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Let Down By God
Psalm 44; Job

Have you ever been let down by God? Listen as I read excerpts from Psalm 44. (v. 8 - esp. 23-26) Have you ever felt like the Psalmist pouring out your confusion, questions, grief and anger out before God? Have you ever felt like God was asleep when you were praying, closed eared refusing to listen? Have you ever been disappointed with God? Disappointment with God happens when we see a large gap between what we expect from God and what we actually experience in our life. We listen to sermons, books and tapes and testimonies. We watch the TV preachers all promise that if we go all out for God that our life is going to be wonderful and our seed of faith will be transformed into great success and wealth and blessing. We can manipulate God by the amount of faith we can conjure up within. We have heard all the stories of triumph and dramatic evidences of God working in their lives. But when tragedy strikes, when disappointment and failure come knocking on the door...we feel like God has somehow ripped us off. We feel let down by God. Betrayed by God..or guilty that somehow it must have been our fault that all this avalanche of bad things come crashing down on my life.

I think of the young parents who tried for years to have children. Then praised God for the blessing of a new baby girl only to have that child die just a few short hours after birth. What heartache and pain. I think of those with excruciating painful health issues...so terrible the husband can't even work consistently. The pain and hurt in the eyes of the parents whose teens are doing the rebel yell. The young mother who dies of cancer so suddenly leaving a father with three little kids. The child who gets hit by a drunk driver the summer before entering his high school year. We hear all the terrible stories... and it's very easy to think that life is unfair. It's easy to become bitter and angry at a God who has let us down.

We Christian don't outright deny the reality of the unfairness of life, but we try to water down reality. We may tell the one who has just experienced one tragedy on the heals of another. Well God is trying to

teach you something, you should feel privileged and not bitter. You need to meditate and count your blessings you are not a fair weather believer are you? Hey..there is always someone who is worse off than you are. This is a chance to exercise those spiritual muscles. Whatever you do don't complain...it won't be a very good witness to unbelievers. Don't get me wrong all of these have some truth in them, but often I think these are used to camouflage reality of an unfair situation.

When life is unfair we want to ask. Why me? Bad things do happen to good people. Why? Why do blatantly ungodly people who snub their nose in the face of God...yet are rich and wealthy, powerful and successful. Why isn't life fair? Why don't bad things happen to bad people and only good things happen to good people. If God really was God why doesn't he intervene more often? Why do the innocent suffer? Why does that baby get a lifetime crippling disease and that one does not. There seems to be no pattern at all to the bad stuff that happens. If God would just do more miraculous stuff...so many more people would believe in Him wouldn't they? Why does God choose to handicap himself against all those critics that say, "There is no God" Why. can't god's interventions be ordinary rather than miracles? Why does He seem to sit on His hands and permit such injustice and suffering to seem to thrive on this earth. Does God care? Does He even give a rip that I'm down here and hurting?

I'm sure most of us have prayed. God help me find my wallet. I prayed that very prayer a couple weeks ago on vacation. He answered almost immediately showing my wife where to look. But..a couple months ago I heard a thump thumping outside, it was dark, it was rainy. I prayed God..don't let that be a flat tire. It was. I drove on it too long. that tire was just about toasted. Even in the little prayers we ask of God, when they start adding up to zero's from God..isn't it tempting to say with the Psalmist. God...Are you asleep? wake up! Don't you care? Are you unable? Powerless? No one is immune from unfair life circumstances. There are no easy answers..perhaps there are no answers to the reality of unfair life. But this morning we are going to take a tour of the Bible and try to put our finger on understanding Disappointment with God. (Pray)

You do not have to sit outside in the dark. But if you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is required. The stars however neither require it nor demand it. Some things are best observed in the dark. Some things are only observed in the dark and even then they are difficult to see. In Philip Yancy's book "Disappointment with God" he explores three questions "Is God unfair? Is God Silent? and Is God hidden?" In my experience God at times seems to be all three..or is He and if He is why? What in the world could God possibly be up to with his plan for human beings?

