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James 1:5-13
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IS GOD CONCERNED?

"He careth for you."

I Peter 5:7

There are many people who do not believe it possible God could be concerned about them. Some of those people believe as they do because God refuses to do exactly what they would like Him to do. They want God to intervene in human affairs and shuffle things about so that their own particular will is done. If God does not do their will, then obviously God does not really have any concern for human beings, if indeed there be a God at all.

Let me offer you a parallel. An agitated lady one day approached the station master in a railroad station and begged him to delay the departure of the next train. He replied that he had no such authority and the woman would have to see the general manager. When she got into his office she made the same plea. Her son, she explained, was seriously ill and not expected to live. She and her husband were on their way to see him, but the husband had been detained and would not be able to reach the station until fifteen minutes after the train was scheduled to leave. It would be perhaps the father's last chance to see his son alive. Couldn't the train be delayed for fifteen minutes? The manager replied that he just could not delay the departure of the train. "Can't or won't?", asked the woman. The manager then went on to explain how many important connections were made by this particular train. To others this connection might mean just as much as catching this train meant to the woman and her husband. Then the manager concluded, "My business is to run the most trustworthy railroad possible."

We human beings often get upset with God because we forget that his business is to run an orderly and trustworthy universe. Which would we prefer, a world in which water always runs down hill, in which H₂O always makes water, in which the sun always rises in the east and sets in the west; or a world in which these things may or may not happen, depending on whose prayers and petitions God happens to be listening to at the moment?

There have, no doubt, been many occasions when some people were praying for rain, and close by other people, whose pleasures and desires were of a different nature for that day, were praying that it not rain. What is a good God to do--make it rain in your yard, but not in mine? Would you really admire that kind of capricious deity who tried to please everybody all of the time? Such a God would not be a God, but a slave to men who played god. One of the greatest blessings you and I possess is the privilege of living in an orderly universe which is dependable and upon which we can rely. To live in any kind of universal disorder would in fact be a hell.

Another parallel to illustrate the point. What do you parents of more than one child do when one wants one thing and the other wants quite a different thing? One wants the family to go swimming and the other wants the family to go on a hike. One wants to watch a football game on television, the other wants to watch a panel discussion? Obviously the whole family cannot do both in most cases. You do that which seems to be the best for all concerned. What is the best for all concerned quite frequently turns out to be what dad would rather do.

Now it's not a very good illustration, I admit, for God is far more objective than most of us dads, but it does point up the problem. If God has to please all of the people all of the time in order to convince them that he cares about them, he will have to be a capricious and arbitrary diety operating in a world which is completely undependable.

In the family stituation which we have just cited, the children are quite likely to cry, "But it isn't fair." That is often what God's children cry when God does not bend his will to theirs. But who is a better judge of what is fair, men or God? Who is the best judge of how the universe ought to operate, men or God? Who knows best what in the long run is good for us, ourselves or God? As for me, I have no craving for a God so weak that he will always do what I want him to do. Looking back over my life I know how often I have wanted God to do something which now I realize would have been a terrible mistake.

II

Some unknown limerick writer once wrote some lines which put the matter to us rather plainly and straightforwardly:

"There was a young lady of Ryde
Who was carried away by the tide,
But a man-eating shark
Was heard to remark,
I knew that the Lord would provide!"

As I pointed out a few weeks ago on Communion Sunday, God does care. Of that I am absolutely convinced beyond all doubt. But with age and experience has also come the knowledge and understanding that God does not care for me alone. He cares for all that He has made. I am not, nor are you, God's little darling to whom he completely devotes himself. In his care for the shark, he may seem not to care for the young lady from Ryde, but such is not the case. The young lady from Ryde may well have gone swimming when she was warned of the strong undertow that might carry her out to sea. Is God to be blamed for her stubbornness, and charged with not caring about her because he refuses to turn back the tide?

Now, of course, I am also convinced that "all things are possible with God". He no doubt could turn back the tide, if he so desired. But he does not desire to do so because he wants men to have a universe upon

which they can rely. If it sometimes appears that God has intervened in the orderly affairs of his physical world, it is only because advantage has been taken of other orderly processes and laws of which we at the moment were not aware. There could be no such thing as science were this not an orderly and reliable universe.

When the Wright brothers began flying airplanes, they did not do so in defiance of the law of gravity, they did so using the laws of aerodynamics. When miracles occur, they are not sudden decisions by God to set aside His laws and make something happen that otherwise would not happen. They are the application of higher laws and principles which at the moment are not understood and appreciated. There is no chaos or anarchy in God's universe. He is not arbitrary or capricious. There is divine reason and divine sense behind all that is. Our task is to probe that divine reason and divine sense, try to understand it, then to use it as God would have us use it.

III

Another question frequently posed on this same subject and one that indicates that he who asks it has not fully understood the depths of God's nature, goes something like this: How could God care or be concerned about the millions and millions of people who have lived, who are living and who are yet to live?

Not infrequently we see in the newspapers pictures of families with 9, 10 or 12 children. If you think each one of those children is not loved the way you may love your one child, you do not know much about parental love. There are no limits to real love. It is not proportional to the number of objects which are loved.

Let me also illustrate this by analogy. Your body is composed of millions of cells. As you grew from infancy to adulthood the number of cells increased. Do you care about and respect the cells which make up your body any less now just because there are more of them? Just as those cells live and move and have their being in us, so we live and move and have our being in God. Paul likened us to "the body of Christ". In the same sense, we could be called "the body" of God. Does not God care for his "body" in the same fashion as we care for ours?

Let me offer you another analogy. Some of us are blessed with the ability to remember names, but it is just not a happenstance. People who remember names do so because they want to remember names, not because they can't help it. If such people really worked at it they could no doubt remember ten times as many names as they now are able to recall for we are told that we use only ten percent of our mental capacity.

The same thing is true of love. God loves millions of people because God wants to love them. That is the only way you can love.

You don't love in spite of yourself. Some parents don't love their children; they beat them and starve them. But the more people we want to love, the more people we will love. Our capacity to love, like our mental capacity, is unlimited. God's capacity to love us is completely unlimited.

IV

Now if you still find it difficult to believe in God's love and concern, let me attempt to tell you why you have that difficulty. It is because you refuse to believe until all possible objections to belief are overcome. You are afraid of faith. The scientific and materialistic world in which you live has convinced you that faith is synonymous with gullibility. You have to be shown. Everything has to be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt or you won't buy it.

The man or woman who has that attitude will never know or understand the goodness and mercy of God. God cannot be put at the end of a syllogism.

You can of course raise all kinds of questions which challenge the existence of God and the goodness and concern of God for his creation. There are two ways of approaching the problem. The first way is this: One can say, "I can't believe in God until I find an answer to suffering, pain, evil, disease, etc., etc., etc." In that case you will never believe in God. For one lifetime is not sufficient to find an answer to all the problems which could be cited as evidence against the goodness of God.

The other approach to the problem is this: You can say, "I believe in God because all of the evidence I have ever examined points to the existence of a supreme loving creator. There are lots of questions in my mind, there are lots of problems to which I cannot at the moment find the answer, but I know there is an answer because I know that God does exist, and God is good. And I will go on searching for those answers as long as I have life and being."

Having accepted for myself the second position, I can assure you that it is by far the most happy one. For well over 25 years I have been searching for the answers to some of these deep problems of theology and philosophy, not only for myself, but because I wanted to help other people find the answers to the same kinds of questions that bother them. After those 25 years I confess to you there is much I do not know, there is much I think I shall never know. But I do know this: God is, and God cares. His ways are mysterious, but his ways are good.