

August 19, 2007
 Broken and Shattered in Order to be Made Whole
 Luke 10:25-37 / Luke 22:24-34 / Job 40:1-14

Martin Luther once made an intriguing observation. Speaking of the way God works he said:
*"God creates out of nothing. Therefore until a man is nothing,
 God can make nothing out of him."*

Another saint put it this way:
"God always builds on ruins. He must tear down before He can rebuild." That's what He does in conversion. Like a demolition crew, He sets charges under the edifice of our ungodly worldview and brings down the whole structure that He may start reconstructing it in the correct fashion one brick at a time."

Both were speaking of a principle we find displayed throughout the Old and New Testaments:
 That the way God makes us whole is to permit us to go through experiences that
 "break us" — because brokenness is the pathway to wholeness and restoration.

We see that vividly in the life of the Apostle Peter. In the Gospels we find that Peter is a very proud, head-strong, stubborn, self-sufficient, boastful, arrogant and somewhat self-righteous individual.

He had a problem with anger and wanting to hurt people — one time desiring to call down fire from heaven and kill a whole town of people merely because they rejected Jesus and His message. And despite being rebuked for it by Jesus, he lost it again in the Garden of Gethsemane when he apparently tried to kill one of the men that came to arrest Jesus, but thankfully only ended up cutting off his ear!

Yet in spite of all that, Peter was still the person Jesus had chosen to be the leader of His little band of disciples, and the fledgling church!

But, of course, that presented a little problem! Because a leader with those characteristics will not make a good leader — at least not as long as he retains those characteristics!

And even moreso, he won't make a good Christian leader — because such characteristics are sub-Christian! They're contrary to the fruit of holiness which the Spirit seeks to produce in our lives.

So... If Jesus has chosen Peter to be the leader of the church, and those traits will hinder his ability to lead, how does He eradicate or transform such negative and potentially damaging characteristics from Peter's personality?

Well, according to the text, Jesus appears to do it by determining that Peter needed to go through a "breaking experience," or a "sifting experience" where his whole life is shaken up and turned upside down! Strong-willed, stubborn people are often that way. Verbal instruction isn't enough to change them. Verbal rebuke isn't enough. They usually have to learn things the hard way by experience. An experience that forces them to see the truth about themselves -- just how proud they really are; just how inadequate their own innate human resources really are and just how reliant they are upon the grace of God at all times for all things.

In fact, when it comes to God sanctifying proud, self-assured people, what He usually needs to do is let them go through a failure experience that humbles them, thus diminishing or transforming the proud and more abrasive aspects of their personality — something mere verbal instruction by itself simply cannot produce!

"Simon, Simon," says Jesus to Peter, "Satan has asked to sift you like wheat." And what's the obvious implication from the next verse? I have decided to let him! Jesus did deem it necessary that Peter to go through this sifting by Satan. He was going to allow Satan to "sift Peter like wheat." "But," says Jesus, "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

You see, this is a preparation for leadership. WHY did Peter need to be sifted like wheat? The verse itself gives us the answer: So that after he had turned back, he might "strengthen his brothers." That is, that he might function as the type of leader he needed to be!

Not a leader who looks down on the other disciples because he thinks he's braver, and better and stronger! Not his usual proud, boastful, haughty, self-righteous self! But a leader that's been humbled, and now understands weakness, and thus has more compassion.

A leader convinced by his own failure experience that he as well stood each minute of every day in desperate need of God's empowering grace. A leader who could now encourage and strengthen his brothers who were also struggling in their faith and also very aware of their faults, and failings and inadequacies — because he himself had experienced the same thing.

Proud, self-assured, boastful, arrogant Peter is going to turn away from Jesus. Fear is going to consume him and He is going to turn and run away like a coward. He is going to go through something so harrowing that had Jesus not prayed for him his faith would fail! Apart from the grace imparted by Jesus prayer on his behalf he would lose it all!

(A reminder that we too need to be thankful that Jesus is at the right hand of God right now interceding for us! Otherwise our faith might also fail when we go through times of sifting!)

