

Sermon Notes 2024

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Foreword

Herein contains my summary of the sermons for 2024. These sermons notes are mostly typed out during the sermon as the pastor preaches. Sometimes I will add in some of my own clarifications/notes/thoughts to the points given by the pastors, hence one can safely assume that any theological errors found herein are to be attributed to me, not the pastors.

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7th January 2024: I have had enough

Text: Isaiah 1:11-20

[11] “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

[12] “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? [13] Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. [14] Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. [15] When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. [16] Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, [17] learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.

[18] “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. [19] If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; [20] but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Notes

- In our text, we see that Judah’s offerings in Isaiah’s time are prim and proper. They offer up all the required offerings in the ceremonial law, and they offer them abundantly.
- But somehow, God is rejecting all of their worship. See v11-15. why?
- This is because Judah, though they appear prim and proper in their worship, they are actually rebellious and rotten. There is much evil, oppression, and failure to care for the marginalised.
- This shows us that to God, obedience is more important than sacrifice. And obedience must be whole. It is pointless to obey all the ceremonial laws but ignore all of the laws to fight oppression in the land. What Judah was doing was trying to seek a Holy and Just God through their sacrifices even though their hands are full of sin.
- This is why God tells them to repent of their sin first (v16-20). If they repent, they’ll be forgiven, but if they don’t repent, they will die by the sword. And this is what happened to Judah.
- First sunday of the year is always a sermon about worship. This makes sense because there are 51 more sundays in a year where we come to worship. Thus, from our text, we should find out what makes our worship acceptable to God.
- Firstly, the form of worship is important. A worship service has to be liturgical and participative (liturgy means works of the people). That is, during Sunday worship, we are not just there to have an experience, but we are there to render our works to God. In the past, in time, it would be to bring their burnt offerings to God. And it would be to listen intently to the teaching of the Levites. In our time, we are to participate in the service by singing to each other, to listen intently to the Spirit of God speaking to us through the pastor’s message and the songs. In our form of worship, we must also give of our best. To Judah’s credit, she did give of her best here, by bringing fat animals to sacrifice to God. We can learn this from the

ancient Israelites. Do we come for Sunday service in a sleep-deprived state? For example. Or do we come fully energetic and ready to worship God.

- But apart from the form of worship, what is more important is the quality of our lives (quality as in from God's POV, ie our obedience). We must not be just "Sunday Christians", because that would be religious hypocrisy just like Judah here. As James says, it should not be that the same mouth comes blessings to God and curses to man. How can we say that we love God when we do so much evil to others? Because loving God and loving our neighbour cannot be separated. Our whole lives are to be offered as a worship to God, that is the more important worship.
- But it's not that we should stay away from church unless we're perfect. [KH: (My analogy: we can think of church as an alcohol rehabilitation centre. A person who is happily addicted to drunkenness and thinks alcohol the best thing ever right, no point going to an alcohol rehabilitation centre. That is hypocrisy. But the alcohol rehabilitation centre is open to people who want to quit alcohol but who struggle with quitting and who perhaps even from time to time take a bit of alcohol out of the weakness of their flesh.) The key is repentance and a desire for obedience. When we have those, and we come to church, God will honour our desire for obedience and cause us to obey Him through His Holy Spirit working in us when we come to church to worship.]
- Form of worship and obedience is important, but we cannot use it to manipulate God. It is not that when we serve God in church, then we expect God will bless us. [KH: True love of God obeys God not because of the gifts that God gives, but because of gratitude for God's acts of creating us, redeeming us, and providing for us which reflect His glory and beauty, which makes Him worthy of worship just because He is God.]
- Here, we have a call to repentance. Repentance is key, and repentance is the reason why we gather for public worship. See Hebrews 10: 19-25. Through Jesus' work, His sacrifice has cleansed us for all time, and His blood perfects all our imperfect (because of sin) service to God. As long as we believe in Jesus and repent, when we gather together, His Holy Spirit works through the service to transform us even as we offer up our voices in worship of God.

14th January 2024: Do I have to attend to him

Text: Luke 10:25-37

[25] And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” [26] He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” [27] And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” [28] And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

[29] But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” [30] Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. [31] Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32] So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. [34] He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35] And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ [36] Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” [37] He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Notes

- This is the second sermon on a series of sermons on the “call of Christ’s church”. Last sunday, the topic was on worship.
- This sunday, the topic is on community. There is no such thing as a lone Christian. We are all parts of the same body with Christ as our head. We are all living stones of the new temple of God, of which Christ is the cornerstone. We are all children of God in God’s family. From all these analogies, we see that community is key in the Christian life.
- As a church, just as how Christ is the revelation of God to the world, we are the revelation of Christ to the world. We are the light of the world, just as how Christ is the light of the world.
- For today, instead of looking at texts that specifically talk about community, we will look at the parable of the good samaritan. The idea is that if all of us act like the good samaritan to others but especially to the church community, the church community will be a healthy one.
- Three ‘S’ for today.
 1. Situation
 2. Story
 3. Significance
- First, the situation at hand. The “lawyer” in our text refers to someone who is trained in the OT law. Here, he wanted to put Jesus to the test. He asked Jesus: “what shall I do to inherit eternal life”. We will come back to this question at the end of the sermon. To answer him, Jesus charateristically asked the lawyer back a question, “what is written in the law”. The lawyer then quoted two portions from the Law, the “Shema” (Deuteronomy 6:4-17) and Leviticus

19:18. As Jesus has said himself, these two commandments (to love God and loving one's neighbour) summarise all of the 10 commandments.

- Since the lawyer was on the right track, Jesus then told him to “do it”. Now, the lawyer was probably feeling quite embarrassed; he wanted to test Jesus, but he ended up answering his own question! He probably knew that it was impossible to keep these two commandments perfectly, and perhaps in a bid to narrow the scope of “neighbour”, and also to continue testing Jesus, he asked Jesus: “who is my neighbour?”. In those times, Jews probably only considered other Jews as neighbours.
- Next, the story that Jesus gave. We have four characters in the story. We have an injured man, a priest, and a levite, and a samaritan. Why did the priest and levite not help? They were definitely not rushing for time, since they were coming down from Jerusalem (which means they have already done their job). Was it because they thought that the injured man was dead, that's why they didn't want to be defiled? Or were they afraid of their own safety?
- On the other hand, a compassionate Samaritan was the one who helped the injured man. This story could have blown the lawyer's mind. Jesus could have told the story with a Jewish helper, and a Samaritan victim. This would already be big brain, because Jews were generally antipathic to Samaritans and hence a Samaritan would be the last person that the Jews would consider as neighbours. But Jesus' story is even more big brain, with a Jewish victim and a Samaritan helper. Just as how Jews disliked Samaritans, the Samaritans also disliked the Jews. But this Samaritan gave so much of his money, time, etc to the Jew without expecting anything in return.
- The significance of the story is this; the lawyer's question is wrong to begin with! He asked “who is my neighbour?”, whereas the correct question that Jesus wanted the lawyer to think about was: “am I a good neighbour?”. If we were good neighbours, then to us, all people would be neighbours. All people, including people from different ethnic groups, different socioeconomic classes, even people who dislike us and hate us. As Jesus said, “blessed are the merciful”, and we are to be merciful to all people around us. If we fail to show mercy to the people around us, then maybe we don't understand the mercy that God has given us. Or maybe we think that we are incapable of helping because of our schedule etc. But that line of thought forgets that it is God who empowers us to be merciful in the first place, and thus we can always look to God for strength to self-sacrifice. And as Paul says in Galatians 6:10, “so then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith”.
- In Church, we like the *idea* of loving one another, but actually loving one another is difficult and requires self sacrifice. The world says: “birds of the same feather flock together”. But the church can definitely do better than that! As per the vision in Revelation where we have all tribes and tongues worshipping God, let's aim to have “birds of a different feather flocking together”.
- And we must also realise that Jesus is the ultimate good Samaritan. We are those who are beaten and left half dead on the road. And Jesus, instead of giving us oil and clothing for us, gave us His blood. Jesus has loved us and shown us compassion and mercy, and as recipients of Jesus mercy and grace, we must “go and do likewise”, love others as Jesus has loved us!

21st January 2024: Can I leave them alone?