Is God unfair? How does one reconcile the Bible's promises of reward and blessings with some of life's miseries? How do you explain mega star entertainers and radio shock jocks who go out of the way to blaspheme God and yet make millions and have power and popularity and a gorgeous woman under each arm? While at the same time..a man who I knew in Dallas devoted his life to Christian service. He tried to hold on to his job at the seminary. Three little girls. His wife had a disease that slowly wasted her away. He had a crippling accident. Plagued with fatigue and money problems. Is God fair? Why doesn't God consistently punish the bad and reward the good? Why do awful things happen to good people often without any pattern? Can't you imagine a world where every sinful thought and action induced a sharp painful jolt of electricity and every good and virtuous deed and attitude rewarded with ripples of pleasure? Why doesn't God treat the world in fairness if indeed he truly could?

Question number 2. Is God silent? Have you not spent time begging for clear direct guidance from God, words, open doors anything. only to feel like your prayers are hitting the ceiling and going no further? Then we think we have finally figured out God's will for our lives only to have that choice lead to failure. What kind of a father is that? Does God enjoy seeing me fall flat on my face? So He loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life...what's the plan? Why is God silent when I truly and honestly want to know. If He would just show me clearly what I am supposed to do then I think I would really do it.

Question number three. Is God hidden? If God indeed had the power to intervene and act and show himself as the one who can do it all

for those who claim to be His...if he did that wouldn't everyone want to believe? Why does God seem so reluctant to show Himself today?

In the Old testament, testament meaning covenant. God chose to act in total fairness. There was never any question of God's fairness or not. The Old Testament or contract with the people, God said in Deuteronomy. If you are obedient, you will be prosperous, blessing, success, military victory. If you are disobedient you will be guaranteed poverty, crisis, crop failure and domination by enemy countries. The experiment of God's total fairness resulted in what? Within 50 years the country of Israel was reduced to a state of anarchy. We can read the Old Testament and just weep. It is a dreary history of God's curses on the people for their disobedience, the people opening their eyes coming back to God only to mess up again. Israel proved it was impossible to obey God and meet God on His terms. Human beings are unable to keep a contract with God. We cannot afford God being totally fair. So a new contract or new testament between God and man was given, one full of God's grace and forgiveness that depended on great sacrifice on the part of God. The New Testament writers looking back at the OT do not see that as an example to follow, but to serve as an object lesson demonstrating we cannot fulfill a totally fair contract with God. It wasn't that the OT law wasn't righteous and good, it was just that it was a contract we people could never fulfill. We couldn't uphold our side of the bargain. There was a time when God acted in complete fairness. Did it work? Did it encourage the faith that God desired? no.

So we say. Yes we would not want God to be totally fair. I probably wouldn't be alive if he was..but why the silence? If God is so concerned that we do His will, why doesn't he just reveal that to us more plainly? There was a time when God revealed Himself quite plainly. God was crystal clear in the Sinai desert to the people of Israel leaving Egypt. When they wondered, should I pack up my tent and start traveling, all they had to do was to look at the cloud column that hovered above the tabernacle. If it stayed there, they knew to keep put, if it started to drift off to the north, they knew it was time pack their bags and head north. For those people who wanted to get a jump on their travel plans, it was better than CNN, they could even check it out God's Travel will 24 hours a day. At night the cloud was replaced by a tower of fire. There were

other ways that God clearly spoke as well. The high priest had these stones called the Urim and Thummin and could determine specific answers from God for direction. Most of the questions were outlined in a detailed codified 613 laws. These were very detailed instructions from do not murder to do not boil a young goat in its mothers milk. There was no one in those days who went around complaining that God's was fuzzy in His direction and will and guidance.

But..did this clear word from God increase the likelihood of obedience from the people? no. Just glance through the book of Exodus. They ask God, Shall we go up and fight the Amorites? God says do not go up and fight I will not be with you. What do they do? They go up and fight...they get slaughtered. Here is God communicating with great clarity to His people, yet they barter peace when God call them to fight. They stay when God says go. It was almost as if they made a game of trying to break the 613 commands of God. The people rebelled against crystal clear guidance from God.

