

## *God's Ways are not Our Ways*

by Rev. Robert Griffith

We have all heard the saying, *"God works in mysterious ways."* In fact, many people believe that's actually a verse in the Bible. I can assure you that it's not - but there is a Scripture in Isaiah that does convey a similar thought.

**Isaiah 55:8,9** - *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."*

It seems reasonable to us that God would open a certain door of opportunity for us, instead He might close the door.

It seems reasonable to us that if God truly loves us and cared about our happiness that He would heal our sick loved one and give us more time with them; instead He calls them home.

It seems reasonable to us that God would bring our time of trial or trouble to an end after we have asked Him to; and instead He may allow that trial to go on and on.

It seems reasonable to us that God would give us exactly what we asked for; and instead He gives us something very different.

One of the greatest challenges to all of us in the Christian life is reaching that level of spiritual maturity where we completely trust God. One reason why that poses such a great challenge to us is because God doesn't always act as we expect Him to act and when God doesn't do things the way we think He ought to, some people become disappointed and disillusioned with God; some get angry and bitter towards God; and some even lose their faith completely and give up on God.

Why did God command Moses to take the Israelites through the Red Sea? Why didn't He have Moses take them some other way?

Why did God command Joshua and the Israelites to march around the city of Jericho for seven days? Why didn't HE just snap His fingers and destroy Jericho and save Joshua and the Israelites all that trouble?

Why did God allow Joseph to be thrown into a pit and carried off as a slave to Egypt? Why didn't God just say, "Joseph, I need you to go to Egypt?"

Why did God have young David go out with a sling shot to slay Goliath? Why didn't God just send a bolt of lightning and zap the big lug?

Why did God allow Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to be thrown into the fiery furnace? Why didn't He just wipe out Nebuchadnezzar and all the Babylonians?

Why did God allow His only begotten Son to die an agonizing death on the Cross? Why didn't He just send ten thousand angels to deliver Jesus?

Why does God allow so much sickness and disease and pain in the world? If He can heal all sickness and disease, why doesn't He do it?

Why does God allow so much evil to go on in the world? It's obvious He took evil people out of this world in the Bible? Why doesn't He do it now?

The answer to all these questions is found in our scripture text: First of all:

## **1. GOD'S THOUGHTS ARE NOT OUR THOUGHTS (v.8a)**

In this verse, God is doing a comparison: He is comparing the way He thinks to the way we think. One of the hardest things for us humans to accept is that God doesn't think like we think. Just ponder that for a minute. You and I have thoughts every day and to us, our way of thinking is perfectly logical and rational. Our thoughts make sense to us. In fact, when other people don't agree with our way of thinking, we think something is wrong with them, not us, don't we?

We have all kinds of thoughts on politics and religion; how parents ought to raise their kids; how coaches ought to coach their team; how somebody ought to do his or her job; what the courts ought to do with criminals ... and the list goes on. Our thoughts make perfect sense to us and we can't understand how anybody could disagree with us.

We don't just do this with people. We do it with God. Many people believe they could do a better job running the universe than God. They think they know more than God and that they are smarter than God. God could learn a few things, if He would just listen to them!

But before any of us gets too puffed up with pride thinking we know more than God, we must remember we live in a fallen world. Our minds have been warped by the deceitfulness of sin. Our thoughts have been tainted by living in an environment of evil every day since we were born.

God, on the other hand, dwells in a perfectly sinless environment. God's mind, God's thoughts, have never been contaminated by sin like ours have. God's thoughts are pure, ours are impure. God's thoughts are righteous, ours are unrighteous. God's thoughts are perfect, ours are imperfect. God's thoughts are holy, ours are unholy. God's thoughts are eternal, ours are finite and temporal. God's thoughts are heavenly, ours are earthly.

God knows things we don't know. God sees things we don't see. God understands things we don't understand. And therefore "as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His thoughts above our thoughts." But not only are God's thoughts not our thoughts ...

## **2. GOD'S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS (vs. 8,9)**

If God allowed you to do His job for one day, how would you do things differently?

Perhaps for starters you might get rid of all the left wing politicians and educators ... or you might get rid of all the right wing politicians and educators! Then maybe you would put all the dictators and terrorists on a deserted island as far away from our society as possible.

Perhaps you would call down "fire from heaven" and destroy Hollywood, and Las Vegas and all the other cities that are renowned for their wickedness. Chances are before the day was over, you would end all the wars, remove all the criminals, heal all the sick and paint a beautiful rainbow in the sky. Then you might ask God to let you run the world another day!

Seriously, I think deep down, we all know that we would do a lousy job running the world and that God really does know what He's doing. We just don't always understand God's ways and Isaiah tells us why: God's ways are not our ways. God's ways are higher than our ways. God's ways are better than our ways.

Perhaps nowhere do we see this demonstrated more than in the way God answers our prayers.

We pray for patience, and what does God do? He sends some difficult or demanding person our way; because in His divine wisdom, God knows that nothing will increase our patience like the flame of trials.

We pray that God would make us more unselfish, and what does God do? He puts us in a situation where we have to put the needs of someone else ahead of our own and make some sacrifices.

We pray that God would make us a more loving person, and what does God do? He makes our path cross with someone who's handicap or physical appearance or obnoxious behaviour makes them a challenge to love. Loving the lovable is easy. Loving the unlovable is Godly.

We pray that God would make us more humble, and what does God do? He puts us in a situation that is so difficult, it drives us to our knees in prayer and surrender.

