

About a month ago, Teren, Simeon, Kathleen, Kylie and I all piled into the car and took a quick trip to Hillsdale to visit Tyler and watch a student theater production of a play called *JB* with him. I had never heard of the play before, but in essence, it is a modern retelling of the book of Job. It was an interesting experience. In one way, it felt very ironic to sit in this small, very intimate theater (historically at least) to watch a play in which the entire cast and the entire audience was masked. Yet in another sense, it felt strangely apropos to be masked while watching a play filled with suffering.

As the play began, JB (the playwright's name for Job) was living a full life, surrounded by a loving wife, multiple healthy children, a thriving business and so on. Throughout the opening scenes, JB was praising God for his goodness. As you can imagine, as the story continued to unfold, after a scene where God and the devil interact over JB, things begin to unravel. Sons go off to war and die. A daughter is raped and killed. A car accident claims the lives of other children. Tragedy upon tragedy. JB's business fails. Everything of value, humanly speaking, was taken. All of the trials were costly and the pain and pleading to the Lord was vivid. Yet even in the midst of struggling to understand, JB trusted in the Lord.

After God and the devil converse in another scene, we were reminded that things were not going to get better. JB and his wife, left childless and impoverished, were now struggling to hang on. Their health began to fail and JB's wife spiraled into further despair. You could feel the weight of the blows as they continued to fall. It was hard to watch. The actors made the story come alive, the setting made the trials feel like something that could happen now...you just wanted it to end.

As I watched, I was confronted with some difficult questions. Could I bear the weight of having all of my children killed, my earthly possessions destroyed, my health ransacked, my wife calling me to curse God and die? I was asking myself the same question that I asked when studying Psalm 62 (see my last pastoral encouragement for context)...at the heart of who I am, does my soul wait in silence and resolutely trust that God is at work and acting for my good? Will He alone be my Rock and my Salvation in whom I will not be shaken? It was very humbling to watch JB suffer. As you might guess, my original thoughts of "suffering" through the play because I had to wear a mask, now felt a bit petty in comparison!

As the play continued, JB was confronted by his friends. What had he done wrong? Where had he failed? What must he repent of? Perhaps, from their perspective, JB was even deserving of all that had befallen him. And JB, immersed in the pain and suffering, began to crack a bit. In his struggle to understand amid his trials, JB speaks out to defend himself, to be heard among the several friends that had spoken to him about his circumstances (mostly in some negative light). In some sense, he began to question God. The more he spoke, the more he forgot about the voice of God.

All the sudden, the lighting changes and a booming voice is heard filling the theater. As an audience member, the voice is not new (though perhaps louder). Unlike JB, we have heard His voice throughout the play as we are able to peek behind the curtain so to speak and see the many interactions between God and the devil. But for JB, when God spoke (you will have to read Job 38-41 to see what God says) JB was overwhelmed. When confronted by the majesty and power of God, JB can no longer open his mouth. Job 40:4-5 records these words of Job:

- ⁴ “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
⁵ I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further.” (Job 40:4-5)

The change was palpable. He was clearly humbled by God. The play, at this point, helped both JB and us (the audience) gain some perspective. JB was not God, nor did he know all things.

Though this was a tremendous lesson to be reminded of, I wished the playwright would have captured, what was perhaps of even greater weight, the compassion and mercy of God in the story of Job.

Even though James in his epistle connects the compassion and mercy of God to the story of Job, it still may feel a bit strange when we reflect upon what we know of Job’s story. Nonetheless, I was hoping for its presence in this play because it provides so much hope for those who go through suffering. You see, as God continues to reveal Himself to Job, Job stops defending himself and turns to humble *wonderment in God*,

- ² “I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
³ ...Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...
⁵ **I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;**
⁶ therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:2-6)

God compassionately and mercifully opened Job’s eyes to see God as even greater than he imagined. He wasn’t simply humbled and put back in his place. He was humbled as he saw God revealed to him in an even greater capacity than he could imagine! He saw his momentary affliction in the light of the eternal weight of the glory of God. He was able to gaze at that moment into the things that are unseen. He got to peek behind the curtain and it changed him for the better. Because of this, he stopped questioning and submitted to God’s purpose. He no longer saw the need to speak because he saw God for who he is. He yet again became steadfast, trusting in the power and steadfast love of the Lord. Is this not an extremely compassionate and merciful thing for God to do?!

Take some time to read in the book of Job this weekend. See how God revealed himself to him in chapters 38-41, how he moved from hearing to seeing. And may our God, the God of compassion and mercy, help us all to see him with our eyes, just as he did with Job.

To God be the glory,

Pastor Brad