J. C. Metcalfe was right when he wrote:

"It is those who have plumbed the depths of failure to whom God invariably gives the call to shepherd others. Without a bitter experience of their own inadequacy and poverty of soul, they are quite unqualified to bear the burden of spiritual ministry. It takes a person who has discovered something of the measure of his own weakness to be patient with the shortcomings of others."

Proud leaders are not patient. Proud leaders lack compassion. Proud leaders tend to walk all over people and leave many wounded souls in their wake. And thus Jesus could not allow Peter's pride to go unaddressed. Not if he were to lead the church!

His pride had to be confronted, and not only confronted, it had to be broken, or eradicated — something Jesus chose to do by permitting Satan to sift Peter like wheat. An experience God allows for a purpose:

To teach us things about ourselves that we are unaware of / to teach us things we would never otherwise understand / and to help mold our character in ways that verbal instruction by itself could never do!

It was the Psalmist who wrote: "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word."

And again, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." There are certain things (usually things having to do with proud and sinful character flaws) that can only be learned or internalized through the experience of struggle and affliction and hardship and pain.

Isaiah spoke of such experiences as "God sending us through the furnace of affliction." The imagery being that of metal sent through a blast furnace and turned to liquid so that the impurities could be dislodged, float to the top, and be skimmed off.

You can't remove impurities from metal, or purify gold by simply telling it what going through the furnace will do for it! It doesn't need instruction, it needs to go through the furnace and be

subjected to heat so intense that it becomes a liquid, so that those impurities can be dislodged, float to the surface, and be scooped off. And the same is true for us.

Trials produce patience, and perseverance, and humility, and meekness. Never is a person more teachable than when they want to get out of a painful situation! Never are they more attentive and more willing to listen. Never are they more pliable and moldable than when they, like gold, are subjected to the heat of the furnace!

You see, contrary to common Christian belief, God's purpose in the lives of His people is NOT to make them comfortable, prosperous and happy. It is to train and equip them for ministry and make them holy.

"This is the will of God for you," says Paul, "your sanctification." (1 Thess. 4:3) "God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in Him." (Eph. 1:4) "Our fathers disciplined us as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good, that we might share in His holiness." (Heb. 12:10) ("discipline" in that passage being defined previously as "trials" and "hardships.")

That's why so many Christians are confused when they go through trials. When trials come they think God must be angry at them, because they continue under the misconception that trials are God's way at lashing out at them for something they've done wrong.

They're not! They're "discipline" according to the Author of Hebrews. And in the Bible "discipline" is for instruction and character formation. It isn't punitive. It is "for our good," says the author of Hebrews, that we may share in God's holiness!

And because trials and hardships are instructional and for our good or our growth in holiness, that means they are often little more than God determining that its time for us to grow! They are often little more than God simply fulfilling the purpose for which He called us—that we might be holy and blameless in Christ. That we might share in His holiness, since we know that His explicitly stated will for us is our sanctification!

Trials are simply one of the ways God fulfills His promise to bring to completion the good work He started in us! The work of sanctifying and making us holy! The vast majority of Christians I've met are under the impression that God's job to make them happy. Whereas God explicitly states that says his purpose is to make us holy.

And all of that as an introduction to what we find in today's passage in Job 40:1-14! Job may have been blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil, but it didn't mean he was beyond the need of trials to purify and sanctify him even further.

He was godly, but God deemed it necessary that he become even more godly than he was! God's will for Job, as with us, was for Job's "sanctification" — a process God continues in every one of us till the day we die!

It's true that Job was a godly man, but what these verses show us is that he was still a little bit too proud. He said things about God and made accusations against God that he had no business making.

So how did God break that "spirit of pride"? By showing him how little he knew. The path to Job's restoration was not simply to have his suffering brought to an end and then be blessed with double for all he had lost!

NO! The path to his restoration was to first pass through a time of divine rebuke. In spite of all he'd gone through, his pride still remained strongly in tact! And so, like Peter, his pride also needed to be broken. And, as J. C. Metcalf noted, such a thing can only be accomplished by the bitter experience of being brought face to face with one's own inner poverty, and inadequacy.