Text: Romans 10:9-17

[9] because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. [11] For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." [12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. [13] For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" [16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Notes

- Some people overly idolise certain preachers and evangelists. But based on today's text, we see that evangelism is a work of everyone, not just for certain "gifted preachers".
- Today is the third of a series of three sermons on the calling of Christ's church. The topics in the sermon series are:
 1. Worship (not just on Sunday, but with our whole lives). If we worship a holy God on Sunday, then shouldn't our lives be holy for the rest of the week? Of course we will fail from time to time, but God's forgiveness is freely given. And when we respond to God's freely-given forgiveness in repentance, we will grow in holiness through the Spirit, and our lives will be slowly transformed.
 2. To be a good neighbour to all around us, and especially to those in the church. We do this following Jesus' pattern, where He showed self-sacrificial love to us even though we were undeserving. And if all of us in church can do this, then we will be a loving and embracing community.
 3. **Engage the community, evangelise the lost.** This is our topic for today! We should desire to see people being freed from the condemnation, power of sin and death, and being gifted the gift of eternal life.
- In our text today, from v13-15, Paul works backwards from the statement: "For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved". Paul says that in v13, then in v14-15, he explains the steps that must be taken for this to happen through a series of rhetorical questions.
- First, for people to call upon the name of the Lord, there must be other people who were **sent** to go to them. And who are the people who were sent? It is all of us! See the great commission as well as in John 20:21-22. We are all sent forth by Jesus to continue Jesus' work of spreading the message of the kingdom of God. And we can do this through the power of the Holy Spirit. And as Paul says in v15, "how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news", quoting Isaiah 52. In the OT, it was the good news of being delivered from

Babylonian captivity. But in the NT, the good news is better cause the deliverance is better; we are delivered from the power and guilt of sin!

- “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved”. This ties in with the idea that everyone is our neighbour. Just as we should not make distinctions when we do good works, we should also not make any distinctions when we do the ultimate good work of sharing the gospel with the people around us. Everyone needs to hear the gospel. Of course good works are important (see the example of the good Samaritan), and we should do them, but we should also pray for opportunities to speak the gospel when we do good works. And these opportunities will come when we are consistent with engaging our neighbours and doing good works to our neighbours. We just have to pray for these opportunities and pray for courage/obedience to take those opportunities!
- Secondly, for people to call upon the name of the Lord, they must hear the word that is preached. Though we are sent by God to preach, and when do we preach the gospel, not everyone will hear us with open ears. In a sense, this was Jesus’ experience as well as the experience of the OT prophets. So we can be encouraged that when people don’t fully hear the word that we speak, we are just following in Jesus’ footsteps. Of course, we should make it such that our religious hypocrisy is not the reason why they are turned away.
- Thirdly, for people to call upon the name of the Lord, they must believe the word that is preached, and they must confess outwardly that Jesus is Lord. They must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and they must thus believe that Jesus (who is Lord) died for us.
- The above is the whole process through which someone can be lead to salvation. But as can be seen, the process begins with people who are sent! And continues when those who are sent are faithful to their calling. A church without evangelism is a contradiction, much like a fire without heat. If the church were to be zealous in their love for God and for neighbour, this love should infect those around us. We must be faithful to the great commission! We are called to be “fishers of men”, not “fishes in an aquarium”. The latter situation somewhat describes the case when growth in church membership is mostly due to church transfers... and when all the pastors in the country are just taking care of the same fish, and the church members just look pretty and are inactive.
- If we as a community can grow in all three points: worship, loving our neighbour, and evangelism, then we would have lived up to the call that Christ gives to His church.

28th January 2024: Will I still worship God

Text: Job 1:2-10

[1] There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. [2] There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. [3] He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. [4] His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. [5] And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

[6] Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. [7] The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." [8] And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" [9] Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? [10] Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. [11] But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." [12] And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

[13] Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, [14] and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, [15] and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." [16] While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." [17] While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." [18] While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, [19] and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

[20] Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. [21] And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

[22] In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

[1] Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. [2] And the LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and

said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." [3] And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." [4] Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. [5] But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." [6] And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

[7] So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. [8] And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

[9] Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." [10] But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Notes

- None of us can avoid suffering in this current world. Some people might suffer more than others, but everyone will suffer.
- Throughout history, there were many views on suffering. E.g: "i am suffering because i must have done something wrong". This is quite prevalent among folk religion, but even some christians subscribe to this. E.g, "i need to pray the right prayers/do more good works".
- One thing we must take away today: suffering is not always to be equated with God's punishment! [KH: It is true that sometimes suffering is God's discipline in our lives. God sometimes permits us to suffer when we commit sins just to show us the harmful effects of our sin on ourselves and on our r/s with Him. But we need to be careful when interpreting our suffering in this manner, because this is not always the case. Job's suffering is not God's discipline in his life, for example.]
- Other views on suffering are: "I am suffering because i was at the wrong place at the wrong time, etc". i.e, these people dont believe in a higher power, everything is random, and suffering comes about just because one is "suay". These people will try to minimise the randomness as much as possible.
- The commonality between these two views is that people are trying to take control of their lives. The first is trying to take control of their lives by manipulating God who they believe in. The second is trying to take control of their lives by controlling all the factors that they can. This constant need for control of one's life leads to restlessness.
- What does Job tell us about suffering? We have a series of 7 sermons on Job. Today is the first.
- Firstly, from our text, we see that God knows Job perfectly. And God knows that Job fears Him. Its not that Job was sinless, but he was repentant, i.e v8, he "turned away from evil".
- Next, from our text, we see that God blesses the work of Job's hands. We see that Job is wealthy with a very loving family for example.
- Skipping forward, we see that Job was to suffer a lot without hearing anything from God. But we are taken behind the scenes to see why Job suffers.

- We see that Job is suffering because Satan acts as if he knows better than God about Job. Satan lives up to his name here, he's an adversary, an accuser. So he accused Job before God of worshipping God only out of convenience. Satan here wanted to destroy Job's relationship with God, he wanted to test Job. He wanted to make it such that Job will blaspheme God and then God, in his justice, will have to judge Job.
- Satan also sought to accuse God and deny him of his glory. He was telling God that in and of Himself, He is not worthy of worship, and that He is only worthy of worship because of the good things he gives.
- But in the end, we see that Satan unwittingly ends up proving himself wrong and magnifying God's worthiness. We see here that the evil and suffering that Job suffers, instead of destroying both Job's r/s with God and also denying God the glory, in the end, Job's character is vindicated and God is glorified by Job's true worship.
- When we suffer today, we too must guard against Satan's lies and accusations. One way people buy into the lies of Satan is that we believe that we are not good enough to be loved and blessed by God. So this is exactly the "works based" thinking that we Christians fall into. Then in the end we think that we deserve blessings just because we are serving in church.
- The book of Job does leave a lot of questions about suffering unanswered. For example, we don't know why God doesn't just ignore Satan. But what it reveals is sufficient for us to live faithfully. For example, we know that suffering ultimately for our good, and not for our harm. We know that we must not worship God just because of the good things he gives, our r/s with God must not be transactional. And we know that faithful living in times of suffering ultimately leads to glorifying God.
- What can we learn from the details of Job's response? First, he actually turned to God to pour out his grief. V20 said he "fell on the ground and worshipped" after shaving his head and tearing his robe. And v21 says that Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. This shows us that it is not sinful to go to God in our grief. In the end, when Job's wife told Job to curse God and die, Job didn't.
- Second, he actually doesn't have any sense of righteous pride or entitlement. He realised that all that he had came from God. "Naked I came, naked shall I return"; Job came into the world naked, and Job realised that the things he had was pure grace, purely God's blessing.
- Job can trust God to act with divine sovereignty and justice. We might not understand why we are suffering, and we cannot understand why we are suffering. God's ways are really higher than our ways, there could be a million things He is trying to accomplish in our lives and in the lives of those around us. But we know also from the rest of the Bible that God hates it when His righteous servants suffer. [KH: "[Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His saints](#)", [Psalm 116:15](#)]. God is not the source of evil, but God in His sovereignty is the one who puts limits on the suffering. Here, God is the one who told Satan not to take Job's life, and Job had to obey.
 - But why did God not just ignore Satan? Again, this is a question that is left unanswered.
- Here, Job's innocent suffering, in some sense, foreshadowed Jesus' innocent suffering. Jesus was a righteous man, sinless, truly fearing the Father. But He went to the cross willingly to demonstrate that God is worthy of worship and that God truly loves His creation. He had no lack, it's not like He had to obey to be loved, but He obeyed anyway.
- We should not think: "Jesus suffered so we don't need to suffer", but rather, "we suffer just as Jesus suffered so that we can grow to be more like Jesus, and glorify God just as Jesus glorified

God”.

