

Never Give up

There's a story about Rabbi Joshua ben Hanahiah who was paid a visit by one of the Roman emperors. This emperor wanted to see God. There is just one problem with this, of course. We can't. God is invisible. How then could Rabbi Joshua answer the emperor? He took him outside on a sunny day. He told the good emperor to look into the sun. Have we ever tried to do that? "I cannot," the emperor complained. "The sun," the rabbi said, "is only one of God's servants; and you ought to admit that, as you cannot look into it, much less can you behold his glory" (quoted in Kenneth Leech, "God of cloud and Darkness").

How does God work perseverance into us? It is when times are tough, when we go through trials, that our faith in God gets tested. It is when we go through rough spots that we begin to ask ourselves very important questions, basic to living. One of the most essential questions in life is: "Who is God?" This is what Job's story largely deals with. The best thing his three friends did for Job was to simply show up in his troubles and just silently be with him, saying nothing. It was when they began to ask the question, "Job, why did this happen?" that they got into trouble with God.

Who is God? One of the concepts of "the gods" that was freely floating around in the days when Peter wrote this letter had this notion: we must "appease the gods." If we don't, they'll get angry, and when they get angry we're in big trouble. When we appease the gods, they will turn their anger away and then we will be safe. This was the dominant view of God as portrayed by Job's "miserable comforters" that were his friends. "Job, you must have gotten God good and angry. Why else would this be happening to you? Confess your sins and be done with it, and then God will restore you again."

When trials come, what happens to our faith? Peter describes it in his first letter. *These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed* (1 Pet 1:7). Without faith it is impossible to please God (this from Heb 11:6). Anything that does not come from faith is sin (this from Romans 14:23). Yet there is something about the faith that God gives us that is defective and needs to be proven. Spiritual writers in the past have called this process by a big word. **Dis-illusionment: which means ridding yourself of illusion.**

What is an illusion? An illusion is something that fakes us out. It seems real, but it is not real. God gives us perseverance so we'll discover who God really is, not who we think he is. I remember well how this happened to me in 2006 when I had what our family affectionate calls, "the Crash." We all need crashes to find out who God really is; not who we'd like him to be; not who we think he should be; but who he really is. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance...* (James 1:2-

3]. Perseverance is never giving up on God, never stopping seeking him, never expecting and believing that when we seek him with all our hearts, we will find him, even when life hurts.