The clarity of God's will also seem to stunt and deform the very kind of faith that God wanted to foster. This clear guidance may have been very helpful to a group of slaves who had just been freed from Egypt to travel across a desert, but it does little to encourage spiritual development. Faith will grow best when it is fed, not when all the questions and choices are done for them. True? It was like for God to try to train a million 2 year olds. When all the food, direction, questions and conflicts are all resolved by God, why bother growing up. Parents know the worst thing they can do for their kids is doing for them what they are able, not challenging them or pushing them to grow. Why do I need to bother pursuing God? That was never a question when God had made himself so clear. It took no effort on their part. Why would one have to step out in faith when God guaranteed results? God had already resolved the dilemma. Why grow up and act like adults when we all the choices are made for us and all is provided for us and we can continue to act like children. So they did. Read Exodus the people of Israel continually grumbled and complained and griped and whined. If every choice is already made for you..then what need of faith?

Question 3 Is God hidden? Why? Why doesn't God just show up and make a grand display of His presence and power and once and for all

silence the critics? We want proof. We want the God that we have all heard about become the God we see. Well it did happen. God did show up in person. He spoke man to man just like a friend. God and Moses. It was no secret. Everybody knew that Moses went into the tabernacle to talk to God. The Israelites kept their distance they feared. Moses would come out on the tent glowing like he had taken a bath in phosphorous and they turned their faces from him and made him put on a veil.

There were very few atheists back in those days. Every one could see clear evidences of God. Wouldn't that be great? Isn't that what we need today to reverse the moral slide in our country. Don't you wish God would just show up in all His glory and power? Well, God was very clear then, yet the rote obedience that left little choice, seem to produce rather weak hearts of faith. It was incredible that Moses went up to the Mountain to spend some concentrated time alone with God and what happened while he was gone just a few short days? He comes down off the mountain and the people and his vice president Aaron are dancing around worshipping a golden calf they have sculpted and the nation that God has revealed Himself so clearly to is reduced to a wild drunken orgy. What happened? God did not play any hide and seek games with Israel and yet it had the opposite desired affect. Instead of instilling love and worship, God's revealing of Himself produced fear and rebellion. The visible presence of God seem to do little to improve a lasting heart of faith in most people. So...has God changed? Has He adjusted his strategy and relationship to people? Is it because God been burned one to many times that He now keeps himself distant and hidden? What does God want from us and what can we expect from God?

Did you ever pray these super hero prayers to God. If only you would help me hit this grand slam I will serve you forever. God help me walk across the lake. God help me beat up this bully then I will please and obey you forever. If you balance my checkbook and give me 500 dollars in my wallet I will go to church for the rest of my life and try to follow your ways. Trying to treat God like He is some genie in a bottle. But what if God did that wouldn't it cause a lot of faith? Well. God tried that too. He gave Solomon any three wishes and more. He was the world's richest man, most powerful and wisest man plus the world's largest harem. God pulled out all the stops with Solomon. His

unprecedented success eliminated any national crisis and also any need of dependence on God. He had anything His mind could think of wanting, but ended up enjoying the gifts more than the giver of those gifts. It does not appear that a genie in bottle does much to foster a heart of love and faith. The goodies given are taken but the giver gets left in the wake.

What in the world does God want from us? What in the world is God up to? I think God cares less about being understood and analyzed as He desires to be loved. Not people who are forced to love..that's not love at all. But love because they choose to love. When people rejected God's extensions of Himself, What do you think God felt like? A lover that has been spurned? One who refuses to control people yet cannot simply thrust them aside. The book of Hosea describes God is like a rejected lover that still loves and can't get humanity out of His mind. Even though he gets rejected time and time again..he keeps letting us come back.

You see, God is not just some misty vapor up there, but a person. The Bible tells us God demonstrates deep emotion. He weeps, he feels delight and frustration and anger and jealousy. The people who seem to know Him best contend with him at times and speak with amazing familiarity. What does it feel like to be God? A parent of a two year old? A creator whose invention has rebelled against him?

We come to the New Testament. Is God Silent? Is God Hidden? Is God Unfair? God decides to send Himself. His own son Jesus Christ to tell of God's great love for the people He created. God great desire to have a love relationship for people. God's life map direct from the creator Himself for living life exactly as He crafted it to be. Jesus come to earth. Not in an overpowering or dominating way, but stealthily as a mere baby born to an insignificant woman in an out off the way place. But God was not hidden. Jesus veiled his own deity and took on the form of man. He had a name, a job, a street address and father a mother a nationality. Anyone could just walk right up to him and ask a question of the son of God. Jesus was in fact God made flesh. Jesus told people anyone who has seen me has seen God the Father.

