

Be a Berean!

The Bereans ...received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day. (Acts 17:11)

["Be a Berean" will regularly cover topics that arise during the "Acts 29" and "Lifted Up" Bible classes. Contact Franklyn Pfeil--liftedup@lockportalliance.org--with questions or comments.]

"Job and Judy"

For it seems to me that God has put us on display...we have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. (1 Corinthians 4:9)

I have a hero named Judy Forsey. She's a biblical character, though her name is not specifically mentioned in the Bible. She got very, very sick just a few years ago and I didn't see her for a long time, but during all that time I was watching her.

It's turned-around in a way, because she often comes to the Bible class that my wife, Shelley, and I teach every Sunday. But I would bet that she has taught me more about the key concepts of the Bible than I've taught her. She taught me the book of Job, one of the most difficult books of the Bible to teach. And she's teaching many, many more than just me.

Even now, she regularly has to go to the hospital for long, arduous treatment. Now and then she undergoes bad stretches, and when she does we don't see her at Bible class. Watching for her, I note her absence.

It gets kind of spooky, because she's on display to the universe. God is showing her off, to prove that faith is real. She's proving that some people actually do believe in God: not just that He exists--even demons believe that (1)--but that He can be trusted, no matter what.

What's the difference? Mere intellectual assent that God exists, even that Jesus is the Son of God, saves no one (2). Trusting Him with our lives--listening for His voice and going His Way, even when it's dark and we can't see very far ahead--is the faith that saves.

(As the book of Job opens, we glimpse God's throne room and a confrontation over Job's life between God and Satan. Job himself is never made aware of what's behind the scenes of his suffering...)

Satan: "Job--and Judy Forsey--follow you because you're their celestial Sugar Daddy. Stop strewing gifts all over "the narrow road" and you'll see them desert You for "the broad highway" that I'm on. They don't believe in you. Change their circumstances, take away the good things you've given them, and we'll see that their so-called faith in you is a sham."

God agrees to the terms. Soon, one calamity after another strikes Job. His wealth, his family, and his health are taken away. And the universe--angels, principalities, powers, and people--watch.

Job's wife tells him to give up faith--to curse God and die (3).

Job's friends insist that Job's troubles are because of sinfulness in his life.

Job doesn't know what to think, but he knows that his Redeemer lives--and that he will take his stand one day upon the earth (4).

It was right around some of the darkest days and months of Judy's illness that I was preparing to teach the book of Job for the first time. I well remember that first year and the trepidation I experienced when two especially difficult books--Job and Hebrews--loomed ahead. How would I even begin? I had a bunch of very sharp students who loved the Bible at least as much as I did and would not look kindly on any half-baked approach to any of its sacred contents. Over many

months, I worked long and painstakingly in preparation for Job. I'd prepared responsibly, but I had the feeling that I had not gotten hold of the heart of the book.

Periodically, I asked Dick Forsey how Judy was doing. Dick has the face of a poker player and the heart of a Saint Bernard. He always said the same thing: "She's going to get better." His faith was showing, too.

During that time there often were prayer emergencies concerning Judy on the message machine when we'd get home, called in by Betty Lane, who was just ahead of Shelley on the telephone prayer chain. I listened and I watched. I watched and sometimes I prayed.

A couple days before I was to teach Job, I took out my lesson and reviewed what I had finished weeks ago. But since then, I had learned so much about Job from Judy and Dick Forsey that I unhesitatingly deleted the entire lesson and, typing as fast as I could so the heart of the matter wouldn't escape me, I banged out this lesson sketch:

God's directing the entire scene and there's times when that's all we're going to know--that He's in charge, that He's putting his whole heart into it, and that we are to trust Him--even though we don't understand everything and are not going to be shown every card in His hand. Whatever we're dealt, we're to trust that God knows about it and has a purpose for it. Evil can't go further than the end of the chain God's got Satan tied up with, and God uses even evil to bring about good.

There are cosmic purposes that we are not aware of behind many of the things we find inexplicable. Job's suffering has a purpose that he couldn't understand; he and the friends were not even aware of the cosmic struggle.

The friends and Job remind me of the disciples with Jesus. The disciples didn't understand why Jesus had to suffer and die, but the happiness of the universe rests upon His suffering. And God staked His name, everything He had, on Jesus' day-by-day faithfulness, right up to the cross. And then Jesus was restored--resurrected--like Job was restored.

God didn't test Judy's faith. He proved it. He's proven it to created beings beyond our realm, and He's proven it to me. He allowed circumstances, to demonstrate that her faith is based upon God's character, revealed in His Word; upon God's heart, revealed at His cross.

I'm still watching, Judy. And I'm still learning. And I'm not the only one.

Scripture references: (1) James 2:19; (2) see Luke 4:34; (3) Job 2:9; (4) Job 19:25

It is our fervent hope that you will 'be a Berean' by attending one or more of these Bible-based classes this week! —

“Acts 29” Bible Class—Sunday at 9:45

“Everyday Wisdom for the Average Joe” (men)—Sunday at 9:45

"A Gentle and Quiet Spirit" (women)--Sunday at 9:45

"Speak God's Word"--Sunday at 9:45

“Lifted Up” Continuous Bible Class—Thursday at 6:00 p.m.