Faith and Suffering

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Preacher: Rev Alan Montgomery

[0:00] This is God's Word. Are you all?

Oh, that you would keep silent and it would be your wisdom. Hear now my argument and listen to the pleadings of my lips. Will you speak falsely for God and speak deceitfully for him?
Will you show partiality toward him? Will you plead the case for God? Will it be well with you when he searches you out? Or can you deceive him as one deceives a man?
He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality. Will not his majesty terrify you and the dread of him fall upon you?
Your maxims are proverbs of ashes. Your defenses are defenses of clay. Let me have silence and I will speak. And let come on me what may.
[1:24] Why should I take my flesh and my teeth and put my life in my hands? Though he slay me, I will hope in him. Yet I will argue my ways to his face.

Amen. There are many examples of faith in both the Old and the New Testament.
You take for example Hebrews chapter 11. Which has been entitled The Role of Honour of Men and Women of the Faith.
And in that chapter writer lists various people who have gone through that situation in their own lives where they have proved God to be faithful.
Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 1 says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
[2:52] A minister was preaching a sermon on the relationship between fact and faith.

He said to his congregation, He said to his congregation, That you are sitting in front of me in church is a fact.
But it is only faith that makes me believe that any of you are listening. And a tutor in homiletics and preaching, Once told to students, If you don't strike oil in the first ten minutes, Stop boring.
Now I don't want to overrun myself. And maybe the sermon should be short this morning.
Do I hear an amen? Well, why do the innocent suffer? It's an age long question.
[4:13] And one of the biggest barriers to belief in God is the question of suffering. And we have all known suffering in one form or another in our lives.

And the general argument is this. If God is good, he would not permit innocent people to suffer.
However, we have to understand that no one is truly innocent. And we all suffer because of things we do in our life or that other people do to us in our lives.
And God has given to us a choice to love or not to love. and love always involves a choice.
The book of Job is about suffering and faith emotionally, physically, psychologically.
[5:43] And you might ask the question, why was Job tested? There are five reasons in particular I want to share with you. He was tested to silence Satan, to reveal Job's true character, to teach Job's friends some theological truths, to bless Job, and to teach us patience.

I remember working in a unit for learning disabilities. And this young girl came up to me during one of the sessions.
Why she picked me, I'm not sure. But she picked me and she said, patience is a virtue. find it if you can.
Seldom in a woman, never in a man. Now, that spoke to me. What was God trying to tell me in that? What is God trying to tell you in your situation in life that come to you? You see, Job was a godly father.
[7:10] He was unspoiled by prosperity. He was someone who ministered as a priest to his large household. And yet, in the midst of this, Satan was allowed to test Job.

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He lost his prosperity, his children. He suffered a terrible disease, a hopeless condition, we are told. He had to undergo the blasphemous advice from his wife and the fruitless discussions with his three friends.
And you find that in Job chapter 2 and 8 and 30 and 30 and chapter 7. All through Job we see those things happening. And that was enough to bring anyone to their knees, to crush their faith and to destroy their character.
But Job stood tall in the midst of that. And as you look through the scripture we see that there are other illustrations and examples of such faith.
[8:28] Hezekiah in 2 Kings chapter 20 and verse 1 Isaiah was told to say to Hezekiah put your house in order because you're going to die you'll not recover and yet because of his praying to God he was told this in verse 6 I will add 15 years to your life.

And thereafter follows the story as to how Hezekiah was to be healed. David had many trials and in spite of his troubled life whether of his own doing or not David never turned his back in God. Isaiah was a great prophet who said woe is me I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and yet as he had that vision of God in the temple he responded to God by saying here am I send me here am I send me and Paul the persecuted turned prisoner turned preacher had his own problems through serving God here are some of them he says in his letter to the Corinthians I've been imprisoned more frequently I've been flogged more severely severely I've been exposed to death again and again I've received from the Jews forty lashes minus one three times I've been beaten by swords rods once pelted with stones and three times shipwrecked and I wonder if we can identify in some way with what Paul was saying or those other examples of people were saying in our lives but in all of these examples Job must stand out above them all if for no other reason than his statement which is found in reading that Stuart gave to us this morning chapter 15 verse 15 of chapter 13 though he slay me yet will I trust him no matter what comes to me
I will trust in God that's a tremendous faith to have a faith that other people have had in this church and who have testified to that faith we heard one of them last week Julie who talked about the faith she had in her God who would take her through the chemotherapy treatment there are other people Keith who has gone through heart problems and lives to tell the tale of that Elaine and her surgery and how God has worked in those people's lives and there are other people in this fellowship maybe years ago who have gone through lots of situations in their lives and can testify today how God has helped them and brought them through it all and we praise God and we thank him for his faithfulness to those people and that can be the same for others who may still have to go through situations that their hope is in
[13:15] God trust him what should faith do for us it should assure us success in 2nd chronicles chapter 20 verse 12 our God will not judge them for we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us we do not know what to do but our eyes are on you you see Jehoshaphat the fourth king in the kingdom of Judah successor to his father Asa in one of his battles was so overcome with anxiety as to how he should conduct the battle that he turned to prayer we do not know what to do our eyes are upon you and how important that is for