- In the end, there are no easy answers for suffering. It sucks. But the bible shows us that God loves us, even if the suffering seems to indicate otherwise, and also that God’s ways are higher than ours. And we see a glimpse of how God works from the example of Jesus.

4th February 2024: The lament

Text: Job 3:1-26

[1] After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. [2] And Job said:

[3] “Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man is conceived.’ [4] Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. [5] Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. [6] That night—let thick darkness seize it! Let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months. [7] Behold, let that night be barren; let no joyful cry enter it. [8] Let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan. [9] Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none, nor see the eyelids of the morning, [10] because it did not shut the doors of my mother’s womb, nor hide trouble from my eyes.

[11] “Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire? [12] Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse? [13] For then I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept; then I would have been at rest, [14] with kings and counselors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves, [15] or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. [16] Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child, as infants who never see the light? [17] There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest. [18] There the prisoners are at ease together; they hear not the voice of the taskmaster. [19] The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master.

[20] “Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, [21] who long for death, but it comes not, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures, [22] who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave? [23] Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? [24] For my sighing comes instead of my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water. [25] For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. [26] I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, but trouble comes.”

Notes

- Recap: in Ch.1 of Job, we see that Job was the greatest man in the region (in terms of wealth, blessing). In Ch.2, we see that Job has quickly become the complete opposite, he lost all his possessions, and even his health.
- Today, we’ll be looking at chapter 3.
- Song lyrics have a way of conveying our deepest emotions. In human history, there has been a lot of people who wrote emotional songs of lament when they felt like life was overwhelming. And those song lyrics usually are not to be taken literally. E.g, “welcome to my life” by simple plan lol.
- In the first two chapters, we see Job acknowledging God despite all that has happened to him. But in this chapter, we see Job’s humanness and how his spirit is at a breaking point. As Job speaks, his words are filled with unbearable anguish and sorrow. Here, we see him wishing that he has never been born, and that the day where he was born be erased. He was wishing he would rather not be born, so he would avoid all the trouble that has befallen him. He also continued on and lamented why he did not just die at birth. To Job, the next best thing to

never having been born was to have died at birth. Then to Job, the best thing after that was to just die now and be at peace from his pain and suffering.

- In this chapter, we see Job going down the spiral of despair. In Job's lament, we encounter a real believer who went through anguish, despair and utter desperation. It is something for us to grasp, that we ourselves, if we walk closely with Christ, may go through very deep darkness, deeper even perhaps than if we had not walked faithfully in his footsteps.
- When we suffer, we may often demand answers from God. Or we sometimes try to blackmail God, saying: "if you don't remove my suffering, I will walk away from you". All of that is foolish. [KH: I didn't manage to catch what else Ps Stanley was saying, so I extrapolate here: what we should do instead is to continue trusting in Jesus despite not hearing any answers. But that is very difficult to do, and it is ok to lament like what Job here while trusting Jesus. Though I don't know what that looks like in practice...]
- God's ways are really higher than our ways. God is sovereign, and though we might not understand the purpose of our suffering, we know that He does all things for our good and for His glory. [KH: Thus in our suffering, if we can glorify him, then that would fulfill the purpose of our suffering.]
- When we fast forward to the last few chapters of Job, we see that God did not give Job any answers for his suffering. The key to wisdom in life is not to know why things happen to us. The key is to know God who knows why things happen to us.
- And for us Christians on this side of the cross, we can look to Jesus as our example. He was made like us and He suffered everything on our behalf, so that He can relate with us in our suffering. He knows us, He is not foreign to our suffering, [KH: He cares so much to die on the cross for us so that we can have eternal life and to be free from suffering in the new creation.]

11th Feb 2024: You have sinned?

Text: Job 4:1-9, 5:17, 6:24-30

[1] Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

[2] “If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking? [3] Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. [4] Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. [5] But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed. [6] Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?

[7] “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? [8] As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. [9] By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

[17] “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.

[24] “Teach me, and I will be silent; make me understand how I have gone astray. [25] How forceful are upright words! But what does reproof from you reprove? [26] Do you think that you can reprove words, when the speech of a despairing man is wind? [27] You would even cast lots over the fatherless, and bargain over your friend.

[28] “But now, be pleased to look at me, for I will not lie to your face. [29] Please turn; let no injustice be done. Turn now; my vindication is at stake. [30] Is there any injustice on my tongue? Cannot my palate discern the cause of calamity?

Notes

- Today, we see the first exchange between Eliphaz (Job 4:1-9,5:17) and Job (Job 6:24-30).
- Eliphaz says that because of Job's integrity and uprightness, Job should have been more patient in his suffering
- Eliphaz has two points to make: 1. Job has sinned, but Job has made himself out to be innocent. 2. Job was impatient to withstand the discipline of the Lord which came about because of his sin.
- Was Eliphaz right that Job has sinned? From v7-9, Eliphaz re-iterates that the innocent don't perish, the upright will not be cut off, but that those who do evil will be punished. The doctrine here is that: “you reap what you sow”. This is not wrong, because the Law operates that this is how God operates in his justice. [\[KH: But as we fast forward to the end of the book, we see that Eliphaz was rebuked by God for “darkens counsel without knowledge”\]](#)
- If the doctrine above was sound, then what is the problem here? Two problems:
 1. Doctrine is sound, but Eliphaz has not seen enough to know all things and everything. Eliphaz did not see what happened in the heavenly realm.
 2. Doctrine is sound, but there also are exceptions to this doctrine. Job is one such exceptional case.
- Was Eliphaz right that God disciplines people for their sin, and that people will be restored if they repent and submit to God? This doctrine is also correct, its found in places like proverbs.

But then Eliphaz didn't realise that the world was very complex, there's an entire spiritual realm that is unseen. Again, Eliphaz did not know about the wager between God and Satan.

- [KH: My thoughts: Classical physics gives descriptions that are generally correct, but then there are exceptions. But all of these (the classical physics description and the exceptions) can be described with QM. So similarly, Eliphaz's doctrine of retributive justice is generally correct, but it is just an approximation, that's why it doesn't handle Job's case. The underlying idea is God's passion for His glory, which includes retributive justice but also sometimes a delaying of retributive justice to get more glory.]
- Now, how did Job respond? And what can we learn?
 - V24-25: honest words are painful. And different people respond to the painful, honest words in different ways. If we see how Saul and David responded when they are confronted by God's prophets because of their sin, we can learn the difference (we must emulate David who repented rather than Saul). But Job here has not sinned, but was confronted by his friends. Note: Job's friends are not prophets unlike Samuel/Nathan!
 - A godly person (David) is not one who has not sinned, but will find honest rebukes painful but helpful for the sake of repentance. So for Job who is a godly person, he was frustrated by his friend's rebuke, because Job was unaware of things he needed to repent for and hence he didn't know what to do, because he knew he was innocent.
 - Job here was saying that Eliphaz's attitude was very mean (v27) because his words have increased his pain.
 - Lesson for us, when we are called to rebuke someone, we need to examine all the "evidence" carefully. Like a forensic officer, we need to see if the "evidence" is planted, or if it is genuine. We should be willing to listen and hear and change our minds. This is especially so if we claim to be speaking for God, we don't want to be found to be misrepresenting God!