Pride will only be dislodged when it is shattered by overwhelming circumstances that expose the true nature of our weakness and need for God and powerlessness as creatures. That's why, in many cases, strong-willed people bring additional suffering upon themselves! God simply wants them to acknowledge the truth of their own weakness and need for Him.

But what do they do? They say, "No! I'm strong. I can do it." "No you can't," says God. "You need me." "I can do it," says the stubborn person. "I'll show you I can." "I don't want you to," says God. "I just want you to acknowledge your need for me and rest in my grace."

"No says the strong-willed person. That's weakness! I want to prove I've got what it takes! I don't need any crutch." "I don't want you to prove anything," says God. "I just want you to come to me, lean on me, rest in me, feed upon me, and get your strength from me. It glorifies me when you turn to me and depend on me."

But the strong-willed person refuses to surrender. He or she continues to fight and kick-against-the-pricks — thereby prolonging the trial God has ordained for the purpose of humbling them. That is, getting them to see that they are weak, they do need Him, He is their sufficiency, and that their goal is rely on Him, not vainly try to prove they can do it without Him!

In some ways Job had a little bit of that same spirit. And so God had to spend two chapters trying to show Job he didn't know as much as he thought he did. That is, he didn't know enough to say the things he'd been saying, or make the accusations he'd been making.

It's pride that caused Job (v. 8) to condemn God in order to justify himself. And it's only after he's humbled by being unable to answer the many questions that God places before him (38:1-40:2) that he finally breaks down and says: "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but have no answer; twice, but I will say no more."

But God is not done with Job. Because Job still has some lingering vestiges of pride that need to be dislodged. His confession of unworthiness is a start, but it's only a start! He has admitted he is "unworthy" because he didn't know enough to say the things he did, but he didn't say he was wrong. He didn't admit his guilt. He didn't apologize and ask God to forgive him. He is still clinging to the last few vestiges of his pride.

So what does God do? He continues to turn up the heat, so to speak. He presses Job further, until Job's pride is finally broken, and he actually comes to the point where he repents and admits he was wrong in chapter 42 verse 4.

LISTEN: Contrary to most simplistic interpretations of Job, which teach Job suffers well and then God simply blesses him in the end with double for all his sufferings, a closer look shows us that Job didn't always suffer so well, he slandered and condemned God to justify himself, and God took him to task for doing so — for having the audacity to "contend with the Almighty."

And He refuses to restore Job until He breaks him of the sin of pride and self-righteousness that caused him (a mere, ignorant, finite, human being) to accuse God of being unjust!

I mean it's uncanny! Job has suffered so much, but God refuses to relent or stop the trial before his pride is completely broken. Because to have done so would have been to leave Job's it intact, confirm Job in his arrogance, and thus ruin any positive sanctifying effects that may have come from his suffering.

And there's one **LAST** thing we need to see in relation to brokenness being the pathway to wholeness. Job lived it out, and Isaiah spelled it out when he gave us the key to spiritual restoration and personal revival. Listen to what Isaiah says:

"This is what the High and Lofty One says, who inhabits eternity and whose Name is holy: 'I dwell in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite.'" (Isaiah 57:15)

To whom, then, does spiritual revival, and renewal and restoration come? It comes to the broken. The humbled. Not those who think they have their spiritual act together, but those who know all too well they don't.

It comes to those who know their own lack and poverty of soul; their insufficiencies and inadequacies. It comes, we are told, to the lowly and contrite of heart — the word "contrite" coming from a Hebrew term that means "broken" (actually "crushed into small particles," or "pulverized to powder," as a rock is pulverized).

And what does God want to "break" or "pulverize" in us" so that He may restore us, bring us spiritual revival and make us whole in the true sense of the word?