God's people when we do not know what to do either individually or collectively that we turn our eyes to Jesus and seek out his will and know his will and obey his will here is a cry of exasperation of hope of sincerity and trust how often do we as individuals or as a church fail because our eyes are not on God we are not focused on the main person in our lives right of the Hebrews reminds us in chapter 12 and verse 2 fix our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith you see when our eyes are on
Christ they are not on the world and when our eyes are on the world they are not on Christ Peter was able to walk on water as Jesus had invited him to do until he took his eyes of Christ and Job was blessed at the end of his life more than at the beginning the book of Job tells us how much he had at the beginning and also tells the same at the end and how those things had doubled and we also need to take direction from
God during the many battles we face in life because God and only God can give us assurance of success it's also a fundamental duty following the feeling of the 5,000 Jesus walking on water the crowds asked Jesus what they should do to do the works of God read that in John chapter 6 verses 28 and 29 where he says this then they asked him what must we do to do the works God requires and Jesus response to that question was one simple response the work of God is this to believe in

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the one he has sent and so often we can put our eyes on other people and other things other organizations other individuals but we are called specifically to keep our eyes on
Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith Jesus calls us daily to believe but not to be like those aspiring only to material gain what did they mean when they asked that question about works was it power to multiply the loaves and the fish power for increase to popularity or to be challenged that they desired to do work that was pleasing to God our aim should be to set out to do that which pleases only God not anybody else we are not here in the popularity stakes we are here to please [18:57] God who loved us and gave himself for us in Christ and to please him is the most important thing that we could do Smith Wigglesworth a 19th century evangelist said great faith is a product of great fights great testimonies are the outcome of great tests and great triumphs can only come after great trials thirdly it's to be used as a defensive weapon read one of Paul's letters especially Ephesians chapter 6 verses 13 to 16 therefore put on the full armor of

God so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your guard and after you have done everything to stand to keep standing stand firm then with the belt of truth buckling around your waist the breastplate of righteousness in place and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace in addition to all this take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one the belt of truth we know that Satan is the father of all lies the best breastplate of righteousness guards against accusations by Satan the gospel of peace as footwear to guard against the obstacles put in our way the shield of faith where Satan wants to make the word of
God ineffective the helmet of salvation the way our way of thinking needs needs preservation to be kept from thinking the wrong things that God may protect us the sword of the spirit the holiness and power of the word of God and pray in the spirit we cannot neglect prayer we cannot neglect prayer it's a weapon that God has given to us to defeat the enemy but also put on the whole armour of God don't leave anything missing that's the fourth thing that we're told about prayer it is essential it's necessary when James writes of the trials and temptations of the
Christian he states in chapter 1 verse 6 but when you ask you must believe and not doubt because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind for James the Christian teacher with a Jewish background wisdom was and is a practical thing the definition of it is this the supreme and divine quality of the soul whereby man knows and practices righteousness when the apostle Paul speaks of the devils thinking of that evil influence which seeks to make us sin you see the word that Paul uses is not a small shield but that of an oblong shape worn by the heavily armed guards one of the most dangerous weapons in ancient warfare was a fiery dart a dart dipped in pitch and satellite and the shield that
Paul speaks about was made of two sections of wood joined together covered and hide and when wet as the dark as the dark sunk into the wood the flames were put out the shield was the side of a door called a scutum and Paul illustrates that faith can deal with the darts of temptation and we all face them we all face them the darts of temptation have you ever thought of being told by an inner voice you're going to fail you won't succeed faith is a complete perfect trust in God the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one
[25:35] Paul chained to a Roman soldier has a ready-made picture and translates the armor of the Roman soldier into Christian terms what is the armor of God he explains in these words for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil and when we ask through prayer we have to remember two things how God gives generously and never casts off the gift or casts up the gift and how we must ask without doubting the pastor of a

Christian science church was talking to a member of his congregation and how's your husband today he asked her she responded by saying I'm afraid he's very ill no no no no corrected the pastor you really should say that he's under the impression that he's very ill we were nodding meekly yes pastor I'll remember the next time so a few weeks later the pastor saw her again and how's your husband at the moment well pastor she said he's under the impression he's dead sometimes when trouble comes we often give the impression that we are dead we can't cope let's take courage from the words of job
I know not I think but I know that my redeemer lives and have that same confident faith in our living God today tomorrow and the next day may God bless us and maybe you're struggling this morning in some way or have been and maybe you need prayer then that invitation is open to anybody in this church to come and speak with us after to pray with them to pray with you and to enable you to

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know that your redeemer lives in your situation whatever it may be I know that my redeemer lives and though he puts me off
I'll still trust him father god thank you that you and you are the only one in whom we can trust completely and explicitly help us this morning to have that same faith which job and others in the scripture had in you and in no one else but help us to be the conduit whereby we can help people be pointed towards you whose life and love and liberty in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen saben

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