18th February 2024: Blessed beyond measure

Text: Numbers 6:22-27

[22] The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [23] “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

[24] The LORD bless you and keep you; [25] the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; [26] the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

[27] “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

Notes

- In CNY, we toss yusheng. Each ingredient is associated to a particular blessing. This invites us to think about our view of blessing as christians.
- Three questions to ask as we think about blessing today:
 1. Where is blessing to be found?
 2. What do we understand by blessing
 3. How can we receive this blessing
- The ancient priestly blessing was given by Moses by God to Aaron, for Aaron was to bless them with that blessing. This was relevant because Israel was in the toughest times in the past, being in the exile. In our troubled world, we also want to ask: where is blessing to be found?
- From our text, we know that true blessing comes only from YAHWEH, and the tetragrammaton is spelled as LORD in the English. For example, all the blessings in our text start with the LORD.
- Here, we see that the blessing is secondary, the focus here is on the LORD. Why is there so much emphasis on where our blessing comes from? This is because instead of seeking blessing from God, we often seek blessing from elsewhere. E.g, we often seek our significance and our blessing from material possessions. Sometimes we feel that if we just have a nice house, then we will be blessed. E.g, we also often seek blessing from relationships, e.g we find our true blessedness in our wife/husband, in desiring a kid, etc. If we think of blessing only in these measures, we can't say that we are blessed beyond measure. This is because our desire is an endless pit, we can always desire more things, more wealth more health etc. But if we think of blessing as coming from the LORD, if we think of the LORD as our blessing, then we can say we will be blessed beyond measure.
- The LORD knows all our needs, He knows that we need His protection and provision. If we can see provision and protection as coming from God, then we are blessed. We see this in the Lord's prayer, “give us this day our daily bread” and “keep us from temptation”.
- The idea of blessing as coming from the LORD is described in two vivid metaphors in our text. First, we have “the LORD make his face shine upon you”. When do people's face shine? E.g, a kid opening a new present in delight, a couple looking at each other in delight, etc. The heart of blessing is this: God delights in us so much that metaphorically, His face shines on us. This means that we have God's favour, even though we don't deserve it. This is the heart of blessing.

- The next metaphor is: “the Lord lift up his countenance upon you”. This means that God’s eyes are always on us, which gives us peace (shalom). This is in contrast to pagan religions, where their deity has to be provoked to action through many religious rites. Here, God graciously shines his covenant to us first.
- So, what is blessing from a Christian POV?
 - To know the LORD’s protection and provision but more importantly to know his presence (to have that face to face relationship with him) where we can experience his peace.
- How do we receive this blessing of God?
 - In the OT, it is through obedience to the Law. And disobedience to the Law would lead to cursing. And we see that was what happened to the Israelites, God’s face turned away from them. And this is what would have happened to us too due to our sin, if not for God’s grace.
 - In God’s grace, God instituted a new covenant, where there is forgiveness of sin when we believe in His Son, whom God has sent to be the propitiation for our sin. In the past, God’s face would be turned away from us because of our sin, but now, with Jesus, God’s face is turned towards us cause we are in Jesus.
- When God blesses us, there is a missional purposes. Wrt Psalm 67 (our scripture reading text), when God blesses us, we are to be a blessing to others. We are blessed to be a channel of God’s blessing to others. When God shines his face on us, we can show practical love to our neighbours so that they can see God’s love through our actions, like the good samaritan. And when God shines his face on us, we can show God’s love to our neighbours by sharing the gospel to them.
- Also, in the life to come, when Jesus returns, we will experience the full extent of Aaron’s blessing. When Jesus comes again, we will be before God’s face, we will see God face to face, there will be no more evil and sin and thus no more tears. Thus, we can look forward to this final blessed state when Jesus comes again.
- Thus, for those who do not believe in Jesus, you need to believe in Jesus to receive true blessing. For those who believe in Jesus, we need to self-examine to see if we are seeking for blessing apart from God. When we seek blessing in God, we realise that God is the source of provision and protection, and more importantly, we can experience God’s presence. This is even when we experience difficult things like Job. When we get bad things we don’t want or when we dont get good things we want, it is because God knows that is good for us, and that through our experience of pain and suffering, He is mysteriously working our our shalom in the background. And that He is with us, His presence and peace is with us. And that is blessing.

25th February 2024: Do not pervert God's justice

Text: Job 8-9

[1] Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

[2] "How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?
[3] Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? [4] If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.
[5] If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, [6] if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation.
[7] And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.

[8] "For inquire, please, of bygone ages, and consider what the fathers have searched out.
[9] For we are but of yesterday and know nothing, for our days on earth are a shadow.
[10] Will they not teach you and tell you and utter words out of their understanding?

[11] "Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water?
[12] While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant.
[13] Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish. [14] His confidence is severed, and his trust is a spider's web. [15] He leans against his house, but it does not stand; he lays hold of it, but it does not endure. [16] He is a lush plant before the sun, and his shoots spread over his garden. [17] His roots entwine the stone heap; he looks upon a house of stones. [18] If he is destroyed from his place, then it will deny him, saying, 'I have never seen you.' [19] Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the soil others will spring.

[20] "Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers. [21] He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouting. [22] Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the tent of the wicked will be no more."

[1] Then Job answered and said:

[2] "Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God? [3] If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. [4] He is wise in heart and mighty in strength—who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?— [5] he who removes mountains, and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger, [6] who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; [7] who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; [8] who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea; [9] who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south; [10] who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number. [11] Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. [12] Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'

[13] "God will not turn back his anger; beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab. [14] How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? [15] Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. [16] If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice. [17] For he crushes me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause; [18] he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness. [19] If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? [20] Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. [21] I am blameless; I regard not myself; I loathe my life. [22] It is

all one; therefore I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.' [23] When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. [24] The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the faces of its judges— if it is not he, who then is it?

[25] "My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away; they see no good. [26] They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey. [27] If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face, and be of good cheer,' [28] I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent. [29] I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain? [30] If I wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye, [31] yet you will plunge me into a pit, and my own clothes will abhor me. [32] For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. [33] There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both. [34] Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. [35] Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself.

Notes

- Our response to suffering is based on our view and undersading of God and other worldviews. Today we will see two view, Bildad's view and Job's view. Bildad's view can be summarised as: "if... then ...". I.e, Bildad's view is one of "retributive theology". See for example, chapter 8:v4-6. Bildad's logic is this:
 - If someone has sinned, then there will be suffering. Therefore, if someone is suffering, they must have sinned. Just accept it and repent.
- Retributive justice is a view that is quite common in the OT. E.g, Psalm 1. God's blessing is a consequence of one's faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant, and God's punishment and judgement (which leads to suffering) falls on those who transgress the covenant.
 - [KH: Symbolically, we have $F \implies B$, $\neg F \implies \neg B$ which gives us $F \iff B$, where F stands for faithfulness, B stand for blessing (and hence $\neg B$ stands for a lack of blessing, which is judgement and punishment).]

Thus, a lack of blessing would imply one's lack of faithfulness. But this is wrong, e.g John 9:1-3.
- Job's response is this: "Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God?". Job's view is this: "if someone has sinned, then there will be suffering. **But** not all suffering is because of sin. I need someone to comfort me". Job's view is a correct view of retributive justice, especially in our fallen world where Satan is active.
- Btw, retributive justice for us in the NT ([KH: and also those in the OT who saw the Messiah in the types and shadows of the Mosaic covenant]) must be interpreted in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection on the cross. All of us have sinned and hence all of us deserve the full punishment for our sin, but that has been borne by Jesus on the cross. Thus, for all of us who believe, there is no more condemnation for sin, and hence the suffering we experience now is not necessarily punishment for sin. [KH: There might not be any reason for our suffering that we can understand, but we know God will be glorified through our suffering.]
- [KH: I got lost already... was abit hard **for me** to follow this particular sermon.]

3th March 2024: Less than what my guilt deserves?

Text: Excerpts from Job 11,13:15-24,14:13-22

[1] Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

[2] “Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be judged right?
[3] Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you?
[4] For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God’s eyes.’ [5] But oh, that
God would speak and open his lips to you, [6] and that he would tell you the secrets of
wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. Know then that God exacts of you less
than your guilt deserves.

[7] “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?
[8] It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?
[9] Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. [10] If he passes
through and imprisons and summons the court, who can turn him back? [11] For he
knows worthless men; when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it? [12] But a stupid
man will get understanding when a wild donkey’s colt is born a man!

[13] “If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him. [14] If
iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents. [15]
Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not
fear. [16] You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed
away. [17] And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the
morning. [18] And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and
take your rest in security. [19] You will lie down, and none will make you afraid; many
will court your favor. [20] But the eyes of the wicked will fail; all way of escape will be
lost to them, and their hope is to breathe their last.”

[15] Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face. [16] This
will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him.

[20] Only grant me two things, then I will not hide myself from your face: [21] withdraw
your hand far from me, and let not dread of you terrify me. [22] Then call, and I will
answer; or let me speak, and you reply to me. [23] How many are my iniquities and my
sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. [24] Why do you hide your face and
count me as your enemy?

