought if we were not Christians. Doctors tell us that after the age of about 18 our brain cells start to diminish and physically we are on a downward path thereafter. Where is our hope if we are not believers? As Christians though we are bad at communicating this hope. The popular caricature of the Church is one of joylessness and negativity. What we should be proclaiming is that mortal man can stand righteous before God because Jesus Christ is our Saviour. We fail to spread this good news either because we do not truly believe it or because we get caught up with our earthly lives and forget.

Job expresses his perplexity in various ways. He asks how man can dispute with God who is totally wise and totally powerful. How can man challenge the One who is the creator of everything and in control of the whole universe? Kenneth observed that we all go to bed at night in the dark in expectation that in the morning it will be light because God has established it so.

Job asks “Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?” Yet thousands here in Bridge of Weir pass day after day resisting God and across Scotland millions disregard God. There will undoubtedly be consequences for any man who resists God. As Kenneth ruefully observed, we cannot even resist or challenge ‘earthly powers’ such as the major utility companies, the big banks, the HMRC and other institutions without experiencing the consequences – how then can we dare to resist the King of heaven, the creator of the universe?

By the same token who would dare to play around with God’s Word? Yet people do try to make it say something different from what it actually says because they do not like its actual message. It is not our place to ask why God does or doesn’t do certain things – we must just obey him as our Creator.

Sometimes we sense that we have been in God’s presence and we can discern when a ‘coincidence’ of events has been God planned. Yet we so quickly forget.

The more we ponder Job's question "But how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?" the more our question becomes "Why?" – Why does a righteous God dwell in and with us and why has he so graciously become one with us in Jesus Christ? The Lord desires us to be refined, to grow and to mature in response to His grace. When we stand before God we will be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

Job had more insight than other men. He didn't understand everything about the nature of God but he knew enough to recognise his own dependence on God and his need to be in a close relationship with Him. We too must seek to live closer to God and turn from unrighteousness. As a church we should be speaking about this and telling others.

Jesus was not merely a good example for us to follow, nor was his nature merely the 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' of our childhood hymns. We must not forget that Jesus lived a perfect life so that he could lay it down as a once-and-for-all offering to save us – providing that renewing power within that comes to us when we have faith and repent.

Sunday Evening 23rd February 2014. Kenneth Gray - Job 8 - "Does God pervert justice?"

Now Bildad the Shuhite gives Job his advice and expresses his view of Job's predicament. Bildad is younger than the others and has the forthrightness and self-assurance of youth. He launches straight in saying: *"How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind."*

Kenneth commented that experience teaches us things and experience generally comes with age. Experience implies learning from the mistakes one has made in the impetuosity of youth. It is difficult for young people seeking their first job when they come up against the 'experience required' criterion in job advertisements but employers look for experienced workers in the hope that new recruits will be less likely to repeat errors.

Bildad is probably too young to have developed much understanding of the difficulties of life and his experience of struggling with financial problems, relationships, work will have been limited. Nevertheless, he is quick to give Job the benefit of his opinions.

Bildad believes Job is being hypocritical. Surely Job must know why God is visiting these afflictions on him! It is unlikely Bildad will have known much about Job's children yet he has no hesitation in concluding that God has punished their sin: *"When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin."* How often have we heard people pronouncing authoritatively on someone else's situation or problem when they actually know next to nothing about the circumstances. It is an all too common human pastime!

The problem with each of Job's 'comforters' is that they each speak the truth, **in part**, but this does not mean that there is a perfect law of cause and effect. The end of this passage reveals that Bildad is focused on the restoration of Job's earthly success. Strangely, Bildad's prediction does come to pass that: *"He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy. Your enemies will be clothed in shame, and the tents of the wicked will be no more"* but he is right for all the wrong reasons.

Society today is obsessed with worldly success and we in the church are often equally guilty of this mindset. Some in the church even suggest that unless you are successful materially you cannot be a good Christian, indeed some American churches seem to have adopted this view as a kind of theology. Yet we know some 200 million people in the world go hungry to bed each night - are they all 'bad' people? Much is said currently about the new 'middle class' developing in India but this indicator of prosperity is quite misleading because it is based on numbers of the population who earn a mere \$1000 per annum. Even here in Bridge of Weir, regarded as a prosperous locality, the majority of people are not wealthy.

