

Good News for Troubled Times

Part 2

Current events in our troubled economy and places of works call for extraordinary ministry. There are no easy answers no magic solutions. My goal and prayer are always to point to Jesus, who holds each of us, and our individual ways, in his hands.

For the greater glory of God, I offer Part 2 of my five part series on how we may encounter God in troubled times. I pray that each part will help us recognize God's presence in our daily lives.

Part 1 *Overworked and Overstressed*, the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5: 1-14)

Part 2 *When The Bottom Falls Out*, God's message through Isaiah (Isaiah 40: 21-31)

Part 3 *God's Economy*, how God manages (Matthew 20: 1-17)

Part 4 *Why Have You Forsaken Me*, holy ground (Gospels stories of Jesus' crucifixion)

Part 5 *Stewardship*, living and doing by God's values (thematic)

Part 2 *When The Bottom Falls Out*

One of the great losses we can experience is loss of a job. Our secular and workplace cultures value us for what we do, and what we accomplish in our work. As a result, most people take their sense of identity from what they do. Our value as workplace-Doings, turns us BEings who God made us into the workplace-wounded. Take away someone's work and a human life is shattered. Doctors and psychologists know about this; unemployed people know it, and live with it, every painful minute of every day.

To gage how pervasive our DOing workplace cultures, ask someone you know - for that matter, ask yourself - "Who are you?" Invariably, the response is job-related; "I am an accountant...lawyer...mechanic..." etc. So, when the job is gone, so is that person's identity and self-worth.

Every time there is a recession, people lose their jobs and their lives crash. Nowadays, however, the recession is deeper and its damage, broader. This time, people are being hit so hard, they are losing their homes, savings - and their hope. Both the workplace-wounded and their families are tempted to cry out: "Hey, God! Don't you see that we're hurting? Where are you? Help!"

Our good news is that God has been hearing people's cries - and doing something about it for them - for centuries! And God does it all, person by person, family by family, throughout nations and their economies. As we look in history, we find God's responses to people in every business cycle, national challenge, and personal anguish. One of God's best known and heavyweight responses occurred in the sixth century BCE. God inspired the Prophet, Isaiah, to write about it in his Chapter 40: 21-31. God's message was and is so strong, we still find blessing and hope, today!

Isaiah begins (verses 21 and 28) with repetition for emphasis: *Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood...?* Having gotten our attention, he then writes, vss 28-29, 31: *The Lord is*

the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary...He gives power to the faint...those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

God's strong language says much; but, it is its context that elevates 'words' into a thunder of good news! The Jewish people had been exiled in a foreign country. Everything that they had known and valued had been taken from them. Their personal losses were catastrophic. Finally, they were set free and went home. Years of captivity had worn badly on them; but, they were confident that they would quickly heal. For most people, their spirits were strong. But, what they found on arriving home broke their spirits.

Their cities were in ruins. Their homes were destroyed. Their businesses were gone. Their farms were desolate. Where people's hopes had been high, they crashed. To get a sense of what they found, I imagine cities and farms in Europe after World War 2 - acres of destruction, and millions of broken lives.

God asked Isaiah to walk among the people, pointing to God as everyone's way out of their misery. God gave Isaiah good news messages, of which chapter 40's verses are a small example. God was and is the way, because God's will never changes. God wants everyone to have hope and encouragement for their BEings, and energy as if soaring on *wings of eagles* for what they DO.

In effect, God says to all wounded people - including those from the workplace wounded: *You ask where I am? Have you forgotten who made you, loves you and freed you? Look at Creation - who made it for my glory and your enjoyment? I am all-powerful. It is evil that has hurt you. I come with encouragement, hope and good news. Come, let us go into tomorrow, together. If you can't believe what I say, look at history to see for yourselves. See how I have helped people for as long as history has been recorded. I have not changed, and I never will. I will help you understand: you are not a DOing. You are a BEing. And as my beloved child, I will help you Become what you, now, you cannot even imagine. Let us go forward, together. Trust me.*

The people of history and Scripture often listened. They turned to God. They trusted God as much as they were able. As they did, God and they rebuilt their lives. And they learned: when they suffer, so does God! God stands with them, and does something for them. God always delivers what God promises. Of course, it's hard to see this - especially when our tears and brokenness and losses overwhelm us. But, when we are most weak, that's when God really shines. That's when God gives us strengths that we never dreamed of.

How do I know these things? I learned the hard way. Once upon a time, in my former life as a marketing manager, I was unemployed, and then underemployed, for 49 weeks. It was then that I discovered Isaiah's promise. At the end of those 49 weeks, I enjoyed work again as never before. I could see for myself: what Isaiah recorded for an ancient people is still fresh and real and very personal, today.

May Isaiah's God-given insights from the past be our insight, today and tomorrow. So far, he's never been wrong, because God delivers on every promise, always.

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