

The dust of having “blown” it.

“I lie in the dust; revive me by your word.” Psalm 119:25
“Job, are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die!”

Her expensive clothes were covered in dust from her harrowing experience at the city dump. She lay on her un-made bed; the curtains remained drawn, cloaking the room in a darkness that mirrored her mood. She was alone; more alone than she ever thought possible. She couldn't eat; she couldn't sleep; there was nothing to live for any more. She was married to the “Bill Gates” of the East. They had everything! They had nothing!

She was enduring what no other mother could reasonably hope to survive. The past week had been an incomprehensible nightmare. Her children were gone – all ten! They were once babies she carried and nursed; once little ones she had cuddled and reared; teenagers she had watched develop and mature! The grown up kids who were her pride and joy were gone! Gone in one cruel, crazy afternoon. Gone forever. And she never got to say goodbye.

She rose and wandered aimlessly around the room sobbing. Slowly she drew back the curtain just a little. Nothing moved in the landscape but a tumble-weed blowing in the breeze. The land they had farmed for years was empty and silent. Five hundred teams of oxen no longer ploughed. Not a bleat was heard in the meadows where once seven thousand sheep had grazed. There was no longer the unearthly din of five hundred female donkeys baying to be milked. On the paths, there was not one camel out of three thousand which had been the backbone of the most successful freight business in the East.

Her eyes moved to the tree on the corner of the compound. A mere handful of servants who had survived that fateful day, sat silently staring at nothing.

She could not bear to look to the right, towards the hillside where her first-born had built his beautiful home. The tornado had smashed it to pieces while her children partied inside. That tornado had also ripped out her heart.

She stepped back and shut out the light. But nothing could shut out the pain she felt. She and her husband had been robbed and ravaged. Of family, of business, of livelihood. Everything – or so she thought! At least she had Job! He was such a good man. She knew she couldn't cope but, just maybe, with Job's strength and faith, somehow she could get through.

And then disaster struck. Job took ill; suddenly, inexplicably, excruciatingly ill. She'd never seen anything like it before. It was unreal! No, it was unfair! He was the most Godly of men; his testimony in the family and community was without equal. He was the perfect husband, the very best father and the ideal employer. What had he done to deserve this? Nothing! She screamed aloud in frustration as she had done so often in the loneliness of recent days. Job was so ill that he had moved out of their beautiful mansion to live at the city dump. That was where she had been.

She had gone again that day with some soup trying to encourage him to eat. Every visit there was more traumatic than the day before. She observed the man who was once strong and healthy turn into a wretched mess before her eyes. Today she had watched him scrape his putrefying skin with a shard of broken pottery. And like the pot that had shattered due to too much heat – she had cracked. No, she had exploded!

She - who had reared ten kids! She - who had supported her husband from the humble beginnings with one camel and one donkey! Yes, she cracked. She - who had taught her three daughters to be strong in a male dominated society. She – who was a believer in the Lord; who had often told her little ones of their need to trust God. She had blown it. Well and truly blown it. And the man she loved had got both barrels!

She saw that Job had visitors who came to support him. Some help those guys turned out to be! But at least somebody cared about him. Nobody came to visit her; nobody cared. She wasn't sick. She was meant to "get over" her loss. What balderdash. What cruelty. Somehow all the frustration had come out.

"Job, are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die!" There. It was said. She had boiled over; blown a fuse; lost it!

And that's why she was lying in the darkness, wailing until she could no longer make a sound. She was lying in the dust; not merely the dust of an untidy house or the dust of clothes soiled by the city dump but the choking dust of shame. She'd lashed out against God.

She remembered Job's response to her outburst.

"You talk like one of the foolish women talk." How that hurt! In her anger she had assumed Job called her a foolish woman. She been too upset to realise he was gently reminding her that she was talking like the ungodly talk. Fear and frustration and helplessness was making her think and act irrationally but she couldn't stop her thoughts: "Job. Good Job. Holy Job. Still spiritual. Listen to him: "Shall we receive good from the hand of God and not evil?"

