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BY FAITH OR BY FATE?

Today's Text: Matt. Chaps 8-9

Extracts:

Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. ..." When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel." ... Then, *Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour* [Matt. 8: 5-13]

When Jesus departed from there, two blind men came to Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" ... And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord!" Then He touched their eyes, saying, "*According to your faith, let it be to you.*" *And their eyes were opened* [Matt. 9: 28-30]

Nadya Suleman, a California (USA) resident, is 33 years old, single and unemployed, and already had six children with the help of fertility treatment.¹ She holds a college degree in child and adolescent development and is pursuing a master's degree in counseling. She lives with her parents. On 26 January 2009, she gave birth to octuplets (eight babies at a go) at a well-known hospital again with the help of fertility treatment. When the story broke, many people expressed outrage. How could an unemployed single mother that depended on her aging parents and state welfare raise 14 children? In response to such critics, Nadya told NBC's "Today" show, "I knew that's what I wanted." On what is her "knowing" anchored? Is it on fate or faith?

Fate means destiny or that which is unavoidably predetermined. Faith is certain reliance on the trustworthiness of another, especially God.² You may find yourself right now in a challenging situation, such as unemployment, barrenness, poor health, drug or alcohol or spousal abuse, etc. Did you plan to be that way or it just happened? Do you intend to remain that way or get out of it? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's study.

¹ Based on the following sources: Dr. Keith Ablow, "Inside the Mind of Octuplet Mom," <http://health.blogs.foxnews.com/2009/02/02/inside-the-mind-of-nadya-suleman/> and Shaya Tayefe Mohajer, "Octuplet doctor believed to be fertility pioneer," Associated Press, Mon. Feb. 9, 2009, http://www.mercurynews.com/health/ci_11663158?source=rss

² <http://dictionary.reference.com>

1. Sowing and Reaping

Recently, I drove through a street in downtown Los Angeles where beggars and destitutes swarm around alms givers, especially on Sundays. As you critically examine those needy people, you easily see that they have varying degrees of physical challenges. For example, some are obviously blind and/or crippled. Yet, there are some who look healthy by all definitions but they beg all the same. A number of questions flood your mind as you look at those people. How did they get to that state? Is there anything that they or anyone can do to get them out of that state? Do they even want to get out of it?

Many of us are destitute in one way or another. For example, some of us are passing through economic hardship because we have lost our jobs or businesses, or simply because we are lazy or spoilt. Some of us are suffering from terminal diseases and the physicians and prayer people have given up hope. Some of us are battling addictions (alcohol, drugs, sex, stealing, pride, etc) that are killing us gradually and we seem helpless. How did we get there?

The most obvious explanation that we give is derived from the law of sowing and reaping. According to the word of God, “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap, for he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” [Gal. 6: 7-8]. In deed, we would expect that *in general*, those who do good (i.e., do the will of God) will be blessed [Deut. 28: 1-14], while the wicked and disobedient will be cursed [vv. 15-68]. God will punish up to the fourth generation those who hate Him but show mercy on thousands of generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments [Ex. 20: 5-6].

However, we do come across exceptions that challenge our understanding of the law of sowing and reaping. Let us examine the following cases:

a) *How about wicked or lazy people who seem to prosper?*

You are working yourself to death because you believe that “he who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” [Prov. 10: 4]. You try to be good because “blessings are on the head of the righteous; but violence covers the mouth of the wicked” [v. 9]. Yet, when you lift yourself up to look around you, it is a different story. You see privilege triumphing over precept. By virtue of the blood that flows through their veins, or their race, religion or class, or political connections, you are denied opportunities which they take for granted. You find that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; *but time and chance happen to them all*” [Eccl. 9: 11].

b) *And how about good people who are suffering?*

Before you are discouraged, consider another group of people who are better and more hardworking than you are, and yet they are suffering lack, hunger or persecution. Why is it that they have not reaped the goodness that they have sown? Some of such people have refused to steal even when they kept the keys to the treasury of their employers or churches. Some have refused to take undue advantage of vulnerable wards (such as children or women) in their care. Some have refused bribes and inducements that would have compromised their integrity. Yet, they are the ones that are vilified or hounded or imprisoned.

