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KEEPING FAITH IN TOUGH TIMES Michael B. Beaugh
I Peter 1:3-9: James 5:10-11 August 16, 2009
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News writers and politicians keep comparing our current economic recession to the Great Depression of the 1930's. They say it is not as bad as the Great Depression, but what we are experiencing now is the worst it has been since then.

The movie *Kit Kittredge* is about a 10 year old girl who experiences the effects of the Depression first hand in Cincinnati. What I like about the movie is that it has some positive messages for us.

In this first clip, Kit gets introduced to the Depression when hobos come walking down her street and ask if they can work for food. Kit takes them into her backyard where her mother's Garden Club is meeting. You can imagine the reactions of these high society women. Watch what happens.

Clip #1 – 00:06:00-00:08:07

Fear, repulsion, and blame.

But not everyone reacts that way. Kit's mother has compassion. More than the others she seems to understand that what happened to these hobo boys could happen to all of them. And it does.

One day, Kit's father comes walking home from work carrying his desk lamp in his hand. He announces to the family that the bank has repossessed his car dealership. Kit is horrified. She knows what this means.

In this next clip, Kit experiences the kind of mockery that only other children can dish out. It makes her defensive and angry. But we also see how her father tries to reassure her that everything will be okay. He gives her a lesson that will sustain Kit to the end.

Clip #2 – 00:20:38

"Don't let it beat you." This is the central message of this movie for me. And Kit doesn't let it beat her. For one thing, she willingly gives up her bedroom so her mother can take in boarders. She even starts selling eggs, the one thing she swore she would never do, and actually enjoys it. And not only does she sell eggs, but she also wears dresses that her mother makes out of chicken feed sacks. So stylish are the dresses that other girls at school start buying them from her mother.

Then something even more terrible happens. Someone steals the lock box that has all the family's money in it. Unable to pay the mortgage, the

bank puts a foreclosure sign in Kit's front yard. Her mother starts packing up the house to move out. Of course, everyone blames the hobos who came to work for food.

But Kit does not give up. She sets out to find the real criminals and the lock box. With two of her classmates, Kit solves the crime. The criminals turn out to be some of the boarders in her home. In this next clip, one of the criminals gets religion, sort of. She turns on her co-conspirators and admits to their wrong-doing. Then she makes a little speech that is a warning for all of us.

Clip #3 – 01:25:05-01:26:33

Desperate times cause people to do desperate things. My question is, "How do we keep from falling into that trap?" How do we help others avoid that trap? How do we who claim to know God keep faith in such desperate times as these?

I decided to go straight to the person who suffered the worst calamities any man could suffer. Job. Here was a man of faith who literally lost everything. Not just a job, but his family and all his possessions, everything taken away from him. (Job 1:13-22)

When I found him, guess what he was doing? He was down on the floor playing with his grandchildren. I am not sure what I expected, but not this. **How does a man who has lost everything ever laugh again?**

I hated to interrupt this scene of pure joy, but I did. I asked if I could have a word with him. He looked up at me and immediately his face took on a sad countenance. He asked, "Why do you look so sad or worried?" I realized his face was a mirror of my own. "Come on down here and we will talk."

He patted the floor next to him. So I got down there with him. One of his grandchildren asked, "Do you want to play cars with us?"

I looked at Job as if to say, "Can't you send these children away?" He looked at me with raised eyebrows and handed me a toy car. This was not at all what I had in mind. Playing cars with the great Job of the Bible and his grandchildren? "So, what do you want to talk about?" he asked as he rolled his toy car on the carpet.

All I could think to say was, "You don't look at all like the Job of the Bible. How can you do this after all you suffered? I end up bitter if I get a hangnail."

Job looked at his grandchildren. There is no other way to describe his face. It was filled with love. He spoke with a catch in his voice, "God is a great God."

I shifted my weight. It is not easy to sit on the floor at my age. One of the children noticed and said, "Where are you going, Mister?"

I told him I wasn't going anywhere just yet. Job explained, "**This man wants to talk about God. He's not sure he can trust God's Word.**"

Without thinking, I exploded with indignation. Words came out of me like I was defending my life on a witness stand. "What? Of course I trust God's Word. I'm a minister. I know the Bible forwards and backwards. I teach from it every week. I believe what it says." The children stopped playing and stared at me like I was a lunatic. Job rolled his toy car a couple of times. He even made some car sounds.

When I finally stopped my ranting, Job said gently, "You sound a lot like me. When my world fell apart, I let God have an earful. For weeks, months, years I ranted at God. How dare he take my family from me! I was a righteous man. I deserved better. My friends kept telling me it was my fault. Some friends they were! I kept telling them how I thought God should run things and that if He would only listen to me, the world would be a better place. Can you imagine that?" He reached over and stroked the head of one of his grandchildren.

"I was in such pain," he continued. "My soul ached with sorrow and my days were filled with such anger. **I felt like God had let me down.** I wanted to die."

Job pulled one of his grandchildren close to him and held her. "If I had died, I would have missed this."

I shifted my weight again. One of the children looked at me. "I'm not going anywhere yet," I said. I rolled my toy car on the floor. Then I said to Job, "So what do I tell people who are losing their jobs and their homes and their retirements?"

He said, "Here is what you tell them. **Don't let it beat you. Trust in God.** Look, I can't explain why some people suffer and others don't, why some lose their jobs and others never miss a beat, why some good people die too young and some mean people live too long. But here is what I do know. Our God is a great God. His ways are just, though as mortals we may not see it. You've read the book of James, right?"

I nodded. He continued. "Like James says in James 5, 'we call blessed those who showed endurance.' You know why? Because through their endurance they learn that God is full of compassion and mercy. How could

anyone doubt that after He sent His own Son to die for our sins? Like Peter says in I Peter 1, *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'* 'A living hope.' That's what God gives us. **Those who trust in Him and give their lives to Him can live and die in the assurance that nothing in all of creation can separate us from His love.**

"I am not sure I knew that before I lost everything."

Job was quiet a moment. Then he said to his grandchildren, "What do you want to play now?"

I took that as my cue to leave. As I stood up, I realized that I had met in Job a man of deep faith and inner peace shaped on the anvil of suffering. One of his grandchildren asked me, "Where are you going, Mister?" I thought about saying, "I am going to ask God for the patience of Job." Instead, I said "I am going home to hug my family and play cars with my grandchildren."

It occurred to me on the way home, that the final clip from our movie summarizes what Job was saying to me. It is something we can take to heart in these desperate times.

Clip #4 – 01:34:40-01:35:48

When tough times hit, we are put to the test. We can let it drag us down and even sink our ship of faith. Or by the grace of God, like Job, we can endure the misfortunes in the certainty of God's never failing love. Faith does not keep us from suffering, but in faith we can be certain that the God of faith whom we know in Jesus Christ has our backs eternally. By faith, we might even discover new ways to live.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!