

Beyond Our Eyes

"Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding to the heart" (Job 38:36)? Two simple questions that God asks; two seemingly easy answers. Job is perhaps one of the most troubled characters in the Bible, having had it all, lost it all, and not understanding a thing about the back story of why he lost it. He's a righteous man, one who offered sacrifices for his children (Job 1:5), a blameless and upright man (1:8), and blessed by God in many ways (1:10). When his possessions and family are stripped of him, he doesn't seek to gain them back immediately, but sits for seven days and seven nights on the ground, questioning why these events are happening.

Philemon would wonder the same thing, albeit on a smaller scale, when he discovered that his slave, Onesimus, had run away from him. Had he not been a faithful Christian master? Had he not treated him well? All these questions run through his mind, and it was not until he came back that he received a possible answer to his question. As Onesimus hands his master the epistle that Paul wrote to him, Philemon opens it and reads Paul's request for the gracious receiving of his slave back to him. But Onesimus is no longer just a slave; he has been baptized by Paul in Rome, and is now a brother in Christ to Philemon. Scrolling his eyes across the words, Philemon's wrath at his property departing from him slowly slips away, as he reads, "For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever" (vs. 15).

One thing about the nature of God we must understand is that everything happens for a purpose. God does not act by accident, He does not make mistakes, and He knows good and well what He is doing. There is, of course, a certain amount of things that happen due to the natural course of laws, as Solomon put it in Ecclesiastes 9:11: "*Time and chance happen to them all,*" but even those very laws are put into place by the hand of God (Colossians 1:15-17). His omnipotence rules, and even those things that seem to be for nothing but evil can sometimes turn out for good. If the Pharaoh of Egypt in Exodus 1 had not committed genocide by killing all the boy babies from the Israelites, would Moses have been in a position to lead his people out of Egypt? If Joseph had not been sold into slavery, what would have happened to his brothers? If Philemon had never run away from his master, would he have ever become a Christian? Maybe, maybe not; it would be beyond the authority of man to cast certain judgment one way or the other. We do know this -- those situations turned out pretty good, despite what happened at the beginning.

Who is man, that we can decide what the best course of action is? I can't even decide what I'm having for dinner most nights, much less what the path would be for a friend to obey the Gospel. I have a good friend that studied with a preacher for nearly two years, constantly refusing the authority of the the Bible, questioning it at every turn. What seemed to be an insurmountable task of converting him bore fruit one day, when he opened his eyes and saw the truth of God's word. Now, this man is one of the most knowledgeable proponents of the Bible on multiple fronts, scientifically and spiritually, that I know today. Would we prefer his conversion to have been a little easier? Probably. But maybe he questioned it all those times to prepare himself, unknowingly of course, for defenses he would make in the future. It's possible. One of the best examples of this is in the life of Paul. A man who persecuted Christians to the death (Acts 22:4) could not possibly be one of the greatest proponents of that faith could he? Ananias certainly didn't think so, at least at the beginning. But, as God told him, "*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine*" (Acts 9:15).

What do you prefer, the short or the long run? We can't have our cake and eat it too, but if that were our choice, it would probably be what we prefer. But God is just, and He knows what He is doing with His own creation. It would behoove us all to sit back and think about the greater scheme than just what we can see with our own two eyes. Trust God, and believe that He is in control. Who are we to say what will become of a man, or what will become of the circumstances that we are presented with? Perhaps they are given to us for this very purpose, that God might receive us up forever.

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