A good example from Nigeria is Nuhu Ribadu, the former head of the anti-corruption body, the EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission).³ He is best known for arresting and successfully prosecuting his boss, the Inspector-General of Police, for corruption. Through his exemplary leadership and personal example, corrupt politicians and fraudsters who perpetrate financial scams on the Internet, have been arrested and prosecuted. Huge sums of stolen money have been recovered and returned to the state treasury while some of the culprits have been jailed. In recognition, he has received international and local awards and honours, including rapid promotion on the job. However, under the guise of curbing his excesses, the government that came to office in May 2007 has been after Ribadu. He was demoted (by two ranks) and later dismissed from the police force on charges of alleged insubordination. He has reportedly been forced to hide to escape assassination. Meanwhile, the corrupt politicians that are supposedly on trial are free on bail without any serious attempt to prosecute their cases. Meanwhile, the drive to rid Nigerian public life of corruption has suffered a major blow. Why is Ribadu reaping persecution for all his dedication to duty?

We do not have the answers to such questions, just as God refused to answer Jeremiah when he raised similar questions. The prophet asked God, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? ... But You, O Lord, know me; You have seen me; and You have tested my heart toward You.” In response, God asked Jeremiah, “If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?” [Jer. 12: 1-5]. God is telling the prophet to mind his business! That is what He is also saying to you right now.

Your business is to look at your situation as unique. You can choose to remain as you are, believing that it is your fate in life to be poor or sick or suffer from self-pity. Or, you can choose to get out of your current disappointments, discouragements and disadvantages and move on to greater things. How you go about it is another important step. You can choose to go for own or canned solutions being marketed by so-called experts who cannot solve their own problems. In the alternative, you can choose to go to God through His only

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuhu_Ribadu

begotten Son, Jesus the Christ. In today's text, we shall study the stories of people like you and how their faith in Him helped them to overcome their limitations.

2. All things come to those who believe

In the Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 8 and 9, we read the stories of people who came to Jesus because they believed that He had answers to their disabilities. The following sample is illustrative of such people:

a) *The leper is cleansed*

Under the Law of Moses, here was the social standing of a person pronounced a leper by the priest [**Lev. 13: 45-46**]:

The leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" He shall be unclean; all the days he has the sore he shall be unclean (and) he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

If the leper that came to Jesus had taken his illness as his fate, he would have stayed away from the multitudes and dwelt outside of the city. He did not do that. Instead, he defied all odds, came to Jesus and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean" [**Matt. 8: 2**]. Jesus put out His hand and touched the leper, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Right away, the man's leprosy disappeared [**v. 3**]! By his faith in Jesus, the leper was healed.

b) *The Centurion's servant is healed*

As a Roman, the centurion was a Gentile and, therefore, an outsider to Jewish culture and worship. His servant lay at home "paralyzed, dreadfully tormented" [**Matt. 8: 6**]. He came to Jesus for his healing but he got more than he had bargained for. Jesus offered to come to the centurion's house and heal his servant. The Roman officer was used to authority and the power of command. So, he said to Jesus, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, *but only speak a word and my servant will be healed*" [**vv. 7-9**]. Jesus marvelled and said to those following Him, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such *great faith*, not even in Israel" [**v. 10**]. Turning to the centurion, Jesus said, "Go your way; and *as you have believed, so let it be done for you.*" That same hour, the centurion's servant was healed [**v. 13**]. By the centurion's faith, his servant was healed.

c) *Jairus' daughter is raised from the dead*

One of the rulers of the synagogue, identified as Jairus in Luke's Gospel [Lk 8: 41], came to Jesus and worshipped Him, praying for Him to come and lay His hand on his dead daughter for he was sure that if Jesus did so, she would live [Matt. 9: 18]. Imagine the import of that moment. As a whole, the Jewish rulers did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah nor did they respect His influence. Jairus swallowed his pride, broke out of his fate (orthodoxy) and by faith looked for Him who could bring his daughter back to life. Jesus immediately went with him, followed by His disciples [vv. 18-19].

