

SERMON JOB 1 WHY ME, LORD?

August 14, 2022

In December 1958, a play opened on Broadway that only had two letters in the title – *J.B.* The play had several handicaps to overcome. First, the newspapers were on strike, and not a single notice was printed about its opening. Second, it did not have any of the elements that seem to make a play successful – comedy, romance, music, dancing, and sex. Third, the play was written in verse and dealt with a biblical theme. Nonetheless, every performance of *J.B.* was sold out.

Why did people take such an interest in this play? The answer is quite simple. *J.B.* is short for Job, and Job is the book in the Bible that deals directly with the agonizing problems of human suffering. You see the story of Job hits people where they live; therefore, the insights from the story of Job are of interest to most people because all of us at some time or another in our life have or will deal with suffering. The theme of the book is the mystery of human suffering and the problem of pain. George Barna, who does national religious polls, surveyed a cross-section of adults and asked them if they could ask God just one question, what would it be? The number one response was: “I would ask God why there is pain and suffering in the world?” Do you agree?

Job is the only book of its kind in the Bible. Lord Tennyson, the poet laureate of England, called it the greatest poem of ancient or modern literature. Although an ancient story, Job gives us several insights for dealing with the problems of life today. This morning, let’s look at this biblical classic on the subject of suffering and see what we can learn. I will be reading from the first chapter of Job, verses 1 through 22. You can find it on Page 429 in the Pew Bibles.

Read Job 1:1-22

I don’t know about you, but the first time I read this passage I was confused. For instance, why in the world is the devil in heaven; I sure wouldn’t invite the devil into my house, would you? And why are he and God chatting like old friends? And why would God make a bet with the devil? However, we need to be careful to not get caught up with these kinds of questions, and lose sight of the key points in this story.

The Lord described Job as: “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God and avoids evil.” Now that’s quite a recommendation. Job was blessed with a great family, seven sons and three daughters. He was further blessed with great wealth. He was considered “the greatest of all men of the East.” Yet he lost it all in the blink of an eye.

Job became a test case in motivation when the devil claimed that Job only served the Lord because of the great blessings that God had bestowed on him, and that if God was to take away these blessings, Job would turn on Him and curse Him. So God permitted the devil to take away

these blessings of family and wealth because He wanted to show the devil that Job's obedience was true; that Job served God from his heart, from the proper motivation. So, in quick succession, Job suffered one great loss right after another. An Arab tribe stole his cattle. A storm destroyed his sheep and goats. Robbers carried off his camels. Then a tornado killed all his children. And after all of this, in later chapters of the book, Job was inflicted with sores all over his body. Yet, in all these losses Job never lost his faith in the Lord, or turned on the Lord.

The story of Job baffles most people. What did Job do to deserve all these tragedies? What did he do wrong? He was a good man, why did this happen to him? Why do bad things happen to good people? Now, unfortunately, we all have experienced situations that have brought up similar questions, such as why did over 3000 innocent people die in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11? Why do some people get cancer? Why do children die so young? Why is there so much hunger in the world? Why is there so much violence today? Why do good people suffer? At times we have all pondered these and numerous other questions and asked: "Why me, Lord?" The circumstances in our lives bring many puzzling questions. Someone asked C. S. Lewis: "Why do the righteous suffer?" To which he replied: "Why not? They're the only ones who can take it." I believe that the book of Job has been placed in the Bible to give us some insight into these mysteries of life.

Driving through Texas, a New Yorker collided with a truck carrying a horse. A few months later he tried to collect damage for his injuries. "How can you now claim to have all these injuries?" asked the insurance company's lawyer. "According to the police report, at the time you said you were not hurt." "Look," replied the New Yorker, "I was lying on the road in a lot of pain, and I heard someone say that the horse had a broken leg. The next thing I knew this Texas Ranger pulls out his gun and shoots the horse dead. The he turns to me and asks "Are you hurt? What would you have said?"

Later in the book upon hearing about his situation, three friends of Job come to visit him. Now I really think that they came more out of curiosity than sympathy; they wanted to see if what they had heard about Job was true. Isn't it amazing how bad news travels fast and how much people love misery, especially when it's someone else? Lou Holtz, a former college football coach said: "Don't tell people your problems – 90 percent won't care and the other 10 percent will be glad you have them." The visitors were shocked at what they saw; they did not even initially recognize Job. The Bible tells us that Job was covered with sores or boils from head to foot, and that he took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself as he sat in ashes.

His friends sat with him in silence for seven days and seven nights. Perhaps this silence was the best comfort that Job could have received from these friends because once they did speak, they criticized Job. Rather than encouraging him, his so-called friends claimed that Job suffered because of his sin. Remember it was the Jewish belief that if you had an illness or suffered, it

was because you or your parents had sinned. Job's friends believed that if he would just admit that he had sinned, his suffering would cease. Ever have friends who tried to comfort you like this? I hope not!

Then a fourth friend with a different theory came to visit Job. He concluded that Job was suffering as part of God's plan to refine Job's character like gold is refined in a fire. Unfortunately, like Job, many of us have experienced these same well-meaning, yet misinformed and insensitive well-wishers in our suffering and sorrow – people who think that they have all the answers as to why we are experiencing misfortune or having problems.

Job's friends were following the ancient belief of cause and effect – that is, if you sinned, bad things would happen to you. They believed that prosperity was a sign of God's blessing and favor; thus, suffering and misfortune were a sign of God's punishment. Thus, they believed that illness and misfortunes in your life clearly signaled God's displeasure with you.