We pray that God would bless us with strength, and what does God do? He puts us in a tough situation that shows us just how weak and helpless we are in our own strength.

We pray that God would increase our faith, and what does He do? He allows us to experience the loss of something we trusted in for our security when we should have trusted in Him.

We pray for peace, and what does God do? He allows us to go through a very stressful situation where we really need His peace in the midst of the storm.

We pray to be more like Jesus, and what does God do? He allows us to feel the sting of rejection, or the sting of unfairness, or the sting of ridicule and mockery. Or the sting of unjust accusations and condemnation.

### **I ASKED GOD**

I asked for strength - God gave me difficulties to make me strong.

I asked for wisdom - God gave me problems to solve.

I asked for prosperity - God gave me the ability to work.

I asked for courage - God gave me dangers to overcome.

I asked for patience - God placed me in situations where I was forced to wait.

I asked for love - God gave me troubled people to help.

I asked for favours - God gave me opportunities.

I received nothing I wanted - I received everything I needed.

### **3. GOD'S WAYS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT**

If God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and God's ways are higher than our ways, it only stands to reason, God's ways are always right doesn't it?

One day a sceptic and a Christian were sitting under an oak tree. The sceptic started criticizing the way God got everything backwards in creation. He said, *"Take this oak tree for example. God put a little acorn on this tree that has branches that are more than strong enough to support much more; and yet God put watermelons on flimsy vines that can't even hold the watermelon up. If I were God, I would have put watermelons on trees and acorns on vines."*

About that time an acorn fell out of the oak tree and hit the sceptic on the head. He said no more.

Because God is always right, you and I can trust Him with everything! At times, we may not understand the things that are happening in our lives - problems come that we don't think we deserve; temptations come that we don't think we can handle; grief and sorrow come our way that we think is too unbearable to survive - but we can and we must trust God.

*Trust the Lord!* Is one of those sincere, but often trite-sounding statements we may say when we are trying to encourage or challenge someone. We may throw it around when someone has a hope deferred. *Just trust the Lord.* We say it when someone is anxious about provision. We say it to the terrified young mum as she brings her first child home from the hospital. We say it, perhaps in a slightly different way, to the wife who has just lost her beloved husband. *I'm praying for you. Trust the Lord.* And when we are miserable with fear - fear of the future, fear of man, fear of tragedy - we are often encouraged to *Trust the Lord.* Those three words do indeed contain great truth, but what does it really mean to trust the Lord and how might our encouragement better point us to the One in Whom we can place our trust? In other words, we know that we *want* to trust the Lord, but why *should* we, why *can* we trust the Lord?

We can learn a lot about trusting God from the story of Job. In the midst of great trouble, Job had to trust the Lord. I can only imagine the fear he experienced as one horrible circumstance after another unfolded in his life. If you remember the story of Job, then you know that he lost everything. And I mean *everything* that was of any importance to him. Job lost it all. At the end of his story, as he repents and sings praises to God, Job proclaims, *"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."* (Job 42:2). Job suffered greatly, and, I imagine, he was very confused. His friends didn't do a good job of comforting him; Job even called them "miserable comforters" (Job 16:2). But Job turned to God and was convinced of the wisdom of God, even in the midst of great pain and confusion.

We get a glimpse of Job's view of God when he says, *"His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?"* (Job 9:4 ), and, *"With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding."* (Job 12:13). Job isn't thinking about how he feels at the moment or even his current circumstances. Instead, Job realizes that in order to minister to his own heart he must remember the character of God - who God is, and why He can be trusted. Job doesn't ignore his pain - but he does remember his King.

So what did God do? He restored Job and his fortunes. He gave him twice as much livestock as he had previously possessed and gave him more children: seven sons and three daughters. Job was restored and blessed abundantly. The Lord worked in unexpected ways. The end of the book of Job almost reads like that familiar passage of triumph over pain in Romans 8. Job had learned a truth about God that many years later would be uttered by the apostle Paul:

*"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died - more than that, who was raised - who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* (Romans 8:31-37)

God doesn't do anything in His sovereign will that isn't both wise and loving. If God is for you, who can be against you? We don't trust God simply because someone tells us to. We don't trust God because two verses in Isaiah tell us that His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. We trust God because He is God. He is holy and awesome and righteous in every way.

We can trust God because we don't only serve a God who is sovereign and wise, He is also infinitely loving. God's love is incomprehensible. We can't fathom its depths, and when we try to compare our love to God's, we fall awfully short. We've heard it said before, but it's worth reflecting on the truth again and again, that *God is love*. Even though your present circumstances may not feel loving, as surely as you are in Christ, you are in His love.

When I am fearful, I need to be reminded to trust the Lord, even if it might sound trite. My mind is forgetful, and I need that reminder. So do you. We need to point each other to God and meditate on why we can trust Him. God is worthy of our trust and adoration. Thankfully, He is also patient, slow to anger, and abounding in great love. He knows our weaknesses and He encourages us to come to His throne of grace to receive help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

This world presents us reasons every day to give up and feel like God has lost control of His creation and it's times like that when we need to read Romans 8:28 again and again: *"... in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

There may be a situation going on in your life right now that you don't understand. You don't know why it is happening. You don't know how long it will go on. You don't know how its going to turn out. God doesn't ask you to understand; all that God asks is, *"Trust Me. Trust that I am with you in this situation. Trust that I have a purpose in this situation and trust that I will see you through this time. Just trust in me, for My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways ... for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. Trust me."*