"I can't take any more," she screamed and ran, fists clenched, thumping at Providence. And now there was shame to add to the suffering; now there was guilt on top of grief. Anger merged into anguish. The darkness closed around her.

Have you been there? Are you there now? Do you choke in the dust of shame? You blew it. Everything was too much. You had held it together when the scan result was explained. You had managed to cope through your child's surgery. You somehow had endured even after your husband walked away but one day you blew it big time. Now you sit in the dark room with Job's wife.

We don't hear more about Job's wife through the long, long days of Job's illness. For Job it was a living nightmare and it dragged on seemingly forever. His wife did not carry the physical burden but her suffering was excruciating. She had to cope with everything alone. No arms to hold her. No wise counsel to reassure her. No spiritual giant to support and encourage her. We do not know how she endured those desperate times but we know the Lord's hand was upon her. He had a plan for her; His plan was to prosper her and not to harm her; to give her a hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

In the dark rooms of life, when the curtains are closed and the dust is thick, it is hard to believe that God is still working out His purposes for those who trust Him. But He is. He was for both Job and his wife.

The last chapter of Job reveals how God blessed a woman who had "blown it." God's purpose for this couple was to bless them more than they had ever been blessed before. God granted Job a complete recovery. The Lord restored Job's business so that it prospered again until it was twice as big. Job and his wife still loved each other deeply and God gave them a family; he gave them ten more children and the privilege of growing old gracefully enjoying their grandchildren and great grandchildren. All this to a woman who had blown it! How gracious God is. What mercy He grants to His children. What blessings He gives.

We know things that Job and his wife did not know at the time and perhaps never knew. We know that Satan had been granted permission to test Job. But also behind the scenes of the book of Job, God was quietly and purposefully at work in Job's wife. The light of conviction began to shine in and she knew she had sinned against God; she had turned her back on God; she had blamed God. Somewhere in the utter darkness of grief and guilt, Job's wife wept in repentance; she sought and found God's forgiveness.

But also in the background, another battle was taking place. Someone was praying for them both. To understand this, we need to come forward in time a few thousand years to Luke 22:32. At the last supper, the Lord Jesus addressed his followers and Peter in particular:

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Wasn’t He also praying for Job and his wife in their battle with Satan?

How wonderful that our Saviour is not sitting like a spectator at a game watching helplessly to see whether we win or not. He is praying for us and His prayers are effective. He knew Peter was going to deny Him, even with oaths and curses! He knew Job’s wife was going to blow it and say “Curse God and die.” But He said to Peter: “.. when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” He had prayed for Peter’s faith to remain firm and for Peter’s repentance when he faltered.

If you are a child of God He is praying for you too. Maybe you’ve blown it? Maybe you have shaken your fist at God? Perhaps you have turned against the One who loves you and sent His Son to redeem you? There you are hiding in the darkness and lying in the dust. Listen! Hear the Psalmist. “I lie in the dust; revive me by your word.” Psalm 119:25. Listen to the voice of God. Read His word. Think about His promises.

Are you choking on the dust of guilt over how you reacted?

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9.

Do you fear that God will give up on you because you blew it?

“I will never leave you or forsake you – never.” Hebrews 13:5.

Do you feel alone and overwhelmed?

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.” Isaiah 43:1-4.

Are you so worried and frustrated that you fear you will be crushed under your circumstances?

Philippians 4:6,7. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And what if God does not restore your health or change your situation?

“And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2Corinthians 12:9.

Nowhere does God guarantee wealth or health or prosperity like Job. There are no guarantees of miraculous healing for our children or ourselves. And there is no promise of our dead loved ones being raised to life - or even of receiving more children from God. Job’s wife had a wonderful new family to raise but there were still ten gravestones on the nearby hillside; there were still all the trials and disappointments that any large family will face. But God was in control and she would trust him for whatever the future held. His promises were true.

“My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.” Psalm 119:50.

Will you believe His promises? Will you trust Him too?