Unfortunately, some people and some churches still believe this even to this day. However, we know this is definitely not the case. One of the biblical lessons from Job is that bad things are going to happen even to good people. God didn't promise us a rose garden. The Bible tells us that the "rain falls on both the just and the unjust." If the righteous were exempted from suffering then our motivation and obedience would be totally selfish. We would try to be good to avoid getting hurt.

Job's suffering reflects the undeserved trials that we all experience at some time in our lives. I have found from experience that sometimes these trials and troubles help us grow in our faith and walk with the Lord. Fairness and merit have nothing to do with our hardships, pain, and loss. What it comes down to is that there are no easy answers to the baffling problems of life. Simple formulas will not fit some of life's circumstances.

Job's friends insisted that all his misfortunes were his fault. He needed to confess that he had sinned. However, Job insisted that he had not done anything wrong; that the problem rested with God; that God was in error. He was unaware of the deal between God and the devil. In Chapter 23 Job cried out: "If only I knew where to find God; if only I could go to His dwelling place, I would state my case before Him." Job expressed the frustration that we have all felt at one time or another. At some time or another, most of us have argued with God when life has fallen in on us. We either feel separated from God or that God has forgotten about us and doesn't care. Tragedy, death, illness, and other experiences create barriers between us and God. Job had experienced every conceivable loss: broken and strained relationships, and loss of status, health, and material possessions. However, Job had not lost his faith; he had just lost touch with God. He had let his circumstances separate him from God.

Job was angry, and like us at times, he wanted immediate answers to his suffering, not sympathy. He wanted resolution, not advice; healing, not criticism. If only Job could get one word from God; a fill-in-the-blank answer. But God was silent. However, remember that God's silence does not mean that He is absent and does not care. Suffering teaches us patience. These words were penned on the wall of a prison cell in Europe: "I believe in love even when I don't feel it. I believe in God even when He is silent."

In Chapter 38 of Job, God finally broke the silence. Now this was not "the still, small voice," "the gentle whisper" that Elijah heard on the mountainside. This time God spoke out of the whirlwind. God did not appear in order to take away Job's sufferings. Rather, He came to be with Job; to reaffirm their relationship. To teach Job some lessons, the Lord interrogated him by asking some very hard questions such as: "Where were you when I created the earth? Did you make the sea? Did you ever cause a sunrise? Can you explain rain?" God knew that Job could not answer these questions. Job needed to see the power of God and the inadequacies of human beings. From this encounter, Job moved from a second hand to a firsthand knowledge of God.

We must remember that God speaks to us not only when life is calm, but also from the storms of life, in the midst of tragedy. There are times when we accuse God, as Job did, of bringing life's calamities upon us. And I have found that you can argue with God, because it is through our questions and complaints that God leads us to a better understanding of the situation. From the whirlwind, God invites Job to trust that God's ultimate purposes for life will come to fulfillment in God's time. Sometimes God comes to us in the storms of life, not as a relief effort but with His uncommon grace and assuring presence, and His abiding love for each one of us. He asks us to trust Him and walk in faith.

Like a play, the story of Job comes to a surprising end. Job had lost it all, questioned everything, and faced everybody only to come to the place where he confessed his faith in the sovereign mercy of God. In the end, Job's fortune was restored twofold; the concluding chapter in the book tells us that God blessed the latter part of Job's life, doubling the number of his sheep, cattle, camels, oxen, and donkeys, and giving him seven more sons, and three more daughters.

A key point that we should take from this story of Job is that our experience is not unique. Others have overcome adversity and so can we. No matter how bad you may have it right now, your suffering is no worse than Job's. He lost all his wealth, and all ten of his children, his health was failing and his wife turned on him. Yet he held on to his faith. No matter how bad you have it, remember that Job had it bad too, and yet maintained his faith. The story of Job tells us that it is possible to live a life of gratitude and praise even in the face of such adversity.

The suffering in life keeps us focused on heaven and not on earth. It is a reminder that this world is not our home; we are just passing through and should not get too comfortable down here. We think that the worst thing that can happen to us is to experience pain. But the worst thing that can happen to us is to resist Christ. For if you have Jesus Christ, He promises that there will come a day when there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, no more death, no more tears.

One Christmas two brothers expected and received new bicycles. Christmas day came, and both started riding and enjoying their gifts. However, in a few hours both of them became ill. The older boy became so sick that he had to be hospitalized. Spending the Christmas holidays in a hospital and knowing that he had a new bicycle at home did not make him happy.

He asked his father: "Why did I get sick on Christmas?" The answer was obvious and simple. "Well, son, there's a virus going around and many people are getting sick like you." Those were the facts. But the boy was not satisfied with the facts and learning the facts did not help the situation. However, the presence of his mother and father in the hospital room brought him comfort.

And that's the key point; what a person really needs during life's baffling situations is not an intellectual answer, but the presence of the Lord. God put Job in his place, which is our place also – the place where we live by faith, not explanation. We will never know the answers to all the baffling questions of life; however, we can make it through life if we trust in the Lord and walk in faith. When life gets tough, when we are faced with illness, disappointments, broken relationships, and all sorts of problems, the Lord invites us to take His hand and let Him lead us through it as He did Job. Whatever is weighing heavy on your mind this morning, give it to the Lord, take His hand, walk in faith and enjoy His presence. Amen