[13] Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath
be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! [14] If a man dies,
shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come.
[15] You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands.
[16] For then you would number my steps; you would not keep watch over my sin; [17]
my transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity.

[18] “But the mountain falls and crumbles away, and the rock is removed from its place;
[19] the waters wear away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil of the earth; so
you destroy the hope of man. [20] You prevail forever against him, and he passes; you
change his countenance, and send him away. [21] His sons come to honor, and he does
not know it; they are brought low, and he perceives it not. [22] He feels only the pain of
his own body, and he mourns only for himself.”

Notes

- What happens when the person you think can answer your prayers, you feel has also turned against you? This is what Job felt, when his friends imposed their simplistic views of God on Job, which added on to his feeling being cut off from God.
- How can believers come before God with our honest struggling without feeling that they have sinned against God?
- Three Ps for today:
 1. Job feeling prosecuted by his friends.
 2. Job's plea
 3. Job's pitiful plight
- In Job 11, we see Zophar speaking to Job quite harshly. Previously Job would have protested his suffering by claiming his innocence. But here, Zophar (who is supposed to be Job's friend), is being like a prosecutor towards Job. The irony here is that here, Zophar is extolling God, but at the same time he is insulting Job. Here, we see here that when we comfort someone, we first need to deal with our pride. We should not treat someone else like a "lesser Christian", and to be like an armchair theologian. We should listen and discern first, rather than speaking.
- Here, God also has not revealed anything to Zophar, yet Zophar is claiming to speak on God's behalf when he said that "God exacts less than your guilt deserves". Here, we must avoid misrepresenting God due to our presumption. God being God, might be doing many things through a single event. We should not presume on what we think God is doing in someone's life when he suffers (unless God has spoken clearly to us).
- As Paul said: love is patient. We need to have patience when comforting someone in their suffering, we need to be patient to listen first before speaking.
- Here, Zophar's solution to Job's suffering is also overly simplistic. From verses 14-16 of chapter 11, we see that essentially Zophar is saying: "if you are more obedient/more faithful, your life will be smooth". Here, the emphasis is on what Job must do to make his life better, rather than on God's mercy/grace. Here, Zophar is placing a burden on Job that is too heavy to bear, that our suffering or lack thereof is directly correlated to our sin. This is a false gospel. We do need to put the focus on God's forgiveness and mercy and grace, that His forgiveness is much bigger than our sin, when we repent. This frees us from directly correlating our sin with the suffering in our lives.
- In chapter 13, we see Job's response. Job's emotions as portrayed here are very complex and multi-faceted. Here, we see Job struggling with God but also longing for God. If we focus on verses 15-16, we see that Job saying that his hope is only God [\[KH: oversimplification here, didn't catch fully what Ps Edwin said\]](#). Job is fearful of being too impudent in his approach to God, but he approaches God nonetheless, since he realises that he can't turn to anyone else.
- Also from verses 20-24 of chapter 13, we see that Job really just wants to be with God. He didn't ask for a restoration of his possessions, he just wants to feel like God is not his enemy.
- Here, we see how Job is grappling between what he knows of God and how he feels towards God.
- Unlike Job, we now know about the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. As Hebrews says, we can approach the throne of grace with confidence in our time of need. So we should not be

fearful to go to God in our times of suffering, we should not be fearful of sharing our complex emotions with God just like what Job does here.

- In chapter 14, Job is wondering about the fate of all mankind, due to sin and death (which is the consequence of sin). In v13-14, Job hopes for God to hide him in Sheol for a time until His wrath is past, and then God will restore Job. Job here is groaning for a day where he is sure that he will not be treated as an enemy, when all will be well (v15-17). This is where Job is at, he is longing for a day where there is no more gap between God and himself.
- In Romans 8, Paul says that not only the whole creation, but even us Christians, we groan inwardly while we wait for the final day. We are aware that things on earth is not fully right. There is still sin and death. We long for something, but we have a hope for something without sin and death. Compared to Job, for us who live after the cross, we are more privileged. Here, our hope is based on the cross, where God has decisively destroyed sin and death. We have the hope that God's justice will always prevail, though we can't see it yet.
- In the sermon on the mount, Jesus says: "blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted". The comforting is not only at the last days, even in our current broken world, when we mourn and groan about the fallenness of creation, we still have a certain communion with God.

17th March 2024: Responding to suffering

Text: Job 40-42

[1] And the LORD said to Job:

[2] “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.”

[3] Then Job answered the LORD and said:

[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.”

[6] Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

[7] “Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. [8]

Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?

[9] Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?

[10] “Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor.

[11] Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and

abase him. [12] Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the

wicked where they stand. [13] Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in

the world below. [14] Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can

save you.

[15] “Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox. [16]

Behold, his strength in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly. [17] He makes

his tail stiff like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are knit together. [18] His bones are

tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron.

[19] “He is the first of the works of God; let him who made him bring near his sword!

[20] For the mountains yield food for him where all the wild beasts play. [21] Under the

lotus plants he lies, in the shelter of the reeds and in the marsh. [22] For his shade the

lotus trees cover him; the willows of the brook surround him. [23] Behold, if the river is

turbulent he is not frightened; he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth.

[24] Can one take him by his eyes, or pierce his nose with a snare?

[1] “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord?

[2] Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? [3] Will he make many

pleas to you? Will he speak to you soft words? [4] Will he make a covenant with you

to take him for your servant forever? [5] Will you play with him as with a bird, or will

you put him on a leash for your girls? [6] Will traders bargain over him? Will they divide

him up among the merchants? [7] Can you fill his skin with harpoons or his head with

fishing spears? [8] Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it

again! [9] Behold, the hope of a man is false; he is laid low even at the sight of him. [10]

No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before

me? [11] Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the

whole heaven is mine.

[12] “I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, or his mighty strength, or his goodly

frame. [13] Who can strip off his outer garment? Who would come near him with a

bridle? [14] Who can open the doors of his face? Around his teeth is terror. [15] His back

is made of rows of shields, shut up closely as with a seal. [16] One is so near to another

that no air can come between them. [17] They are joined one to another; they clasp each other and cannot be separated. [18] His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn. [19] Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. [20] Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. [21] His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth. [22] In his neck abides strength, and terror dances before him. [23] The folds of his flesh stick together, firmly cast on him and immovable. [24] His heart is hard as a stone, hard as the lower millstone. [25] When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid; at the crashing they are beside themselves. [26] Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail, nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin. [27] He counts iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood. [28] The arrow cannot make him flee; for him, sling stones are turned to stubble. [29] Clubs are counted as stubble; he laughs at the rattle of javelins. [30] His underparts are like sharp potsherds; he spreads himself like a threshing sledge on the mire. [31] He makes the deep boil like a pot; he makes the sea like a pot of ointment. [32] Behind him he leaves a shining wake; one would think the deep to be white-haired. [33] On earth there is not his like, a creature without fear. [34] He sees everything that is high; he is king over all the sons of pride.”

[1] Then Job answered the LORD and said:

[2] “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. [3] ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. [4] ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ [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.”

[7] After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. [8] Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” [9] So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer.

[10] And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. [11] Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

[12] And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. [13] He had also seven sons and three daughters. [14] And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. [15] And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job’s daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. [16] And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons’ sons, four generations. [17] And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

Notes

- Dust and ashes - human suffering and weakness. In Job's final response in chapter 42, here we see Job saying that he "repents in dust and ashes". Job here is acknowledging his own weakness before God. A similar phrase is used by Abraham when he was interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah.
- How do we relate to God as dust and ashes? We do so by speaking rightly to God. Here in v7,8 of chapter 42, we see that Eliphaz was rebuked for not speaking rightly to God. This is despite him and his friends saying things that were quite biblical, the idea that sin leads to suffering. So what is wrong about what Eliphaz said? The idea is that they were saying right things but they weren't speaking rightly to God. To speak rightly to God, we need to be **honest**. [KH: It is not merely about having right theology, since the devil has right theology. It is about having a right relationship with God, and if this relationship with God is real, it must allow for honesty]. We can speak to God honestly in lamentation (chs 3-39) and also in intercession.
- The Leviathan is under God's control.
- [KH: Tbh this sermon is abit confusing, I'm lost already. I also think the original ESV translation makes more sense to me than Maggie Low's translation. Maggie's sermon is based solely on her translation apart from the ESV translation. I guess I have to check a commentary on Job.]