But how did those closeth to Him respond? They asked wheres all the smoke and fire? Where is the big entry? Jesus didn't match up with what they thought God should look like. Even Jesus family had some

doubts about him. His mother and brothers thought he had gone out of his mind and were ready to send Him to the loony bin..Yes this is the same Mary to whom the angel Gabriel had appeared to and explained the inside scoop as to what God was up to. This combining of the miraculous and the ordinary seem to get in the way for many people.

The Jews believed that the Messiah would come and set up a kingdom and right all wrongs. Jesus did heal some people...but not all of them. In fact most of the people went unhealed. He raised Lazerus from the dead, but many other people died that Jesus did not resurrect. If Jesus had the power, why didn't He heal everybody? His decisions to heal or not to heal seem so arbitrary. Remember the time when Jesus came to the pool called Bethsaida. John 5; This is the place where people came for healing. When the water would stir in a certain way, they would all run, walk, crawl and hobble to get into the water while it was stirring in order to be the first one in the water to find healing. Jesus is hanging out at this pool and strikes up a conversation with a cripple who had tried to get into the pool for 38 years. He could never make it. Jesus simply says, "Get up". He's cured. He's jumping around. He is the happiest guy in Jerusalem. But then the word says, Jesus slipped away into the crowd. What about all the rest of the people there at the pool? By one spoken word he could have healed them all..but he didn't.

Miracles attract crowds..but they don't seem to produce the kind of faith that God is interested in fostering. We think...god if only you would show up and demonstrate your power in an amazing way then millions would believe. Or would they? Signs and wonders may well addict us to the signs and wonders instead of to God. Miracles do not necessarily bolster the kind of faith that God is interested in.

Jesus could have powered His way in..yet He has chosen not to. God instead seems to hold himself back, he hides, he weeps. Why? Because he desires what power can never win. He does not want the adoration of a circus sideshow miracle man. He does not want enforced subservience...he desires faith and trust and love. He is willing to let evil work, to let life be unfair. Instead of crushing Satan...he has chosen to cast Satan out through the long slow process of sanctifying His saints and building up His people slowly empowering them, strengthening them through the difficult times...instead of bailing them out of every problem

that comes. The Holy Spirit works inside to transform us little by little in every way. Sure Jesus did perform miracles while on the earth and they attracted the crowds, he used them as proof of who He was, but did they incite long term obedience and faithfulness? No. Jesus message was a hard one of obedience and sacrifice, not a sideshow for gawking miracle chasers.

The skeptics of the day explained away the miracles anyway. The Pharisees and religious leaders explained away his powers or when they were faced with solid first hand witnesses of the man who all he can say is, "I was blind but now I can see." They insult and discredit the healed man. They throw him out of court and excommunicate his whole family. When Lazarus turns up alive after having been dead and in the tomb four days...they plot to kill him again. Even Jesus closest friends the disciples just a couple weeks after the transfiguration on the mountain where Jesus is shining, God speaks out of heaven and Moses and Abraham appear...they all abandon and leave and deny any connection with Jesus. We wonder why god doesn't show up and deliver more than He does ...and yet we see that Miracles don't always produce the kind of faith that Jesus wants to foster in the hearts of men and women.

Then we come to the cross. Every one was craving for a miracle to happen. Here was God's perfect opportunity to show his power. But God was silent. Jesus himself cried out, "My God why have you forsaken me?" At the cross God the Father let all that was wrong triumph over all that was right. Nature itself convulsed. The ground shook. Tombs opened up. The solar system shorted out. The sky went black. What a missed opportunity. Jesus could have burst his arms off the spikes. Fire toasted the soldiers and floated down to Herods porch and demonstrated who he was to the whole world. But He didn't. All through the Bible God on the one hand passionately showed his love for the people he created. He consistently desired, even wooed them to love Him in return. Yet at the same time He wanted to destroy the evil that enslaved and harassed these people. It was on the cross that the son absorbed all the destructive force of sin and transformed it all to the greatest act of love for mankind. He was willing to do whatever it takes so that we could know and experience His love for us. And know and experience the delight of loving Him. Not forced...but because He first loved us.