Our pride — not us, but that part of us which refuses to admit our own faults and inadequacies, yet always notices and gladly points out the faults and inadequacies of others. Our self-will which resists surrendering to God's will. / Our self-reliant spirit that sees dependence upon God or leaning upon Him in faith as weakness. / Our hardness of heart that resists being loving, compassionate, gentle, and forgiving. / And our worldly priorities that rob our zeal for God and seem to enable us to have time for everything but Him.

Those are the things God seeks to break in us, because they thwart godliness, inhibit holiness and stunt our sanctification! And thus until they are "broken" (or "crushed to powder ") God refuses to revive us. To bring revival to us when those things are still in tact, would only deepen even further our sense of pride and self-righteousness and make us unbearable to be around!

That's why God will not revive the self-assured. It would be contrary to His purposes for us and thwart the fruit of godliness which He incessantly seeks to nurture and cultivate in the lives of His people.

Roy Hession is right: *"To be broken is the beginning of revival. It is painful. It is humiliating. But it is the only way."*

"Our culture," says Nancy DeMoss, "is obsessed with being whole and feeling good. It effects everything, including the way we live the Christian life. We want a painless Pentecost; we want a "laughing revival." We want gain without pain; [growth without discipline and sacrifice] and resurrection without going through the grave. We want life without experiencing death and a crown without going by the way of the cross. Yet you and I will never meet God in revival until we first meet Him in brokenness. Our families will never be whole until husbands and wives; moms and dads and young people have been broken. Our churches will never be the vibrant witness God intended them to be in the world until their members — pastors and laypeople alike — have experienced true brokenness.... This is a message today's men and women are not eager to hear.... We want to lift ourselves up. God says, "No, humble yourselves and I will lift you up."

You see, God IS going to restore Job. He IS going to revive and renew him — physically and spiritually. But before He does He needs to break Job's pride further. It was cracked in half by his sufferings. It was quartered again by God's divine rebuke in chapters 38-40 which revealed to him his ignorance about the things of God and showed him he simply didn't know enough to say the things he had said.

But he still resisted admitting he was wrong for condemning God in order to justify himself. His self-will was still intact and his pride (though cracked) was not yet pulverized. He was not yet "contrite" in the scriptural sense of the word.

And true revival, renewal or spiritual restoration can only come to the humble, lowly, broken or "contrite" of spirit — which is why God presses Job even further (for two more chapters!) until Job's pride finally breaks in chapter 42, verses 5-6, admits he was wrong, despises himself for what he said, and repents in sackcloth and ashes.

TAKE NOTE! God does not lift Job's trial, end his sufferings, or restore him until after his pride has been broken, because the breaking of our pride in self is the last necessary step on the pathway to restoration and spiritual revival.

How about you: Are you being broken? That is, is your pride being broken? Trials left and right? Struggles coming at you from every angle? Satan sifting you like wheat?

Because if we read Job and Jesus and James and Paul and Isaiah right (!) it may be that God desires and fully intends to revive and restore and bless you like Job — but before He can or will,

He must first (as with Job) break some things in you — like lingering prideful, self-righteous, self-reliant attitudes or God-resisting aspects of your self-will.

PRIDE is like STEEL that must be softened in the furnace before it becomes something that can be formed and molded.

The **HUMAN HEART** is by nature like HARD DRY GROUND which must sometimes be watered with tears and broken by the plow of trials before the seed of His word can penetrate and take root.

The **WILL OF MAN** is like a HARD LUMP OF CLAY which the Potter must first pound and squeeze and stretch and pound again before he can then take it and make it into a beautiful piece of colorful pottery or art.

There is no trial where God doesn't ask us to respond in some fashion. Either in submission, or obedience, or repentance, or perseverance, or earnest prayer, or self-examination, or surrender to His will, or faithfulness despite difficulties, or worship in the midst of the furnace, or praise whether He gives or takes away.

What's the response He's asking of you?

Have you (like Job) given in partially when He's asking you to give in fully? Have you said "yes" conditionally when He's asking for you to say "yes" unconditionally?

Is He asking you to do something and you're resisting? Forgive and you're refusing? Admit your wrong and you're digging in your heels? Trust Him and give control of your life to Him, but your struggling to keep control of it yourself?