

15. God's will, God's way

November 17, 2013

When tragedy hits us, we often ask the question, "Why?" or "Why doesn't God stop this horrible situation?" The Book of Job is filled with moments when Job asks the question "Why?"

There isn't anything necessarily wrong with asking God, "Why?" It's OK to ask, as long as we don't get the idea that God somehow owes us an answer. Frankly, God does not owe you or me any explanation for what He does.

Yet we may still wonder, "Why?"

Let me ask you this: if the Lord did tell you why things happen the way they do, would that ease your pain or heal your broken heart? I don't think so and I know so. In fact, it would raise even more questions.

I know that if any of you read Bible commentaries in this portion of the Word of God, those commentators talk about the miracles of God and the ministry expansions in Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. But in this teaching, I'd rather look this portion of the Scriptures from a little different angle in light of the death of our brother Jack Sutton.

Jack Sutton was a great brother in the Lord and a wonderful servant of God. Whenever his health allowed him, he didn't waste an opportunity to serve others like Tabitha whom we are going to learn more about a little later. Why did our God allow Jack to go to heaven to be with the Lord while He allows other people who are unbelievers to be healthy and have a long life? I don't have an answer, but I believe that the Lord will speak to our hearts about His will and His way more clearly.

A. SAUL AT JERUSALEM

Acts 9:26-30 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. 29 And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. 30 When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

Between v25 and 26, there was a gap of three years according to Galatians 1: *Galatians 1:17-18 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.*

Why did he go to Arabia? Probably because the Lord instructed him to get alone so that He might teach Saul His Word. There were many things that would have to be clarified in Saul's mind before he could minister effectively as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The important thing about this Arabian sojourn is the fact that Saul spent that time with the Lord alone. He was taught the way of the Lord directly from the Lord as it is

mentioned in Galatians chapter 1. He did not borrow anything from the apostles in Jerusalem, because he did not even meet them until three years after his conversion.

After Saul's conversion, there was great doubt among the believers as to whether he had really put his faith in Jesus Christ. After all, he had been a relentless persecutor of the early church. Some even thought his alleged conversion might have been a scheme to infiltrate their ranks. Being disappeared for three years into the Arabian Desert didn't help calm their troubled minds either.

Then God brought another man into Saul's life. His name was Barnabas, and he personally introduced Paul to all of the other disciples and reassured them that his conversion was genuine.

Now many of us would like to be a Paul. We would love to turn our world right side up. But the question is, how many of us are willing to be a Barnabas? You may not be the next Paul. You may not be the next Billy Graham. But you may have an impact on the one who will be. That person you take under your wing could shake his or her world. What Barnabas did is a good illustration of true discipleship, because discipling is not just teaching; it is also being a friend.

For now Saul who was at the center stage stepped into the backstage until the last portion of chapter 12.

B. THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Acts 9:31 Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

This doesn't mean that all persecution had stopped; instead, it means that they had peace in the midst of persecution.

Whenever God's people are walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, you may expect that they will also see their numbers multiplied. Both of these are needed in the Christian walk. Often, God wants the comfortable to be afflicted to gain the fear of the Lord and the afflicted to be comforted by the Holy Spirit.

C. A PARALYZED MAN HEALED

Acts 9:32-35 Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. 33 There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately. 35 So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Dr. Luke put his focus back on Peter for four chapters. Peter traveled the 35 miles from Jerusalem to Lydda. Lydda is near modern day Lod, the site of Ben Gurion Airport outside of Tel Aviv.

We know very little about Aeneas. How old was he? Did he believe on Jesus Christ? Was he a Jew or a Gentile? All that author Dr. Luke tells us is the man had been paralyzed for eight years, which meant he was crippled and helpless. It seems that he was a burden to himself and a burden to others, and there was no possibility that he would ever get well.

Peter clearly identified who healed – Jesus the Christ. Peter was only His instrument. Jesus healed with the power of the Holy Spirit, but Peter did not heal with the power of Peter. Peter relied solely on the power of Jesus, not like some TV evangelists who have a tendency to take credit for healing power because they are supposedly so holy and righteous.

D. A FORMER DEAD WOMAN WALKING

Acts 9:36-43 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. 37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. 39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. 41 Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. 43 So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

Joppa, the modern Jaffa, is located on the seacoast, some ten miles northwest of Lydda. The city is important in Bible history as the place from which the Prophet Jonah took off when he tried to run away from God. Jonah went to Joppa to avoid going to the enemy's city, Nineveh, but Peter in Joppa received his call to go to the Gentiles. Because Jonah disobeyed God, the Lord sent a storm that caused the Gentile sailors to fear. Because Peter obeyed the Lord, God sent the "wind of the Spirit" to the Gentiles and they experienced great joy and peace. What a contrast!

It seemed so tragic that a useful and beloved believer like Dorcas, a.k.a. Tabitha which means gazelle, should die when she was so greatly needed by the church. This often happens in local churches and it is a hard blow to take. But the Lord knows best.

Job 1:21b The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.

At this point, some of you may think about someone whom you loved, but they passed away or are still sick. In the back of our minds, we say, "Unfair, foul, not right! Why is that the Lord raised Dorcas up from the dead, but not this person or that person? They all equally served the Lord." We say that because we love them and miss them. But if we get to have a chance to ask those who went to be with the Lord in heaven if they would like to come back to this earth so that they have to depend on Obamacare, they will give you that look of "Are-you-out-of-your-mind?"

Why some are raised from death or healed from their illness and some were not? I don't know. It is God's plan. His mysterious, at times frustrating, unknowable plan. The Bible tells us this:

Deuteronomy 29:29a The secret things belong to the Lord our God

The hows and whys of God's plan, we may never fully comprehend. In many ways, His plan is beyond understanding. As an old preacher once warned, "It's unwise to try to fathom the Unfathomable God."

Isaiah 55:9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

No human vocabulary can articulate the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, with precision. We just don't have the capacity in our brain to comprehend God and His ways.

I like what the late Calvary Chapel founder Chuck Smith said: " You should never trade what you don't know for what you do know."

Here are facts that we know:

- We know that God loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son Jesus to die for our sins so that we may have eternal life through Him if we only accept Jesus into our hearts as our personal Savior and Lord. Because many of us did this in faith in Him, we now have that eternal life in heaven, not by any of our good works.
- We know that God can make good things come out of bad. So we stand on the promises of God we know through the Bible, instead of what we don't know.

God never promised He would inform us all about His plan ahead of time; He's just promised He has one. Ultimately, it's for our good and His glory. He knows, but we don't.

It's a tough journey getting there. Full of confusion, struggle, and heartaches, followed by a lot of "I don't know." But when the heavens open and we're there, there will be no more confusion and struggle. Then we'll be able to say, "Now we know!"

Death, sickness, or broken marriage is not the end, because we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) It's unwise to try to fathom the Unfathomable God.

2) We should never trade what we don't know about God's plan for what we do know the promises of Him.