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**Wisdom and Nakedness** by Ben M.

## **Job 1**

The title of this sermon is *Wisdom and Nakedness*. If you are uncomfortable with the word nakedness, it is because there is a lot of shame in the human experience that is bound up in this word nakedness. Job says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart." (Job 1:21) This is a very sober assessment of life condensed into one short phrase. We come with nothing, we go with nothing and everything else is, by comparison, just a puff of wind. How does wisdom help us in the battle we have with shame: the shame of loss, failure, and ultimately, sin: the fundamental core of our experience.

Job's story happened between Genesis and Exodus. It is a true story that was handed down through the generations and written up by Solomon under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Job is a philosophical book; Philo, 'the love of' and Sophia, 'wisdom'. It answers the question, 'What happens to godly persons when they lose everything?' Will wisdom help you overcome fear in your fiery trial? In Job 1:6 God's servants are gathered around God's throne. The accuser, Satan is there to put a fly in the ointment. "Does Job fear you for nothing?" (v9) "Take away all his comforts and he will curse you." If we are stripped of everything, will our faith go too? God allows Satan to take everything from Job so Satan can hear a palpable testimony from one of God's servants. Satan is rebuked by the faithful on the earth; "I know that my redeemer lives. "Though he slay me yet shall I praise him."

In every human heart there is a desire to know the truth. So people will ask you questions. Their starting point may be cynical and hostile trying to trip you up as they did Jesus. We should allow them to ask their testing questions so that if they believe they can repent and be redeemed

There will be a time when every one of us will lose everything. Here in the parable of Job we get to see how he deals with that experience. Job is naked, sick and poor. His children are dead and his marriage has collapsed. Job's response from this deep dark pit is, 'It's okay. God doesn't owe me anything. I never had anything, I never will have anything. Anything I have had is only lent to me. I have no rights to health or wealth. If God takes them from me then "blessed be the name of God." Job is at peace. He is reconciled to his experience.

Solomon makes an assessment of his reign in Ecclesiastes 5:15. "Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart." This is a wise saying everyone needs to digest and come to terms with. Our experiences and possessions are insubstantial: here today and gone tomorrow. Job does not equate his sense of self with his attainments, possessions or relationships. The question is where is the fountain of your identity? Paul says in Philippians 4:11-12 "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances whether living in plenty or in want." If we listen, wisdom will teach us how to live like that because it equips us to deal with loss.

At the end of his life Solomon realises he has failed. (Ecclesiastes 7:28) He has built an upright temple but ultimately God wants an upright people. The lack of uprightness in his kingdom is indicative of his failure to revive his people spiritually. He needs the wisdom that sustains his faith because he has done nothing of ultimate worth in the world. The background to Solomon's life was that he was born eighth in line to the throne, into the most ferocious political scandal. What David did in secret with Bathsheba and Uriah would happen to David in broad daylight ten-fold. David

repented and was forgiven but he suffered the consequences of his sin. It tore the kingdom apart. Nakedness played such a big part in the destruction of the kingdom. The ultimate thing that was uncovered was not Bathsheba's body but David's sin. The lust in his heart was there all along. It suddenly became visible. David was not the Messiah. This man was as naked as the rest of us. "We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous. No, not one." No wonder Solomon writes in Proverbs 6:25 "Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes." David killed an upright man. When the most upright of men came into the world we killed him too. There is something wrong with us. We can build temples. We can grow rich but ultimately there is something inside us that keeps us back from what we must and should be. Nehemiah 13:26: "...Among the many nations there was no king like him [Solomon]. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women."

Wisdom gives us a perspective on our successes, wealth and possessions. In the beginning Adam and Eve are naked and unashamed. They were persuaded to leave God's ways. Suddenly they were aware that they were deeply ashamed and profoundly naked. They realised they were sinners. They tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. The sin is one thing but trying to cover up our sin is a crime in its own right. We want others to think we are something we were not by covering ourselves in our achievements. But it's a lie. It's just fig leaves and fig leaves won't wash. We are naked, wretched and blind. I am a sinner and I know that's who you are too. Job experienced this shame when he says, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (42:5-6) He had been healthy, wealthy and wise but he was still a sinner with this problem deep in his heart. He tried to cover himself in dust and ashes because when he felt naked and ashamed before God he was filled with a sense of dread.

You know that standing before a sinless God covered in fig leaves or dust and ashes won't hide you. There are consequences to our sin but something wonderful happened in Genesis 3:21. God made for them clothing out of skin. We do so much to try and cover ourselves but God who sees us and knows us gives us robes of righteousness. He covers us with his love. You are his children. He saw you come out of the womb naked. He is with you all through life. And he loves you. Why? Because Jesus died on the cross and took the punishment you deserve. If you will but trust in him your sin will be forgiven and you can stand in the presence of God just as you are and he will clothe you with the most beautiful garment. Even if no one else can see it you will know who you are. You are not just a sinner. You are a sinner saved by the grace of a wonderful glorious, gracious, loving God. If you've got absolutely nothing, walking barefoot through the streets you know it is only a question of time before you are walking on the streets of gold. You have a saviour who is alive, Jesus Christ. Let him clothe you with his love. Don't be afraid. Wisdom equips us to walk upright because we are redeemed.' In trials we can say with Job, "Naked I came into the world and naked I will depart." but I am going to such an amazing place!