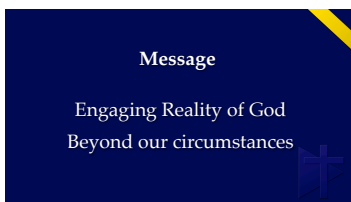


## Engaging the Reality of God .. Talk to Walk #3

Engaging the reality of God beyond what life delivers

*May 2019*

### Introduction:



This is a Talk-to-walk message as follow-up to sermon of 24 March - Engaging God in the Reality of Pain. That message available on line.<sup>1</sup>

It began with report of Jesus' response to tragedy when 18 were killed by a tower falling on them and those killed by the terrorist actions of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. Jesus' response to this crisis of faith was very focused and ended with him saying:

"I tell you; ... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13.5)

So in response to the faith crisis following tragedy Jesus was saying something like:

"Sort out your own relationship with God or expect worse!"

Where did that leave people trying to make sense of what they should expect from the God they trusted and served as king?

Or in more general terms, what is the relationship between God and what happens to us?

How are we to understand shocking events like this?

In the Bible some people reflect a view something like Karma of Hinduism where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. This sees God as just judge delivering blessing and curse on basis of what we deserve.

You can try to believe that but then things happen that shake that confidence which is also a Biblical theme. How come the bad prosper and the good suffer? Where is God in that? What is the deal?

It's complicated!

Paul says to the Galatians (6.7)

"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow."

I can see that, but I suggest that's not the whole story.

In John 4.37 Jesus says:

"One sows and another reaps."

So we also reap what others sow into our lives and our families.

Then we ourselves also sow what others reap in their lives even as I am doing right now.

It's a question of how our relationship with God and how we view our circumstances are connected. What are we primarily orientated to? What is the horse and what is the cart of our life?

This is a slippery area and easily distorted so that the focus is circumstances while God is made the utilitarian accessory or lost sight of.

In the wake of tragedy when asked about why bad things happen Jesus avoids speculation on this.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://trinitychurcheindhoven.org/sermons/20190324/>

Instead he hammers the priority of attending to our relationship with God as needing to be our real concern. Towers will fall, tyrants will bring terror, you are not safe but you need to fear God and make sure you are well related to him. That's more important than your circumstances or safety.

I am going to ask where you are in this? How do you relate God, the good stuff and bad stuff you face?

*Illustration:*

I had an illustration of this in 1994 when serving as a curate/assistant pastor in the town of Ashburton in mid-Canterbury. I was bored so I offered to cold visit people on the church roll, street by street. I learnt so much from this! One Friday afternoon I came to a new comfortable semi-detached home, introduced my self, and the 60 something woman said: "My daughters are all married and we are retired so we don't need the church anymore." So that visit ended there and then! The church and I represented something excess to requirements.

On the following Monday morning my senior pastor / vicar assigned a funeral to me. The given contact address details looked familiar. A short while later I was standing at the same door facing the same woman I had spoken with on the previous Friday. She was only momentarily embarrassed before we got down to the business.

For her the things of God were of interest so long they were needed. Beyond real and present usefulness God was not a priority. Don't call me Lord, I'll call you.

I want to dig some more into this issue and then have us pray into it.

**Biblical Reflection**

The framework for all this is deep within us. It begins with Adam and Eve who chose for independence through knowledge of good and evil over trusting friendship with God. They broke faith and that changed everything.

**Q** How could there be salvation that reset the relationship and reversed the consequences?

The 'salvation reset' began with Abraham. You are familiar with his story. God made a covenant with him involving three promises from God to Abraham: God promised Descendants, Land and Relationship. God Almighty would be faithful to him and his descendants providing them the land he showed Abraham. I believe this explains why the descendants of Abraham are still a distinct people today nearly 4000 years later when you do not see any other ancient people from the Ancient Near East around today.

**Q** When was the relationship between these promises of Descendants, Land and Relationship put to the test to see which was really most important and pivotal to Abraham?

**A** When God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac the nature and priority of relationship was being tested. Abraham's love for Isaac was overshadowed by his love for God Almighty.

