

24. God, the Dispensing Machine

Put in the coins in the slot before class, say a few rushed prayers, glance over some scripture....God will bless my day. I have paid my dues. I expect things to be OK.

Then a crisis or tragedy occurs. I am stuck by the absence of a genie like Jesus. I am in physical/mental or spiritual pain that is overwhelming and profound. I know in the marrow of my bones I will never forget this incident. I desperately want to escape it and see the clock turned back to pre trauma time.

But some things can't be restored.

A dead family member doesn't come back.

A wife doesn't get back 20 years of loss, living with a husband with stunted emotions.

A person with a warped body doesn't play A grade football.

A low IQ girl doesn't become a university professor.

A prisoner for a decade doesn't get back that time magically.

A baby born with AIDS doesn't get a normal childhood back.

But what God does do is give an alternative, something in parallel:

A friend who is close

Creative outlets

Some other expression - wheelchair basketball

A voice to sing with, that enthral an audience



A rich and worthwhile old age e.g. Nelson Mandela

An engaging, and fulfilling job

However the loss and numb pain is always there, every birthday the parents remember the dead child. Many Christians don't like this thought-hyper faith triumphantly rolls out positive scriptures, and selectively quotes Job or Lamentations, or all the other scripture that talk of loss and destruction. *The Valley of the Shadow* means we only suffer a scratch and bit of darkness in our lives in this sanitized rendition of the psalm.

In this life there is horrid loss sometimes, and the innocent are ravaged despite the prayers of them that love the victims-and despite the call of victims for the intervention of Jesus. In the Twin Towers tragedy, Christians earnestly called on the name of Jesus, as did their families at home. Today there is an empty chair at the dinner table in many of those homes. People die seemingly before their time, despite prayer, and prophesy and a zillion positive scriptures regarding healing.

This is the mystery; this is why it's a walk of faith. We don't have all the answers. Some of the people we pray for are healed-some die. But as Peter said, "Who else would we turn to?" (John 6:66-68) Jesus is the only option. He is not a dispensing machine that serves our wishes. God doesn't guarantee a trauma free life.

I believe for a measure and even a full measure of restoration-but, it won't be restoration of exactly what was. Something new will emerge. Your faith in God and His word is to be as steely strong as ever. But you now have a new route to walk- there was a fork in your road, and suddenly you are facing a new route to glory. True, it's not as smooth and reassuring as the old familiar one.

Perhaps you have to experience trauma to understand what is being communicated here, for you never leave it. It is not like leaving the movies, or leaving a patient in the hospital. There is no walking away and closing the door on this. It is part of your life, 24 hours 7 days a week. The Rubicon is crossed, and there is no going back.

You don't know why God allowed the suffering any more than did Job. What you do know however, with a deep confidence, is how God feels. Where there is misery Jesus is present, loving, and knowing a time comes when He will make *all* things new.

Wonderful experiences, and great joys and triumphs still lie ahead, and in spite of the slings and arrows life throws, one moves on and forward. But certainly, a bit less cocky about things and a bit slower to slap a scripture on everyone who presents with a major problem. Job's mates were berated for not shutting up. They would have done better to say little to nothing, and just served him and let God defend himself.

Cities are rebuilt and lives transformed, scorched land regenerates. We are reminded that all is transitory except what is fitted for heaven. When running a marathon race, some pain comes and later goes. Some pain though, the runner carries to the finish line. We are healed and find release from some pain and stress; others we carry till we drop them at the portals of heaven. It will be a lame excuse if we have to tell God that we could not accomplish our goals due to our painful circumstances, when the scriptures encourage us to rise above our lamentations. We are, many of us, damaged vessels used by God, but our circumstances should not turn us into broken vessels that cannot be used.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Corinthian 4:7

*If God is for us, who can be against us? **Roman 8:31***

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **Roman 8:37***