Bildad seems to equate goodness with material success and wealth. If he is right there must be a lot of bad

people in the world. *“if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your prosperous state. Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be.”*

Yet he is right about some things. God does forgive the penitent sinner. Purity and uprightness restores a sinner’s relationship with God. We know that when we come to faith we discover a new life with God. As human being we can find it hard to understand why others fail to share our new-found enthusiasms. As Christians we are staggered that others do not share our joy that Jesus Christ has purchased our salvation nor do they seek to know Jesus themselves. We have a God who listens and responds to those who come to him in faith - to this extent what Bildad says is true.

Next Bildad goes on to evoke tradition and the wisdom of previous generations and, in so doing, shows remarkable astuteness. *“we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow”*. Nowadays we tend to dismiss the wisdom of former generations. We behave as if we are immortal but our days on this earth are just a shadow. We as people have not changed from Job’s day until now. As Christians today we observe that society has moved away from the great truths of previous generations despite the warning from statesmen like Edmond Burke who remind us that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

Finally, Bildad states *“Such is the destiny of all who forget God; so perishes the hope of the godless. What they trust in is fragile; what they rely on is a spider’s web.”* Therein lies a powerful truth: We will not grow and flourish unless we build our lives in fertile soil. Trying to live our lives without Jesus is like trying to lean on a spider’s web. As the old hymn reminds us -

“On Christ the solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand.”

Sunday Evening 9th February 2014 Kenneth Gray. Job 4

**WHY
DO BAD THINGS
HAPPEN
to GOOD people?**

Having spent seven days and nights by Job’s side, Eliphaz the Temanite now responds to Job’s anguished cries with an eloquent explanation which basically says ‘ If bad things are happening to you, Job, you must have sinned!’

On first consideration such a view may seem logical and it was clearly the popular view of suffering and affliction in Job’s day. It can even be true in some cases that we bring affliction on ourselves because of our own behaviour. For example, drug addicts sharing needles can develop life-threatening infections; smokers can develop lung cancer; alcoholics can develop cirrhosis of the liver. But people do not always seem to ‘reap’ what they ‘sow’. So Eliphaz’s explanation is not a universally infallible rule. Sometimes bad things happen to good people.

Eliphaz finishes by exhorting Job to confess his sin and things may be all OK again. But this is no comfort to Job because he does not know what sin he has committed. He believes he has done nothing wrong and we know God has described him as ‘blameless’.

Old Testament understanding is different from New Testament understanding. We know that salvation can only be achieved through Jesus Christ. Job could not have saved himself or anyone else even if he could have identified his ‘sin’.

We always look for reasons for why things happen. In the church we can find that advances we make in our work for the Lord are sometimes followed by times of disagreement, problematic situations and periods of dissent among people. Such difficult situations arise because Satan hates it when things are going well

and when God's people are making strong witness about God's love for mankind.

Sometimes, too, we have known churches that have grown and have been successful then it later emerges that the leader under whom advances have been achieved is actually a very flawed human being. God has blessed the work nonetheless. Despite faithful service to the Lord people can still experience tragedies in their lives; equally, good things can also result from the activities of flawed individuals. So Eliphaz's advice to Job is too simplistic.

But Eliphaz continues to speak and it is as if he is picking on Job, somehow believing that Job is not admitting the truth but is lying both to himself and to his friends. Despite Eliphaz's view it is not possible to identify any particular sin that would have provoked such punishment from God. The only thing that saves is to come in humility before the cross of Jesus and seek forgiveness. Eliphaz has not himself yet come to God in humility so his advice to Job is not sound.

Job's friends are not all bad and they mean well. They are trying to help but they do not know how. We too can find ourselves in difficult situations and we too try to help those who are suffering and in trouble. In such cases we must seek to bring the peace of Jesus to them.

Firstly we must admit our limitations and operate with compassion within the limits of our understanding and knowledge. Above all let them speak and avoid gibbering on to fill the awkward silences. We need to be ready to sit quietly and hold their hand then say a prayer. The book of Job teaches us to think about suffering in both practical and theological terms. The challenge in such situations is to help bring the presence of the Lord to bear.

There is some truth in the things Job's friends say to him but not enough for Job or us to build our lives upon. Eliphaz is wrong in many ways but it is true that repentance does bring peace and security.

As Kenneth observed, many in Bridge of Weir will die leaving lots of money and significant estates but many will never have known Jesus Christ. Prosperity does not guarantee happiness. For Job the light will come when he again feels the love of God in his heart.

