



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 14th, 2007

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

(Job 42) Neither bad theology (in the words of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) nor good theology (in the words of Elihu) gives us the knowledge of God which changes a person's heart. "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34:8). There is a knowledge that only comes through tasting. Five seconds of honey on the tongue will show you more sweetness than ten hours of lectures about the sweetness of honey. Until God gives you a taste of his goodness all the theology in the world will not give you a knowledge of his goodness that changes your heart and saves your soul.

When Elihu was finished speaking the truth to Job, Job said nothing. Only after God spoke did Job say, "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee" (42:5). When God himself came to Job and spoke and took the initiative to make himself known to Job, Job tasted God! And his eyes were opened.

Now Job has a new sense of God's reality. It is more than intellectual or speculative knowledge. It is the knowledge of the heart. He has tasted. And now he sees. And the result is a broken and changed man. That's what happens when you really see God. It happened to Isaiah: "Woe is me! For I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips . . . for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5). It happened to Peter when Jesus showed his power: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). It happened to the centurion when Jesus came to his house: "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof" (Luke 7:6).

Before Job saw God in this way, he had esteemed himself somewhat highly and had not hesitated to

assert his righteousness. Now he sees himself more clearly. And what he sees drives him to repentance.

My friends, if we don't feel grieved for our sin, and deeply unworthy of God's goodness, then we need to pray earnestly that God would show us himself—that he would cease to be a mere doctrine that we hear with our ear, and instead become an awesome, infinitely holy, dreadful, and wonderful Sovereign that we taste and see with our hearts.

When God has given us a taste of his own majesty and our own wickedness, then the Christian life becomes a thing very different than conventional piety. Jonathan Edwards describes it beautifully when he says,

"The desires of the saints, however earnest, are humble desires; their hope is an humble hope; and their joy, even when it is *unspeakable and full of glory*, is an humble, broken-hearted joy, leaving the Christian more poor in spirit, more like a little child, and more disposed to an universal lowliness of behaviour."

That is what God is after in all his dealings with his children—a brokenhearted joy that trusts like a little child in God and returns good for evil.

That is where God has brought Job now; and to prove that he is pleased with Job's "brokenhearted joy" God is going to reverse Job's fortunes and give him his health and ten new children and twice as many possessions as before. But before he performs this reversal for Job, God has two more things to bring about by this experience of suffering.

First, he aims to bring Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar to the dust along with Job.

God seeks to humble these three friends of Job in two ways. He tells them they are theologically wrong, and he makes them seek forgiveness through the very one they had reviled.

They had said that the wicked suffer and the righteous prosper. Job had said that the world proves no such thing: the wicked often prosper more than the righteous and the righteous often suffer more than the wicked. Job was right.

Not only that, the three friends saw all justice working itself out in this life. But Job eventually broke through to the truth that much that is amiss in the world would be made right in the life after death (19:25–27). Job was right.

So God humbled these three friends by showing them that the very one they condemned was in fact the better theologian even if he was not perfect.

But their humbling is not yet complete. They must go to Job with their sacrifices and ask him to pray for them. This must have been a deeply humiliating thing. The very one that they had accused of being far from God must become their priest to bring them near to God. In other words God is seeing to it that the only way the three friends can experience reconciliation with God is through experiencing reconciliation with Job. They must humble themselves before Job, not simply before God.

But it cuts both ways.

There is a second thing that God is doing before he restores Job's fortunes: he is proving the repentance of Job. When the three friends come to Job seeking his intercession with God, it's not just their humility that is on trial! Job is now being asked to love his enemies and pray for those who abused him. He is being asked to bless those who cursed him and not to return evil for evil.

And he is still a very sick man! God has not yet reversed his misery. Why? What is the lesson here? Isn't it the same as Matthew 6:14?

If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

In other words, it is repentance and faith that receive the forgiveness of God. But the genuineness of repentance, the authenticity of faith, the reality of your change of heart must prove itself in your willingness to forgive those who sin against you. If

the forgiveness of God that a repentant sinner claims to have received does not flow through him to others, the claim is a delusion. He is still in his sins.

So God puts Job to one last test. Will he lay down the weapons of revenge and accept the terms of God's treaty and extend amnesty to his three friends the way God has? Yes. Job passes the test. He is a broken man. His own sins have bent him down in dust and ashes. How can he exalt himself above another man! How can he not give the forgiveness that he has freely been given! So verse 9 ends, "The Lord accepted Job's prayer."

So the book closes with the sediment of pride strained out of Job's life through the sieve of suffering, the bad theology of his three friends corrected and their foolishness humbled, the brotherhood of God's servants restored and purified, and the honor of God's name vindicated over against the accusations of Satan.

May the Lord grant us grace to learn that while his ways may not be our ways and his thoughts may not be our thoughts, yet they are the wisest of all ways; and are full of mercy for all those who love God and are called according to his purpose. *AMEN*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.