

## Sermon – October 2, 2021

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When I look back through my life experiences, I find that I had received the most grace and comfort from God when I was in a situation that seemed hopeless. Sometimes the problem is one of my own making; for example, I've really messed up and can't figure out how to fix things.

But other times, it's a situation where something terrible has happened to me or someone I love that is beyond my ability to make a difference; for example, when my mother was diagnosed with lung cancer both the first and second times. Of course, I could care for her and support her, but I could do nothing to change that diagnosis or control what cancer would do to her body. I was totally dependent on what God would do through the doctors and through God's own presence. In fact, during both times my mother was diagnosed, I witnessed a miracle from God. The first time she went into remission for 15 years when the doctor had given her six months to live.

The second time, I witnessed the miracle of her transitioning peacefully from earthly existence to an eternal one. In both of those miracles, I saw the kingdom of God come.

I can recall many times in life when I felt so good about my following the rules God has laid down for our lives, such as attending worship, not stealing, and not being jealous of others. In many of those times, I didn't necessarily feel the kingdom of God coming so keenly. Perhaps the reason isn't that the kingdom of God didn't exist then, but instead that I was so focused on making sure I followed every rule and congratulating myself when I did so that I didn't really seek God or put my trust in God.

This is the same dynamic we see in the Gospel and in the reading from Job. The Pharisees are so focused on whether it's lawful for a man to divorce his wife that they don't really think about the grace Jesus offers to those persons whose marriage has broken apart. They are focused on their own righteousness of knowing and following their rules. They are concentrated on their own agenda of trapping Jesus into saying something that they feel goes against their own self-righteousness. They have no room for the kingdom of God.

Compare that with the children who are focused only on coming to Jesus. They are vulnerable, trusting, and expectant. They realize that they can't fix things but that only Jesus can. They trust Him. And Jesus says the Kingdom of God is theirs.

Then we have Job, who is willing to accept what God gives Him and to rely on God despite this horrible disease that has come upon him. Job is willing to leave the outcome to God. On the other hand, Job's wife is focused on what Job can do to make their situation better. "Curse God and die." Perhaps she thinks death would end Job's suffering and, in that way, be kinder. Or maybe she thinks she won't have to wait on him and hear him moan if he dies. For whatever reason, she's urging him to try to solve this situation himself through the best human means she can think of. She doesn't have room for the Kingdom of God to come either.

We take pride in our independence and in being able to solve our own problems. We take pride in our ability to be good and follow the rules. Indeed, following the rules has its place. Being an adult also carries with it a responsibility to solve problems. However, the fault comes when we think that everything depends upon us – either we rely only on ourselves or begin to think too highly of ourselves or, even, sometimes, think too lowly of ourselves. For example, divorce. If we think in terms of rigid rules, i.e., divorce is never justified, then we judge ourselves if we have to get out of a toxic marriage. If we find love again, we continue to feel guilty and judge ourselves. If we keep beating ourselves up rather than taking that brokenness to God, we deny ourselves the blessings of the kingdom of heaven. If we go to God even in the midst of having left a toxic marriage and trust in God's grace, we experience healing, and we can love again without guilt.

Consider another example of illness or income loss or any other devastating situation. If we keep beating our heads against the wall, asking what we did to deserve this, or trying to figure out how to fix something we can't fix, we become depressed and frustrated. These emotions aren't part of the kingdom of God. If we, however, come to God, bringing our vulnerabilities and trusting that God will create a miracle, we will see one.

When we realize that we are broken, vulnerable, and imperfect human beings who aren't in control of the universe, we create space for the kingdom of God to come. When we come running to God in hope, we will see the miracles of God's grace.