Sunday Evening 26th January 2014. Kenneth Gray - Job 3 "I have no peace, no quietness"



This is one of the darkest, most realistic passages in the Bible. People often criticise Christians for only being happy when things are going well. The Book of Job addresses some of the deepest questions of life. Time after time the 3 friends pose questions and time after time Job answers. In every such discourse there is something true and helpful to be found.

Job's question is 'Why has God turned his back on me?' His friends tell him it is because he has sinned so he should confess and repent. Job cannot confess because he does not know what he has done wrong. We know that Satan is behind it all.

In Psalm 22 we read: '*Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.*' These words are also echoed in Christ's anguished plea at the Crucifixion and we can sometimes feel such a sense of isolation and loss in

situations of our own lives when we are lonely or out of our depth.

Job's refrain 'I wish I'd never been born!' is repeated throughout this passage prompted by a longing to be spared his present suffering. Kenneth observed that ministers frequently encounter people who express such feelings because they are depressed and hopeless, unable to find peace.

Job's anguish derives not from the loss of his family and possessions so much as from the belief that God has abandoned him. Satan believes that Job's happiness depends on the things he has - that's the currency Satan understands and trades in. Satan often gives people too much or too little in order to make them rebel against God. Satan cannot comprehend that Job's ultimate joy springs from his relationship with God. He longs to have that relationship restored to him. He cannot see how he can endure life if God has turned his back on him. Job does not yet know it but God will ultimately speak with authority and power to set the record straight that he has never abandoned Job.

The question for us is therefore 'Is our walk with God the single most important thing in our life? Is our delight first in Him?'

We know how easy it is for the gifts we receive, rather than the Giver, to become the object of our worship. It is all too easy to get worked up about money and things until we find ourselves lying awake at night worrying. When have we ever lost sleep worrying about a lost soul in our family or in our neighbourhood? Have we not lost our first love? The Book of Job reminds us that the challenge we all face is to live for God.

In this passage Job is not fixing his eyes on God. Satan has skillfully convinced him that his present tribulations are God's will and purpose.

Kenneth recalled that during his student days an unpleasant rumour had been spread widely about a young couple in his circle. It was repeated until everyone believed it to be true when it was, in fact, false. Trouble was no-one had thought to speak directly to the couple in question who would have put the record straight at the outset.

So it was with Job - he should have poured out his heart to God from the start and not allowed Satan to get a foothold.

Sometimes we find it easy to commune with God when we are reading the Bible. At other times we find it hard to discern what He is telling us because we are not in an attitude to worship and to be open to Him. But if we persevere it can bring a blessing whereas times we find it 'easy' may be of superficial benefit. Job sees death as a positive thing - a place where 'the weary are at rest' - whereas we tend to view it as only negative.

Sunday Evening 19th January 2014. Kenneth Gray - Job 2 " They saw how great his suffering was"

Reflecting on human suffering that he'd witnessed during his ministry Kenneth noted that physical pain and debilitating illness often changes people. They can come to look very different, even unrecognisable and the focus of much of their attention is often the pain or discomfort they are experiencing. So when Job's friends first see him covered in sores and sitting in the ashes they were extremely upset: "When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognise him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. "

Chapter 2 is similar to chapter 1. It is again God who mentions Job. Such is Satan's hatred of the Faithful that he is swift to visit on Job the worst kind of physical afflictions. The familiar old hymn tells us that Jesus 'knows our every weakness'. So too does Satan and but he uses this knowledge to damage us and destroy our faith not because he hates us but because he hates God and is jealous of the love we have for our Heavenly Father.

Job's wife is also affected by Satan's torments. She now sees Job as a wreck materially and physically and she taunts him 'Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!' Here again God is getting the blame for the actions of the Evil One. Job, however, gives a model and very profound response: 'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' Satan continually uses misplaced blaming of God to his advantage. Unsurprisingly people only have to look at world disasters such as the millions currently being displaced in Syria to question the goodness of God who allows such suffering.

We have probably all at some time experienced suffering in our lives when we have questioned God. Is he really God? Does he really love us? Are we foolish to trust him? But when we have come through that period of suffering we have found there has been a blessing in it. We have achieved a more understanding, refined relationship with God. Job's God shares in his suffering at every step. This Book describes how different people respond to the reality of living in a fallen world.

At this point Job's friends appear in a positive light. They wish to offer him comfort and sympathy. 'Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.'

