

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

Is That Unfair?

John 21:15-23

1 Parents raise each of their kids differently. We have to do it this way because each of our children are different.

So the question becomes in the spiritual realm, why do some believers appear to have it so good while others seem to always be suffering? Is God playing favorites? Is God unfair?

The Lord may play by different rules for non-believers, but we do have glimpses in the Bible about how God works in the lives of His children. Notice our scripture today from John, chapter 21, verses 15 through 23.

2 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

**Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”
sheep. 3**

The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. ⁴

I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” ⁵

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this

disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” ⁶

God deals with each of our lives differently and uniquely for at least three reasons. The first reason is . . . ⁷

I. To Serve God as the First Priority of Your Life

To serve God as the first priority of your life! ⁸ The degree of your service to God measures the extent of your love for Him. ⁹

In verse 15, notice this first encounter. The first word for "love" ¹ here means to give by focusing on the need. The word "know" ² means to know by observation. The second word "love" is a different word from the first one. ³ It means to give by focusing on the person who will receive the gift. ¹⁰ Therefore,

¹ ἀγαπάω.

² οἶδα.

³ φιλέω.

the command in the next sentence is to "Feed my lambs". The word "feed" ⁴ means to hand feed with tender care. The word for "lambs" ⁵ implies that he was to hand feed with tender care each individual lamb.

Lord Jesus asked, are you willing to love Me enough to focus on my need? Peter's answer was, You know by observation that I love you deeply as a person. So Lord Jesus commanded, tenderly hand feed each individual lamb. ¹¹

In verse 16, the question and the answer were the same as the first encounter. The command, however, was different. ¹² The phrase "take care" ⁶ is the word for being a shepherd and the word "sheep" ⁷ is plural. So, the command is to become the shepherd for the whole flock. ¹³

⁴ βόσκομαι.

⁵ άρνίον.

⁶ ποιμαίνω.

⁷ πρόβατον.

In verse 17, however, Lord Jesus in His question, "do you love Me?", used the word for "love" that Peter used; do you really love Me deeply as a person? No wonder Peter was irritated! So Peter's response was different. He answered using a different word for "know". ⁸ Peter's response became, Lord, You know from personal experience that I love You deeply as a person! ¹⁴ Now that the Lord had Peter's full attention, the command became, hand feed with tender care the whole flock!

How deep is your love for the Lord? It is measured by how much you are willing to do for Him! ¹⁵

Treating us differently doesn't mean God is unfair! ¹⁶

Verses 18 and 19 prophesy that Peter's death would be violet. ¹⁷ The word "dress" ⁹ means to tie a belt around you. ¹⁸ In the first example, Peter would tie his cloak with a belt around his waist and then go wherever he wanted to go. ¹⁹ The second example

⁸ γινώσκω.

⁹ ζωννύω.

implies someone else would tie a belt around his arms and lead him around against his will. ²⁰ Tradition says that Peter was arrested by the Emperor Nero in 67 AD, put in prison and, then, crucified upside down in the arena.

Verses 21 through 23 tell us not to ever compare how God deals with you with how He deals with another believer. Consider John. ²¹ His life would be a long one. ²² The rumor was he wouldn't die but would experience the Lord's Second Coming. ²³ Verse 23 says that this was a false rumor. ²⁴ The point is that the reason for a believer's existence is to glorify God in their life and in their death! Paul said, ²⁵ **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.** ¹⁰ ²⁶ Don't ever pass judgment on how God treats others as the standard for how He should treat you!

The second reason God deals with our lives differently is . . . ²⁷

¹⁰ Philippians 1:21.

II. To Present Lord Jesus as God in Flesh

To present Lord Jesus as God in flesh! To illustrate this we need to turn to the event where Lord Jesus healed the man born blind. ²⁸

In John, chapter 9, verses 1 through 5 we read, *As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*

You need to understand a couple of things here. ²⁹ First, sickness does not appear to be the natural result of sin.

We know that some sickness is directly caused by sin. Sexually transmitted diseases, for instance, come as a

direct result of immorality. Then, there are some conditions indirectly caused by sin. Some cancers that we are aware of are the result of bad lifestyle choices. The prevailing belief of that day was that all diseases were related to someone's sinful life.

Lord Jesus tells us that this is definitely not the case. ³⁰ This man had been blind all those years in order to be the recipient of the Lord's healing. ³¹ Verse 32 tells us this had never happened before. ¹¹ It was a true miracle! No one could ever explain this away. ³² This was the same situation we have at the healing of the man at the Beautiful Gate in Acts, chapter 3. ¹² Only God Himself could do something like this! Our lives are to present Lord Jesus as God in flesh!

The third reason God deals with our lives differently is

. . . 33

¹¹ v32-33 - Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

¹² Acts 3:2 - Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

III. To Showcase Your Faith to the Heavenly Hosts

To showcase your faith to the heavenly hosts. ³⁴

Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 10 points this out. **For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** ³⁵ The word "workmanship" ¹³ means that which is created, a masterpiece. God created you to do good works so He could show you off in heaven. You honor your Creator by fitting in with His purposes for you! ³⁶

To illustrate this idea, let's look at Job. Job was blessed by God with riches, possessions and a close loving family. ³⁷ Verse 1 and verse 8 says he **fears God and shuns evil.** ¹⁴ But in verse 11, Satan challenges God. ³⁸ If God would take away all Job's possessions Job would curse Him. ³⁹ Verse 12 says Satan was

¹³ ποίημα.

¹⁴ Job 1:1 - In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. and Job 1:8 - Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

allowed to take everything but not to touch Job himself. ¹⁵ ⁴⁰ Then, in chapter 2, verse 6, ¹⁶ Satan was given permission to do anything he wanted to Job, just don't kill him.

For 37 chapters Job and his friends wrestle with the problem of trials in life. Then we come to the final verdict of the Book of Job. ⁴¹ God has the right to allow anything He wants to happen to us without question! ⁴² What is absolutely incredible to me is, in spite of God's complete sovereignty over us and everything else, He would be willing to personally pay the price for your sin on the cross! ⁴³

So, what are the lessons we can learn from Job? ⁴⁴ Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 1, says, **Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with**

¹⁵ Job 1:11-12 - But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face. The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

¹⁶ Job 2:6 - The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life."

perseverance the race marked out for us. Just like Job, you are on display before the heavenly hosts. God takes pride in showing off your faith to them! ⁴⁵

God tailor makes your life to build your character. God is powerful enough to control your experiences in spite of the choices you make. The theme of the Book of First Peter is that it is expected that the Christian will suffer trials. ⁴⁶ But that's okay because all these things are designed to work out for your benefit. ¹⁷ ⁴⁷

So the next time you have a persecution complex because you are going through a trial and another brother or sister is not suffering, don't question God's fairness. Just remember that this life is just a proving ground for developing your faith. God is molding your character to make you into a lovely vessel for His purposes.

<http://biblelifemessages.org>

¹⁷ Romans 8:28 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.