

Soul Reset: Life in Crisis

I had never been rocked by a celebrity death before Sunday. Sure, celebrities have died during my thirty-two years of life, but for some reason, the events of Sunday rattled me. The helicopter wreck that killed Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna, three members of the Altobelli family, two members of the Chester family, Christina Mauser, and Ara Zobayan rocked me. From the time Linse told me about the initial story, and then the subsequent reports of the death toll and the way the number seemed to climb from three to seven and finally to nine. I'm not a Lakers fan; I don't really watch or follow the NBA. But it was just surreal to hear that this had happened. It still is. And it's surreal for a number of people. I read an article on CNN about how the various reports all claiming to have the truth are making it harder and harder for the families to mourn, which sadly makes sense.

What this highlights, and I know that this will not come as a surprise to anyone who hears this message, but sometimes life is crazy. Sometimes griefs seem to pile on top of each other. And sometimes it makes it hard for us to praise God and worship God with all our hearts.

This is the case in the book of Job. Now, let me say from the outset that the book of Job is a hard book to read and an even harder book to understand. But it boils down to the basic worldview prevalent during that time that basically said, "Good things happen to good people, bad things happen to bad people." But we all now that life is more interesting than just that and that this world view doesn't actually hold true. So, Job helps us to consider how life actually works: where is God and how to we maintain faithfulness when life, in all of its intricacies, happens and good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people.

The basic story of Job is this: Job is, as we heard in scripture, a righteous man who loves God with all his heart and serves him as best he can. But all of a sudden, with no prompting or warning, his life spirals out of control in heartbreaking and devastating ways. His children are taken from him, his flocks disappear, his wealth vanishes, and he is left alone and destitute. His physical health eludes him and he's covered in sores and left to mourn. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. All the while, he maintained that he had done nothing wrong. No one believed him. Even his own wife tells him to either give up the farce or, "Curse God and die."

To make matters worse, Job isn't entirely alone. He has a few friends who have come by to "comfort" him, sure that's the word. And with friends like this, Job couldn't handle having any enemies. The message of the three friends is basically, "You're wrong, you're awful, and you need to repent. You've clearly done something wrong and need to make atonement for that. Once you do all this bad stuff will stop happening." And Job runs the gamut from crying out to God that his life isn't fair to crying out to God to stand in front of Job and explain himself.

What I find remarkable is that in the middle of all of this, Job is able to maintain his faith and really and truly praise God. Chapter 19:25-27 is probably my favorite section in Job. It comes in the midst of Job's friends surrounding him with their advice that Job should just admit what he'd done wrong and Job maintaining the fact that he'd done nothing wrong. And he says, "I know my Redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth." And that's remarkable to me. If I would have endured even half of what Job did, I wouldn't be able to say that I knew anything for certain. But Job knows for certain who he is and whose he is. And he knows that God is near.

What kept Job close to God was his willingness to continue to praise God in the midst of all that he had to endure. Job's response to his suffering was to worship. And when we hear that word worship, we largely think of what we're doing right now: we leave the comfort of our home for this comfortable place and drink coffee and talk to our friends, and it's just ritual: Let's sing some songs and pray, hear the message, and then go home and eat the roast.

But that's not what Job committed himself to. Job, despite his circumstances, lives a whole lifestyle of worship and he stays as close to God as anyone could facing what he's facing. Job's own wife after seeing what was happening advised Job to "curse God and die" to alleviate his suffering, but Job won't do that. He continually cries to God and, yes, sometimes he's complaining, but he's crying out to God. There are moments, especially after his friends give their advice, that Job gives a full-throated and passionate defense for the holiness and justice of God. Job lives the worship of God as a lifestyle, and he's not quick to abandon it. It is an unforced rhythm for him.

The ritual of going to worship and what we do here is important. But if we're going to make worship a lifestyle or an unforced rhythm, we need to start seeing worship as more: more than just this hour, more than this day, more than just these songs, more than just hearing the word and my feeble attempts to make it come to life for us. Worship is acknowledging that God is God and we are not (this is what Job learns). And we worship because God is holy. We worship because God's faithfulness demands from us a response. We worship because spending time with God makes us whole, in the same way that Job was re-made whole by the end of our scripture today.

So, how do we do this? How do we make worship more than just this hour? How

do we make this an unforced rhythm? Part of it is building on some of the things I mentioned a few weeks ago: finding a worship music station on Pandora or Spotify and setting aside some time from time to time to listen or sing along, finding a sermon podcast to listen to, downloading a bible app and find a reading plan that works for you. One of the things that Rev. Junius Dotson mentioned in a podcast was that one of the things he does to make worship a lifestyle is to listen to a modern gospel music channel while he's running on the treadmill. He joked in the podcast episode that he got so invested in the song he was listening to that he raised his hands like he was in worship while still running in the treadmill. We'd make the Gazette if that happened here... or at least they'd talk about us at coffee if that happened, but we take the point: there are ways that we can make worship just one hour on just one day. There are ways we can come into God's presence to give glory to God's name every day.

So, thank you for being here today, and even though we're on the verge of going forth into the world, we're not done. Even when our life is in crisis and things are weird, God is with us. And because God is with us, we praise God's name and worship. Amen.