The quiet company of friends when we are miserable and hurting can be a real blessing. It is not easy to sit quietly because we too are upset and nervous and we tend to find it easier to fill the silence with chatter than simply just to be there. Here Job's friends set aside their own lives and responsibilities for 7 days and nights just to support him even though they find Job's situation incomprehensible.

Kenneth remarked that during Freeland's Day of Prayer we were praying for our missionary partners and we recognised that without actually being there in their situations, without seeing and hearing and smelling and experiencing everything they experience it is difficult for us to appreciate what they have gone through. So it is in situations of grief and suffering we should refrain from glib statements and allow the sufferer to speak when ready to do so. As Christians we must be aware that there are such limits to how we get involved, at least initially, with others who are suffering. We must accept reality and point them to the One who whispers 'Peace!' in the chaos of our lives.

When they arrive Job's friends discover the situation is even worse than they'd imagined. So it is in life often that the bereaved person is the one who finds he has to comfort the 'sympathiser'. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are upset because they love and respect Job.

In future chapters we will find them expressing their views about how Job should be responding and thinking and they turn from being 'comforters' to being critics of Job's outlook. How human they are and how we can relate to their sense of irritation when the comfortee does not respond as they would wish! We must be prepared when we offer sympathy for our words to be rejected or regarded as unhelpful. The risk in such cases is that we'll be tempted to say 'Never again!' which would be a mistake. The first thing to do is to pray for the person and put the situation into God's care.

Sunday Evening 12th January 2014. Kenneth Gray - Job 1 "Blameless and upright"



The Book of Job is sad and very challenging. It covers the theology of suffering and the theology of judgment and in the middle section God speaks and reveals himself in some beautifully expressed passages. Job describes the nature of a fallen world - a world corrupted by Satan who delights in sending misery and who hates to find God's people remaining faithful.

Where does the motivation come from for the horrors we read about in our newspapers or watch on the TV news - such as the horrors of rape and murder, the depravity of child abuse? When Police or Social Work enquiries into horrific cases are concluded so often there is an outcry, a search for some way to explain how such wickedness came about. It is frequently attributed to perpetrators' social deprivation or disadvantaged upbringing or else to mental illness when in fact Satan

is at the root of it.

In Kenneth's experience people often claim 'I cannot believe in God because this or that has happened'. God 'takes the rap' but Satan is to blame. This is not a primitive or ancient concern - we are talking about the reality that confronts all of us from age to age.

Satan is accountable to God and his power is limited, his abilities constrained.. In verse 7 we learn that Satan is tireless. He never takes a day off or a holiday. 'The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.'" He is also ashamed to tell God the truth about his deeds. Satan continues to wreak destruction but, as Revelation reminds us, he is ultimately held to account.

We can perceive Satan at work in our own lives if we are vigilant. We can see him in the random, unlovely thoughts and ideas that can pop into our heads unbidden. No-one writes or talks about evil nowadays - it is unfashionable. Yet no-one is immune - from the highest to the lowest in society sin is a factor all over the world No-one is too lowly or too exalted to be corrupted. So who can we trust? Politicians, princes, personalities all let us down. Only God is totally trustworthy.

Satan expends his greatest attention and effort in trying to corrupt the people of God. Although it is God who first mentions Job, Satan must already have had his eye on him otherwise he would not have commented 'Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.' Satan's nastiness is revealed in his words. '...he will surely curse you to your face'. He cannot understand faithfulness, obedience, love, trust. Job's goodness is based on his love of God not on his wealth or his material success. Sometimes Satan uses our wealth or success to trap us and distract us from the purpose for which God intends us. He adeptly uses things of this world, even things that are not intrinsically evil, to lead us astray.

As the story begins Satan visits a series of disasters on Job one after another in dizzying succession. As news of each new calamity arrives Job gets no time to think. All his things - his animals, his children his property are all swept away - that is the nature of 'things'. . This is a reminder of the folly of placing our reliance, our hopes, our confidence in the things of this world which are all transient. Our hopes, our confidence should be in God alone. This is a hard teaching. How difficult it is to be philosophical about losing our children!

Yet Job responds in an amazing way. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." He does not blame God. It is easy to read these words or quote them in a sermon but it is so hard to share this view when such things happen to you. Overwhelming problems can often make people ask 'Where is God?'. But Job knows God has not abandoned him. As Christians we draw our confidence from the Cross. God did not abandon Jesus nor will he abandon us.

Next we will find that Job's challenge to remain faithful grows harder as the story proceeds. At this time there are many in our church family who are facing difficult times so let us uphold them all in prayer.