**Compassionate And Merciful**

Matthew Bassford

 

 There are many different opinions about the point of the book of Job. Some say that it proves that man will serve God for nothing. Others posit that it is about the incomprehensible nature of suffering. Personally, I am partial to the explanation provided in **James 5:11**.

 According to the inspired author, Job’s story proves two related points. First, those who endure are blessed. Second, the outcome of the Lord's dealings is that He is compassionate and merciful.

 Interestingly, both of these conclusions come from the back half of the frame tale in **Job 42**, not from the poetic discussion that makes up the bulk of the book. Job spends chapter after chapter questioning the justice of God, but ultimately his life reveals God's mercy.

 I think this mercy appears in two main ways. First, God does not merely restore Job’s possessions. He gives him twice as much.

 Second, God deals patiently with Job’s complaints. If one of our prayer leaders addressed God in the way that Job does, we would be shocked. I doubt the brother would ever be asked to lead a public prayer again! However, God endorses Job’s words even though he is mistaken and admits as much.

 Indeed, an even more shocking example of undeserved suffering proves exactly the same point as Job’s suffering. Job was righteous, but Jesus was sinless. Job suffered from circumstance, but Jesus suffered from human envy and malice. Job lost his possessions and his health, but Jesus lost His life. If we didn't know how the story turned out, this would seem like the strongest possible proof of God's callousness and unfairness.

 Of course, it proves the opposite. The One who humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross was highly exalted and given the name that is above every name. What’s more, His selfless sacrifice enabled God to offer mercy and compassion to everyone. God's ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts, and He is able to reveal His compassion in a situation where we think it is impossible.

 This gives me great hope, and it should give great hope to every Christian who is suffering. I do think that Job shows that human suffering is mysterious and incomprehensible. Job and his friends couldn't figure out what was going on, and neither can we.

 However, if we endure despite not getting it, we can be certain what the outcome will be. Once again, God will prove Himself to be compassionate and merciful.

 I don't know what this will mean for me. Maybe it will be revealed in God's personal dealings with me somehow. Maybe my suffering will reveal His mercy and compassion to others. Maybe both will be true. Maybe it's something else that I haven't even thought of yet.

 In short, I don't know how any of this will glorify God's mercy and compassion, but I am certain that it will. That is the outcome of His dealings with all His people, especially those who endure suffering. If you are one of those people, take heart. You might not get it. You might not be able to imagine what God could possibly be doing in your life. If you cling to Him, though, the day will surely come when you look back and marvel at how your suffering revealed His compassion and mercy.

Let’s keep our brother, Matthew Bassford, in our prayers. Matthew is a hymn writer and preacher of Christ’s gospel, but now is suffering with ALS or “Lew Gehrigs” disease. He is at the point where this disease has rendered him practically immobile. But, as you can see, his spirit in Christ is strong! - kds