24th March 2024: The triumphal entry

Text: Mark 11:1-11

[1] Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples [2] and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. [3] If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" [4] And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. [5] And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" [6] And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. [7] And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. [8] And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. [9] And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! [10] Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

[11] And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Notes

- Three points for today:
 1. First point: symbol, what Jesus did was symbolic
 2. Second point: scripture, what Jesus did pointed to some parts of scripture
 3. Third point: salience, what Jesus did was very notable/significant
- Jesus' action here was symbolic. He wasn't just looking for a ride into Jerusalem. When he was looking for a donkey, he was shouting a message to his audience. And in this part of Mark, was the first time Jesus was breaking his usual pattern of being "low key". This part here marks the transition between Jesus' public ministry and now His going to His passion.
- In Jesus' day, it was a common cultural thing that people were to walk to Jerusalem, and not ride into Jerusalem. This is because of the culturally perceived holiness of the city. But Jesus rode into Jerusalem, which was very provocative.
- Also, even though Jesus' action was very symbolic, he didn't say anything at all. Usually in the past, the prophets will do something symbolic and then provide a commentary. Here, Jesus provides no commentary at all. Why? Because here, Jesus is counting on scripture to fill in the gaps, that both He and the audience knows.
- The crowd here says: "blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD". This is a quotation from Psalm 118:9. This is part of the liturgy of welcome in those days that the Jerusalem Jews will say to any Jewish pilgrim who comes to Jerusalem. But the crowd also says: "blessed is the coming kingdom of our father david". So here, the crowd identifies Jesus as the messiah, the Son of David. But why did the crowd do this?
- Usually, when people ride into a city in triumph, they will ride a horse. E.g, the Roman generals who conquered a city will ride in on their war horses. But here, Jesus rides a donkey.
- The crowd understood what Jesus did because of Zechariah 9:9-11. The context of that passage is that the messianic king will defeat Israel's enemies (see chapter 9). But even though

the messianic king is victorious here, the focus in the zechariah passage is on the character of the king, that the king is humble and lowly. Though the messianic king in Zechariah 9:9-11 will defeat his enemies, the focus is on the peace that will come (v10). War is made not for its own sake, but the war is for the sake of peace. The messianic king, humble and lowly, defeats his enemies to come to bring peace.

- When there is such fulfilment of prophecy, we must remember that God remembers His promises and our prayers. He will remember His promises at the right time.
- What are the salient points that we can learn from Jesus' action today? First, we see that Jesus is the humble king of Zechariah 9:9-11. Jesus here understands what it means to be afflicted and deprived, though He is king. We must learn from His example.
- Secondly, we see that Jesus was coming as an inspecting king. In v11, we see Jesus going into the temple, looking around, then going out. Right after, we have the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple. Thus, Jesus is not only the humble king, but He is also the inspecting king. Just as Jesus comes to inspect the temple, we must inspect our life. And here, we must remember the crowd. There's a difference between crowd faith and sincere, personal faith. The crowd faith here is very flimsy, because everybody just "monkey see monkey do" instead of truly believing. They just "herd instinct". We know this because 5 days later in the story, the crowd goes from "hosanna" to "crucify him". Sincere personal faith is happy to praise God with the crowd, but is also happy to praise God alone even when the world is against God.
- Thirdly, if we fast forward abit into the story, we see that the inspecting king is also the sacrificial and loving king. Our king Jesus here inspects Jerusalem, sees where they fall short, and then dies on the cross to make up for they falls short, and rises from the dead to give them the power to live new lives. And this is what happens to us too; jesus sees where we fall short but He also gives himself for us. Jesus is judge, but Jesus is also loving.

31st March 2024: Christ is risen!

Text: Romans 6:1-11

[1] What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? [2] By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [3] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

[5] For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [9] We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. [10] For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. [11] So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Notes

- Every sunday, we remember Jesus' death and celebrate His resurrection. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the bedrock, the crux of our Christian faith. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is no hope, no forgiveness, etc.
- Three points for today, based on viewing the resurrection from the POV of the past, present and future.
 - Did the resurrection happen? (past)
 - How does the resurrection affect me today (present)
 - How does the resurrection affect me in the future (future)
- Firstly, w.r.t the past: did the resurrection happen?
 1. First, we see that women were the first witnesses to the empty tomb. In the first century, a woman's testimony was not legally binding. Thus, in the past, it would be embarrassing for the entire account to be based on a woman's testimony. Thus, if the empty tomb account was fabricated, then the ancient author would not have chosen women as the witnesses. This means that the author was more concerned about truth than avoiding embarrassment.
 2. Secondly, we see that the disciples were willing to die for their faith in the risen Jesus. If the account was fabricated, they wouldn't suffer for that for 40 years. This means that the disciples believed what they were preaching, i.e they believed that Jesus' resurrection was true.
 3. Thirdly, people who were still alive could refute the resurrection if it wasn't true (since accounts of the resurrection were around as early as 50AD).
- In the future: Christ died for us (he gave his life willingly for us), and He was raised for us, and He will never die, death having no more dominion over Him.

1. Comparing Jesus and Lazarus, we see that Lazarus will die again but Jesus will never die again.
 2. Jesus' resurrection to an eternal life guarantees our own resurrection to an eternal life, though we will eventually die.
 3. And Jesus' eternal life means that He will come again.
 4. One day, we will die, but we will not need to be afraid of death. And we will not grieve brothers and sisters in Christ who have died before us, since we will see them again.
- In the present:
 1. We see that we have been united with Christ in a death like his through baptism (v3,4,6,8)
 2. We have also been united with Christ in a resurrection like his (v4,8)
 3. This means that our primary identity is in Christ. We are first Christians, then students/etc.
 4. This being in Christ is not just something abstract, it is an objective reality. When we have put our faith in Christ, then we are most definitely in Christ.
 5. When we are **in** Christ, then we are **with** Christ.
 6. Practical implications of being united with Christ in a death like his: Christ died to sin (v10), i.e he has taken our sin and died for our sin. Similarly, we too have died to sin. Consider the fourfold state of man (St. Augustine):
 - Adam before the fall: able to sin
 - Adam after the fall: not able not to sin
 - In Christ, on earth: Able not to sin
 - In Christ, in heaven: Not able to sin

Thus, for us in Christ now, we are freed from the dominion of sin, we are able not to sin! Compare this with our life before we put our faith in Christ. Though we will still sin, when we are in Christ, the Holy Spirit rebukes us when we sin and teaches us not to sin. And eventually, we will grow in sanctification, if we abide in Christ.
 7. The power to not sin also is part of how we have been united with Christ in a baptism like his. We have the freedom to live responsively to God, for his glory.
 8. Before we have the resurrected life, hearing the bible is lame. Now, we hear God's Spirit speaking to us through the Bible and we obey His Word. Additionally, before, we don't like to serve others, we don't like to worship, etc. But now, we like all of these.
 9. If we don't experience to some degree the above effects of being in Christ, then maybe we just like the idea of being Christian but we aren't Christian. We then need to confess our sins and truly believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin.
 - We must know all of these truths above, and know them not just as theoretical knowledge but as something that affects our behavior.
 - We must know our primary identity with Christ
 - We must know that we are no longer dead in sin, but we are dead to sin and alive to God. We must remember this especially when we are tempted.

- Not only are we in Christ, Christ is also in us, through His Holy Spirit.
- This eternal life that we are living right now prepares us for eternity with Jesus. This is the abundant life that Jesus is talking about. This life is purposeful and meaningful (lived for God), joyful (with God's presence), and beautiful.
- And we can live this life because Christ is risen, and we have been raised with him.

7th April 2024: Remaining steadfast amidst trials

Text: James 1:1-18

[1] James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:

Greetings.

[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

[9] Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, [10] and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. [11] For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

[12] Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. [13] Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. [14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

[16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. [17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. [18] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Notes

- Writer of James is likely to be James the brother of Jesus, which was the leader of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.
- But the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered and dispersed. In this dispersion, many of them were treated unfairly.
- James wanted to encourage these Christians, because he wanted to encourage these suffering Jewish Christians and exhort them not to fall away from their faith because of their suffering.
- For us today, we might also be undergoing suffering, and that might also be affecting our relationship with God.
- When we think of the word "trials", we usually associate it with pain, loss. And as far as we could, it is human for us to avoid pain, loss. But here, James is asking people to "count it all joy when they experience trials".
 - Is James being an insensitive church leader? Probably not.