This was a severe test of Abraham being God's man whatever the circumstances and not God's man only when the circumstances were favourable.

Abraham passed the test and is still celebrated as the 'Father of Faith' for all who believe. Abraham made mistakes and failed in other ways but in this he passed the faith test with flying colours. He had learnt to place his relationship with God as issue #1.

Last week we looked at 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. I noticed it begins and ends with relational statements.

The LORD is my shepherd, ... .. and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

In between those statements are a raft of blessings of goodness and mercy, trials, dark valleys, life with enemies, richly laden tables etc. It can all be expected even within the over arching relationship with God as Lord and shepherd. Circumstances, triumphs, tragedies are life's features within our fellowship of faith with God as creator and saviour.

### *Illustration*

I am often asked to pray with people. I have faith for prayer and I enjoy it and am encouraged. The prayer requests I really enjoy are those where people say: "I want more of God." or "I want to know God more in my life." or "I want to repent of stuff that's blocking God in my life."

I have to say most prayer requests are about problem solving. That is to be expected and Jesus often prayed for the sick and the troubled, but I do sometimes wonder.

Sometimes I feel like a hired gun called to pray the prayers people do not have the faith or relationship with God to pray themselves. That can be the case at times but it's not ideal.

Here is a suggestion: If you desire God's blessing, why don't you press into your relationship with God and seek it yourself? Why go to a priest? Consider, if that is how it is now, will it still be so in 5 or 10 years time?

This raises the question: Are we focused on the Lord of grace or the grace of the Lord? Is getting close to God too much hard work or complicated so we seek a Plan B to obtain the blessing without getting too personally involved?

Where are you in this and why might that be?

Let me frame it this way:

God's purpose is not to have grandchildren!

God's purpose is to have children who know God as their Heavenly Father, their Good Shepherd, their Rock of Salvation, their Living Hope and their Saviour.

There are in my view two tendencies that lead people miss this or settle for something less:

The first is religious piety or misguided devotion.

This leads people to bother God for blessings like an unweaned baby crying for milk year after year as if that is what Jesus intended. This is wrong when it continuously avoids engaging God directly relying instead on religious activities or pious devotion to achieve the sought after blessing.

At its worst this can become formulaic as if words and rituals will move God according to some divinely set checklist. This is not faith but manipulation. Personal contact with God is bypassed through a procedure or technique.

The second tendency of avoidance of God is best expressed in something I learned as 'The English Creed': There is no God but it's good to pray. I have often met this as if prayer is some self therapy disconnected from the reality of God, a God we can't decide upon and probably don't really need but prayer makes us feel better.

These are to be seen both in church and in popular culture.

If you have met God and know him as real, these diversions are so obviously inadequate.

We are saved from these deceptions and deficiencies when we go direct to Daddy and check in as a child of God. This is what Jesus knew for himself and wanted for us. This is what the Gospel is about.

So to the big question:

**Q:** Are you seeking this primary contact with Father God or have you settled for a second hand system to get the blessing without engaging the blessed One?

The ultimate story of this being tested is the Book of Job. Have you read it?

**Q** Was Job seeking God or just praying to keep up his blessed life together?

God allowed Job and his circumstances to be tested to the point of his life as Job lost everything.

**A** The key line that shows where Job got to is Job 13:15. (ESV)

<sup>15</sup>Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face.

Even though God might kill Job, he will recognize and respect God as the biggest reality to engage. That is where Job gets to. This is like Abraham and Isaac.

Job is not a man who curses God and dies once the blessings run out.

He is not a man who gives up on God in anger over his frustrations and bad circumstances.

But God be warned, Job will present his case directly!

### **Application**

I am advocating for a passion to engage God and be faithful to him as being central irregardless of the circumstances.

- It's about passion for God over the gifts of God.
- It's about the Christ of the Gospel over the benefits of the Gospel.
- It's about being loyal and faithful in relationship to the Lord no matter what.

*Prayer:*

With reference to the passage from Luke we began with:

Talk to the Lord about towers that have fallen in your life, experiences of terror, violence and betrayal.

Declare the Lord your life and none other no matter what.

Repent of the sin you have allowed assuming on God's grace.