Along the way, a woman with the issue of blood for twelve years, who could not be healed by physicians after spending all she had, broke all religious protocols [Lev. 15: 19-20; 25], defied the disciples' crowd control measures and touched the garment of Jesus! She believed that if only she could touch His garment, she would be made well. In deed, she was made well and Jesus added, "Be of good cheer, daughter, *your faith has made you well*" [Matt. 9: 20-22].

Jairus' house was filled with "the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing" when Jesus arrived. As far as they were concerned, it was over. All that was left was to bury the dead girl. But Jesus stunned them when He said, "Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping." The skeptics ridiculed Him but not the bereaved father. Jesus went in, took the girl's hand and she arose! You know what? The "report of this went out into all that land" [vv. 23-26].

Two blind men heard of it and chose not to remain blind for the rest of their lives (fate). They cried out to Jesus, saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" He asked them a simple question, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They answered, "Yes, Lord!" He touched their eyes and said, "*According to your faith let it be to you.*" Immediately, their eyes popped open and they saw [vv. 27-30]!

3. Conclusion: It's time to cultivate your faith in Jesus!

From the forgoing, we can draw the following conclusions:

- *Many people milled around Jesus but only those who asked Him for help received.* There were many lepers in that place but only one of them came out of seclusion to meet Jesus. There were many Roman officers but only one swallowed his pride and came to a Jew who could heal his servant. Many parents lost their children at the time but only Jairus came forward to get his daughter raised to life. Therefore, you have to make the first move. Do not let fear, shame or pride deny you of your victory. After all, citizens of a country are entitled to their national passport but only those who apply will get it!

- *You must come to Jesus because you trust in Him, not because you are trying out options to know which one will work.* You have other options. For example, you may choose that your situation is beyond redemption, remain where you are and live with it for the rest of your life. That is called fate. It can lead to anger, frustration and self-destruction. You may choose to get out of it through your own or human wisdom. You can only get temporary relief there from because “the fear of man brings a snare.” Therefore, only faith in God can do it because “whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe” [Prov. 29: 25]. Without faith, no one can please God and those who come to Him must believe that He is and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him [Heb. 11: 6].
- *As you have believed, so it shall be done for you.* But what is your level of faith? Let us measure it on Christ’s “faith-o-meter”! Jesus ranked the centurion’s faith “great.” When His disciples faced a great tempest while Jesus was asleep, they woke Him up saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” He responded, “Why are you fearful, O you of *little faith*?” [vv. 23-26]. In the Gospel of Mark, the response of Jesus to the same or similar experience was “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have *no faith*?” [Mk 4: 40]. So, on Christ’s faith scale, your faith can range from zero to great (or infinity). As you have believed, so it shall be done for you.; and the just shall live by his faith [Hab. 2: 4].

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can do exploits [Lk 17: 6]. However, in case you lack faith, you can cultivate it as follows:

- *Decide that the will of God for you is your destiny in life.* Therefore, you must establish or restore your relationship with God through His only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ. Each time you fall, get up by confessing your sins and God will forgive you as He has promised [1 Jn 1: 9].
- *Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God [Rom. 10: 17].* Therefore, let your spirit live by the word of God as your body lives by bread [Matt. 4: 4]. If you do not read the Bible each day with the same zeal as you watch your favourite shows on television or do your office, home or school work during rain, shine, or snow, then you are not eating enough of God’s word!
- *Walk by faith* (as God wants it) and *not by sight* (as your lust wants it) [2 Cor. 5: 7]. That way, you will sow right and reap right.

As you have believed, so it shall be done for you. Live by faith, not by fate.