- James is not downplaying the trial and the suffering it causes. But James is telling his congregation to think of trials in a christian way.
- It is difficult to define here what “joy” means. But it suffices to say that true “joy” is dependent on truth. And the truth that James is emphasising here is that God allows us to face trials to refine us, not to harm us.
- First point: we should change the way we view trials in our life.
 1. Trials are not a sign of God’s inattention or inability to help us
 2. A sovereign and gracious God can use trials to bring about spiritual maturity. There will be tears and loss and grief, but all of these are not in vain. God will bring good into our lives.
 3. The world we live in demands instant gratification. But the growth in spiritual maturity requires time and requires perseverance. This is counter-cultural! Our attitude should be always having a desire to grow into greater christ-likeness.
 4. We also shouldn’t expect other people going through trials to quickly tell you “eh in this season what is God teaching you”? Spiritual maturity and growth in steadfastness takes perseverance and time!
- Trials have a way of distorting our perspective of life and of God. Thus, we arrive at our second point: we need to ask God for wisdom to be able to grow in steadfastness in the midst of the trial.
 1. The wisdom here is not the ability to immediately solve your problems/remove the trial
 2. The wisdom here is more of the ability to see trials from God’s perspective
 3. James is reminding his congregation that the God we have is always ready to hear us, and thus we always can go to God.
 4. God here is the anchor that helps us to remain “sure and steadfast”, to not go into worldliness in the midst of trials
 5. The doubting here refers to people who want both the ways of the world and the blessings that God gives (e.g maybe peace of mind).
- Part of the wisdom that God gives is that God helps us to find delight in what God says is of ultimate value. Thus, the third point is to understand how God values things.
 1. The poor are not more holy cause of their poverty
 2. The rich are not more unholy because of their wealth
 3. Both rich and poor Christians are loved by God, and that is the ultimate value. And that is equal to both rich and poor Christians!
 4. Poor christians must guard against low self esteem and envy. They must not view themselves in light of their poverty, but they must view themselves in light of the ultimate value they have in that they are loved by God. (Let the lowly brother boast in his exultation)
 5. Rich christians must guard against pride, and thinking that they are better because they are richer. This is them putting more value in their wealth than in the fact that God loves them (let the rich boast in his humiliation).

- Regardless of our circumstances, when we are going through a trial, it is also a potential temptation. It is a temptation because it is an opportunity for our sinful desires to cause us to fall instead of to grow. When we constantly compromise, always giving in to temptation, we will eventually die. And in light of this temptation, we always have to make a choice and we always are responsible for that choice. God is sovereign, but He doesn't cause us to sin!
- So here James is reminding them that God is the giver of all good things, and that despite their circumstances, God is still good. And they know this because they have got the most perfect gift already despite their circumstances. This perfect gift is the gospel, that through Jesus they are "brought forth by the word of truth". They have the power to resist sin and to love God, to enjoy this eternal life. And this gift is to help them to be a firstfruits.

14th April 2024: Evidence of genuine faith

Text: James 1:19-27, 2:14-26

[19] Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

[22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

[26] If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

[14] What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [17] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

[18] But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. [19] You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! [20] Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? [21] Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? [22] You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; [23] and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. [24] You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. [25] And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? [26] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Notes

- Paul says that when we believe in Jesus, we will be saved (Romans 10:19). But what does it mean to believe?
 - Analogy: Charles Blondin could walk across a tightrope blindfolded and carrying a wheelbarrow, but when he asked for an audience member (who claimed to believe in Charles' ability) to sit in a wheelbarrow, nobody wanted to volunteer. Clearly, the audience did not have enough faith in Charles.
- Main point: If we listen intently to the word of God and genuinely strive to obey it, then we can have confidence that we will be saved.
- Listening: "be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger". This comes after the passage on

trials and temptations. We have two ears and one mouth, so a good rule of thumb is to listen twice as much as we speak. We often get angry when we do not get what we want. But maybe listening to others rather than just speaking rashly might help us get what we want. The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God; when we are speak when we are angry, it is usually counter-productive because our anger causes us to be less teachable, understanding and empathetic.

- But apart from listening to others, the v19 on James is also sandwiched between v18 (word of truth) and v21 (implanted word). Thus, we are also to intently listen to God's Word. In fact, as part of fearing God in the midst of trials and temptations, it might be helpful to listen intently to God's Word rather than to complain to God incessantly about our trials (ofc, there is a place for lamentation and honesty before God. But usually lamentation is also scripture based). As is said in Ecclesiastes, "since God is in heaven and we are on earth, let your words be few"
- What place do we give God's Word in our life? Three areas to think about:
 1. Sunday worship (e.g, what time do we sleep on sat)
 2. Bible study (e.g, do we prepare before study and do we regularly attend?)
 3. Personal devotion (do we do so? Best to do this first thing in the morn!)

When we listen intently to God's Word, we will have wisdom to deal with trials and temptations...

- Other than listening intently to God's Word, we are also to obey. Listening intently to God's word is a good start, but it is not enough. We must also obey God's Word.
 1. God's Word has the same effect to us as a mirror. Like a mirror, God's Word points out our sins and shortcomings, and teaches us how we need to improve. When we read the Bible, we are shown who we actually are.
 2. But apart from showing us our sins, the Bible also discloses our need for repentance. It is folly to see our sins and not do anything about it.
 3. God's Word also assures us our promise of God's forgiveness.
- Is obedience to God's Word a killjoy and restrictive? It is not supposed to be, since God's law is the "law of liberty", as per our text.
 1. True freedom is not the absence of rules, but it is the presence of the right rules that set safe boundaries.
 2. [KH: E.g, with the right boundaries in a playground, kids can run as far as they like in the playground because the boundaries are clear (there's actually a psychological study done for this ¹.)]
 3. Since God made us, He is the one who knows best what boundaries we need.
 4. Every command God gives us is for our good, because they give us the boundaries within which we can flourish!
- How do we distinguish between counterfeit faith and real faith? "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (ch. 2:17). "Faith apart from works is useless" (ch. 2:20). "Faith apart from works is dead" (ch. 2:26). Two illustrations for fake faith:
 1. Fake faith is like seeing someone in need, and just giving talk without any action.

¹<https://www.asla.org/awards/2006/studentawards/282.html>

2. Saying that one believes that God is one; even the demons do so! True believers believe and obey, false believers believe and rebel.

Two illustrations for real faith:

1. Abraham's willingness to give up Isaac. He obeyed God here.
2. Rahab's willingness to shelter the spies

Abraham and Rahab are quite polar opposites when it comes to their backgrounds. But they have similar genuine faith.

- Five closing remarks:

1. How much do we need to obey? We need to obey all of God's commandments. When we break one law, we break all the laws. This can be an area of impurity, unforgiveness, pride, etc. God wants us to deal with every sin as the Holy Spirit surfaces it out.
2. The emphasis of obedience to God is love to others. In a time of persecution, it is easy for people to just care about their own self interests. But what James talks about is loving others, like loving the orphans and widows, and not showing partiality to anyone, and providing for everyone's needs.
3. Mercy triumphs judgment. We are imperfect, but we know that as we try our best, God has mercy on us in virtue of the fact that we are in Christ. We will sin in our mortal bodies, but through continued listening to God and repentance for our sins, through the Holy Spirit, we will sin less and less. [\[KH: And in the end, God will keep us blameless, as per Jude 24-25\]](#).
4. The supposed contradiction between James and Paul is resolved by noting that we are justified by faith alone, but faith is never alone, it produces the fruit of obedience. So we don't need to look to our good works for justification, but instead we do good works from a state of being justified by God already, with peace with God and thankfulness in our heart.
5. Finally, obedience to God is not the starting point, but the gospel message of forgiveness of sin through faith is. We are justified by faith, and then that faith produces good works as fruit.

