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Help Along the Journey

Matthew 23:13-31/Job 5:8-18

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“Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees...” Hypocrites, hypocrites, hypocrites, blind guides, fools, false swearers, hypocrites that strain at the gnat but swallow the camel, hypocrites dirty on the inside and a contrary reflection on the out, attracting so many away from the true path of love and compassion of truth and justice. Distortion is the tool used by those who wish to control, those who want absolute power. Leaders are important. They engage the masses as to the way they should go. They have the ability to transform nations into prosperity or chip away until our allegiance praises those who have become our masters. Our times are not so different from the days in which Jesus spake unto the leaders of 2,000 years ago. We too, in Jesus words *“...have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith...”* We should not be willing to follow blind guides for then we become the blind who follow the blind. What we need is help along the journey.

We are all Christians here. We know where our help comes from. But what we might not put into the equation is that God's interest along our journeys lies more in our response of trust and faith than to our personal comfort. What we learn from the book of Job is that suffering and enduring wrongs is not simply a product of personal sin but of living out our lives in a sinful world. A world seemingly bent on control through disorder. Pain, suffering, anxiety come out of the chaos in many forms to those who deserve the fruits offered in sin, AND to those who are exposed to the trama of sin simply by collateral damage. It is Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, who is speaking to us this morning from our Old Testament reading. The words of Eliphaz are profitable when understood from a perspective different from the world view of Eliphaz himself. You see, Eliphaz is responding to Job's dire circumstances using the world's wisdom to explain suffering. Suffering, according to Eliphaz was a consequence of personal sin being rectified through punishment by God. But God's interaction in Job's life leaves us in no uncertainty that although bad things do happen to His own children it in

no way means that God is personally punishing them for their direct personal sins. Sin always comes around to bite us because the wages of sin are suffering and death. No goodness comes from sin. The chaos in so many cities across our nation illustrate how the sinful natures of a few can cause devastating consequences to the just.

But, regardless of Eliphaz's foundation for his dialog, his words can still be used in a way that leads to truth and faith...they can give us confidence in our hope and assurance of God's goodness in our everyday lives. *"If it were I, (Eliphaz cries) I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before him."* And this is exactly what we should be doing! We spend much of our time praying for others, beseeching God's help against injustice, but how often do you pray for yourself? When was the last time you sought the Almighty for personal relief? If we must personally endure the wrath of sin should we not do so from within the arms of Christ through prayer? Even in his anguish Job never blamed God for his situation. Job illustrates that Life will have its moments of great pain but our Lord is ever present even when we cannot fully grasp the turmoil that surrounds us. We would do well to accept that the rain will fall on us at different times in our lives. But we will do even better when we rely on the God who loves us. Prayer is where we seek and find strength. Prayer is where we take our cause to our Father who weeps tears of consoling grace, Prayer is the privilege of the believer, a help along our journeys whereby the Holy Spirit makes our desires into a poetic dialog pleasing to our Father in Heaven. Prayer is the first step into the heart of God.

And if that were not enough, our God, Eliphaz continues *"...performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. He bestows rain on the earth, he sends water upon the countryside."* Beyond what we can even think to ask, our Lord provides consistently and abundantly for our every need. The rain is the Good News that God's love, through Christ, covers all who dwell on the earth. This same rain is the water that falls into the hearts of those willing to let go of worldly traps and let the water of the Word permeate every part of their being. If the world around you seems to be falling apart, if the chaos is causing a drought within your spirit, let the Word of God water your soul and straiten your path. Let the river of God's word be a help along your journey by taking the strait and narrow path of least resistance.

The Christian travels down the river of light trusting in the foundations of the source, the boundaries of the path and the fulfillment of our ultimate ends. But the river is not always smooth. Jagged rocks and waterfalls change the landscape of the river offering a deceiving beauty of their own: danger in the distortion...yet attractive. Sin will distort the journey of every life but *"happy is the man whom God correcteth."* When we fall into sin we must pray. And as we turn from our injustice toward God our sin may bite us as we repent, the repercussions may still linger. We may even imagine Job asking God "Why, if my iniquity is forgiven does my memory hold me in contempt?" This is the correction of the Lord, not that God punishes us directly, but that by trusting in God and turning back to Him we are left with a scar; sin will leave its mark...a mark that will one day...be completely washed away by the blood of Jesus already shed for our sins. It is the sensation of this correction that assures us that we have moved back into the comforting waters of God's grace and mercy. Because sin is a fact in our lives repentance is necessary...it may hurt your ego and it may wound your spirit, but it is a Great God who will bind you and make you whole.

Later Job will cry out to the Lord, *"If I am wicked, woe unto me, If I am righteous, I cannot lift up my head, for I am filled with disgrace and look upon my affliction"* (Job 10:15). "Woe" is a cry for repentance and absolution; a cry that comes from the inner depths of Job's faith...a cry that Jesus would extend to the leaders of his day when he cries out for the penitence of the scribes and the Pharisees. Today our Lord's correction is the correction of Woe! Woe unto us and woe unto our leaders! Our faith is found in God not party lines. As Christians we should be calling out to our leaders; woe unto you governors and mayors, woe unto you senators and candidates, Woe unto you presidents, prime ministers and queens, and woe unto ourselves.

We are covered by God's grace and He is willing to show mercy when approached in penitence and humility. It is in our prayers for ourselves and for those in positions of authority that give insight into our individual characters and Godly integrity. Are we faithful to Christ or to the worldliness around us? As counter parts with each other and members of one body it is crucial that we stand firm not for party, but for love and for truth, for unity and Godly compassion, willing to call out the immorality and dishonesty in high places wherever it may be and wherever it crosses the lines of Christian ethics.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:12-13).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.