

Paradise Lost and Restored: Who is Man? (Part 1)

Ricardo Campos, Teaching Elder Grace Chapel, Orange, CA June 1, 2014

I. Introduction

When something tragic happens in your life, do you ever wonder if that's from God? There you are living a godly life and then you lose your job. Why would God do that? Or perhaps you lived a life of sin, but now you're making all the right decisions. You're no longer on drugs and you just got a brand new job. So why are you about to lose it all? Is God a perfectionist who keeps track of your sins, even the ones you committed 20 yrs. ago, waiting for you to mess up so He can punish you?

II. Does God Constantly Look at Man with a Critical Eye Waiting to Punish Him?

We have looked at several aspects of mankind and perhaps we've also looked at this one, but not in detail. There is something man struggles with: he often thinks that God is out to get him. We're not occupied with this thought every waking moment. In fact, we only seem to think of it when something goes wrong. Something happens that makes us suffer and we automatically think that God is out to get us for failing to cross a "t" or dot an "i". Why do we think this way?

Why does man think that God is out to get him? We have an interesting case with Job. The first thing God says about Job is that he is the most righteous man on the planet, Job 1:8. He's talking to Satan and soon Satan and God are arguing over whether or not Job will curse God. Satan says, yes, God says, no. Satan thinks that if God takes away every blessing that He's given Job, then Job will indeed curse God. So God allows Satan to take away Job's wealth, children, and health. Job ends up penniless, childless, and covered from head to toe in boils sitting on a pile of ashes, Job 1:9-2:10.

After this, Job's three friends enter the picture. They take a look at Job and are horrified and deeply saddened by what they see. They try to comfort their friend by mourning with him seven days and nights. But then Job speaks—he curses the day he was born—and every one of his friends turns on him. They accuse him of sin and urge him to repent before God, 4:5-9; 8:1-7; 11:1-20; 15:1-6; 18:1-21; 20:1-11; 22:1-30.

Notice his friends' reaction, why did they automatically assume that Job was guilty of sin? Because of the way they see God and because of the way they think God sees mankind. They think that if something terrible happens in your life, this means that you did something wrong and therefore God is punishing you. The more severe the punishment, the worse your sin must have been. But what's the truth? Were there sins that Job committed which warranted the taking away of his wealth, children, and health? No, in fact he committed no sin. In fact, when all this was over God blessed him twice as much as before, 42:10-17. So why did Job's three friends automatically go to, "God must hate Job right now for committing some horrible sins; that's why He's punishing him."?

Because man has come to believe that God is up in the sky waiting for us to fail so He can take out His belt and give us the beating of our lives. This not only affects how we see God, but ourselves. We are constantly looking around the corner. This makes for very insecure human beings who operate out of fear and shame...just like Adam and Eve. But what's the truth? How does God punish us when we get it wrong? He does punish, but it's always done with love; it's never merely punitive. God is a Loving Father not an Angry Tyrant.

The true story of “Thomas” the alcoholic, Tom grew up with a similar view of God. He thought that God was a God of wrath. Children will often define God by the actions of their parents because parents are the first glimpse children see of authority. If authority is portrayed horribly, then the child will have a horrible view of God, which will also give the child a terrible view of themselves. When Tom got in trouble, he was afraid of asking others for help. He had no problem panhandling and conning people out of their money when he found himself homeless. But he feared asking for genuine help from those he saw in positions of authority.

Tom was certainly no Job. He had been in and out of jail, in and out of rehabs, had three failed marriages, and was estranged from his teenage son—out of everything this hurt Tom the most. Having gone to jail yet again and having served his time and been released into another program, which he successfully completed, it looked like perhaps Tom was finally on his way back to a normal life.

However, he was awaiting another court date to settle one last matter. His public defender promised him that the judge would be lenient, the charge would be dropped down to a misdemeanor and he would serve no jail time. On the day of the hearing, the judge wasn't as sympathetic as the public defender thought. She charged Tom with a felony, placed him on strict probation for 90 days, which meant that he had to report every week, be home by 6:00 pm, and they could search his house anytime they wanted. Tom barely escaped jail time due to a job he'd recently gotten as a driver. Tom felt absolutely hopeless and was furious with God, “Why is He doing this to me?! Doesn't He want me to see my son again?! I don't get it! How am I supposed to get out of this hole I'm in? How am I supposed to make a living with a felony on my record? The company I work for is gonna fire me. And how am I supposed to be at home by 6 o'clock as a limo driver?! I don't get it! How am I supposed to do this?!”

How do most people see an individual like Tom? Don't we look at him the way Job's three friends looked at him? Tom's not righteous like Job, so he's got no right to complain. In fact, isn't all this God's punishment for Tom's life of sin?

Sometimes we get preoccupied with the question, “Why is this happening to me?” Whether you're guilty or not, this is not the most important question. Whether or not God is punishing you for your sins is not the most important thing. What is important is to ask, “What is the truth about how God sees Tom?” Does God want to punish Tom or save him? What evidence do we have that God is not out to get Tom?

Every time Tom cried out to God for help, God helped him. Even this last time, when Tom was willing to follow God out of his alcoholic existence, God provided him another program where he lived rent-free, another job, money when he needed it, a back pack, a bicycle, a second job, and another place to live once he finished the program. God even made it possible for Tom to clear his criminal record in California. And for the first time in his life, Tom had a clean driving record and got his driver's license back. What's the truth?.....so why did God allow Tom to get a felony? This is the wrong question. What matters is that God loves Tom and is still helping him in spite of having a felony...in spite of his life of sin, God is still there.

III. Conclusion

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”