21st April 2024: Taming the tongue

Text: James 3:1-12

[1] Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. [2] For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. [3] If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. [4] Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. [5] So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. [7] For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, [8] but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. [9] With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. [10] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. [11] Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? [12] Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Notes

- We all know how destructive/disintegrating bad speech or insulting speech can be for a community. All it takes to break up a community is just for a few people in the community to talk bad about one another. And this is made even worse when this ill-disciplined speech comes from teachers. If one wants to be a teacher, he should watch his speech, since if not, his judgement will be greater.
- James' thesis statement here is found in v2 of our text: "And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.". The word "perfect" here is the same word as "mature". Thus, for a Christian to be mature, he must control his own speech. It doesn't matter how much theology one knows if he is ill-disciplined with his tongue; he is immature.
- Three points today:
 1. We musn't **underestimate** the power of the tongue. The tongue has great power.
 2. The tongue can **undo** a community, other people, and ourselves.
 3. The tongue is **untameable**.
- A lot of us have regrets with respect to things we have previously said. Yet we still continue to say regrettable things. Why? Because we underestimate the power of the tongue. The analogy that James gives here is that just like a small bit in a big horse, or like a small rudder in a big ship, the tongue is small but it has a big impact. James also calls the tongue a small fire that can set the forest ablaze. If a Christian can control his tongue, he can control his own body and himself.
- Continuing from the analogy of the tongue as a fire, we see that the tongue has very high destructive impact. For example, the body of Christ takes a lot of effort to build up, but the tongue can just stain the entire body of Christ and makes it impure and destroy it. Just like

how stains are very hard to remove, the impact of hurtful words are very long lasting. The staining, destructive effect of the tongue is on both the hearers and the speakers. The hearers can be hurt for decades by hurtful words, and the speakers can regret those words for decades.

- James also calls the tongue the fire from hell. We think that hell is an eternal destination for some, and this is correct. But the way James uses this analogy here is to say that hell now is no longer simply a destination for the future, but its corrupting, harmful and hurtful power extends from the future into our present time through the tongue. We see this in how our first ancestors fell; they fell cause of the tongue in phrases like “did God say...”. The analogy of the poison here that James uses is also helpful; just like how poison usually takes time to kill, the effects of bad speech are usually not seen immediately, but it will eventually kill. Of course there are more lethal poisons that take effect immediately just like how there are words that are immediately hurtful, but majority of the hurtful words that we say take time to take effect. The tongue is also restless evil, moving from one place to another. [KH: Perhaps that means that bad words have the effect of spreading, through gossip.]
- James also says that the tongue is untameable. Though humans have tamed many animals, humans can't even tame their own tongue. But this makes sense, because Christianity is not about moral achievement, but moral redemption. If one thinks that he can tame his tongue by himself, he will make sooner or later make statements that he regrets. But if one acknowledges that he can't tame his tongue by himself, and which leads him to go to God for help to tame his tongue, then God can work. In short, the tongue is not tameable by human efforts, but with God's help, the tongue can be tamed. This would be an extension of the point that James made previously, about asking for wisdom from above. James here emphasises the untameability of the tongue to humble us, because of how hurtful it is. And only when we are humbled, can God work in our lives to redeem our tongues.
- Btw, corrupt speech comprises not only hurtful words, but also flattery. Flattery is dishonesty, which can undo someone too by causing the person to be prideful.
- One way that God helps us to tame our tongue is through the power of community. For example, spouses can remind each other to “keep it cool, don't say words in anger”. Or our Christian friends can remind each other of that too. Or we can pray and ask for wisdom to do so.
- In verse 11, James says that the tongue is like a spring. A spring is a source of water. And a salty source brings forth salty water. Similarly, when one says hurtful words, it usually comes from a place of hurt that the person has previously experienced. The tongue is humanly untameable because the source that the words come from is human. But what if the source is divine instead of human? When we meditate on the scripture and let our vocabulary become the life-giving words of scripture instead of hurtful words, when we meditate on what God has done for us to heal the hurts we have experienced, then our human source will slowly be transformed by God. And we will become like a spring of fresh water, from which fresh water will come out.
- We can also glean some practical wisdom from the analogy of a forest fire. Here, the practical wisdom is for people who are on the receiving end of hurtful words. Forest fires are usually drastic when the forest has a lot of “dead matter” like dried leaves/dead trees. On the other hand, forest fires are quite manageable and do not spread too much when the forest has a lot of “living matter” like living trees (which has a lot of water content). Thus, when we are the recipients of hurtful words, the damage that the words have on us depends on the state of our own souls. If we carry a lot of hurt/regrets/insecurities within us, then the damage done by these hurtful words will be amplified. On the other hand, if we are very assured in God's

love for us and our identity as redeemed people of God, then the damage done by hurtful words can be contained, though it still hurts. Thus, just as how we should clean away the “dead matter” in forests to minimise the damage of forest fires, this is an exhortation for us to clean out the hurts and regrets in our lives by surrendering them all to God. [KH: [We do this by remembering that Christ has borne all our hurts and pains, He is the person who was the most wronged, and by His stripes we are healed](#)]. When we surrender our past hurts to God, we will have more ability to contain the damage done to us by the hurtful words of others.

- We also note that just as the tongue can do a lot of damage, it can also do a lot of good. The book of Proverbs says that the speech of the wise is healing. There are many people who carry many hurts, and the tongue, if used properly, can help to heal those hurts through words of encouragements etc. The ability to communicate is a wonderful gift that God has given us which is corrupted by sin. [KH: [And we know that the better the gift, the worse its effects are when it is corrupted by sin.](#)]. We should use this gift of the tongue then for the initial purpose that God has given it, which is to love one another. And of course, we can only do this with God’s wisdom, so we should ask God for wisdom to do so.

28th April 2024: True wisdom and worldly wisdom

Text: James 3:13-18

[13] Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. [14] But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15] This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. [17] But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. [18] And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Notes

- First point: what is true wisdom
 - Sometimes, we may think we are clever and we might laugh at others, but others might think that they are clever and laugh at us. Worldly wisdom is often equated with academic success/“street smarts”/“making it in life”/cleverness. Or in Chinese culture, those who have more life experience are automatically seen as wiser.
 - But in James, he says that true wisdom is seen by one living a good life and doing good works with humility. True wisdom is seen not just in talk, but in our actions.
 - In the news, we see stories of top lawyers getting into trouble with the law. They might know the law very well (cleverness/knowledge), but because of greed, they go to jail for embezzlement.
 - James also says that true wisdom is meek. Meekness is not weakness, it is more of a deliberate self restraint, a self-sacrifice for the greater good of others.
 - And we can only have this wisdom from above when our relationship with God is right.
- Point 2: Nature of worldly wisdom
 - Just like how godly wisdom has good fruits, worldly wisdom also has its fruits. These fruits are jealousy and selfish ambition, which leads to all kinds of disharmony.
 - Selfish ambition leads to boasting, quarelling, backstabbing, criticism of rivals, gossip, etc.
 - Jealousy leads us to rejoice rather than grieve at the sorrows of others. It prevents us from loving them and to be understanding towards them.
 - For worldly wisdom that leads to jealousy and selfish ambition, James calls it demonic. We should not follow the ways of this so-called “wisdom”. If we do, we are denying God’s ways and God Himself.
- Point 3: Characteristics of God’s wisdom
 - First, we see that God’s wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere (taken from the text). Pure means that God’s wisdom is free from sin. Peaceable means that God’s wisdom leads to peace. Gentle and open to reason are self-explanatory. Full of mercy means that forgiveness is the way of God’s wisdom.

- We see that these characteristics of God's wisdom reflect God's own nature. And these characteristics of God's wisdom also reflect God's desires and intentions for us. God wants peace in our relationships. And thus by following God's righteous ways and living righteously, we can invite the world into the ways of righteousness and hence make peace in the world.
- In conclusion, we note that this wisdom comes from Jesus living in us through the Holy Spirit. In Him is all wisdom and knowledge. We can also obtain this wisdom from the Word of God. And we can also obtain this wisdom by prayer. And as per what James says later in the text, we are to submit ourselves therefore to God. We are humbling our hearts and saying to God that we are unable to do what is right and know what is right, and asking God for our help. Thus, we see how humility and godly wisdom are intertwined; without humility; one will never obtain godly wisdom. When we live in the ways of the world instead of God's way, it reflects us lacking trust in God in our heart.

Wisdom is knowing how to live God's way in God's world

We should pray that we would desire this wisdom, so that we may live out God's ways in our lives and in the world.