

February 25

Job 1

There's a lot we don't know about Job. Where he lived, when he lived, it doesn't say. But we know this: God loved him. God generously blessed Job with cattle, donkeys, sheep, camels- especially in a time when wealth wasn't really measured in money, but in animals, land, servants, and family size. Job had seven sons and three daughters- and they got along! He wasn't a father who played favorites or worked himself overtime without teaching his children how to treat each other well! And Job wasn't a miser. He was generous with his wealth, giving to the poor, letting the homeless and vulnerable eat from his table. And Job was pure- he didn't fall into the temptations that plague successful men. He was faithful to his wife- even in a time where polygamy was considered acceptable, he was faithful. He was a good man. .

Not only was he good, he was humble about it. He was a devout believer in God, and knew he was sinful like any other human being, so the first thing he did in the morning was worship God, offering sacrifices for his sins and the sins of his children- just in case they did something he didn't know about! If it wasn't biblically clear that Job was a real person and this is a true story, I'm not sure I'd believe it really happened! But it did, Job was real, and so was his faith, his humility, his generosity, *and his suffering*. The writer of Job pulls the curtain so we can see what's happening at God's throne. God himself brings up Job- he brags about him to Satan! And Satan reacts retorts- "He doesn't *really* love you. He loves the stuff you give him! He loves prosperity- but let me take it away, and he will curse you to your face." And God says, "Okay.."

It was the day they were eating and celebrating at the eldest son's house- a celebration of joy and gladness. Job, for whatever reason, isn't there. A messenger sprints to him, out of breath with horrible news. Sabceans- Arab tribes from modern day Yemen, came from the south.. All the servants were killed, and all of Job's oxen and female donkeys were taken. This would destroy whatever agriculture Job hoped to accomplish- their fields wouldn't get planted- likely a third of his wealth gone- just like that. While that messenger is still talking, another comes and says that all of Job's flocks of sheep and the shepherds guarding them were consumed by the fire of God- this could either be literal fire coming from the sky, or it could be lightning- either way, everything in the pastures is gone. While he's still talking, another messenger comes and says that all of Job's camels- an important part of his wealth, has been taken by Chaldeans- raiders from the North. Job, in less than 12 hours, has gone from being the wealthiest man in the East to the poorest- *but at least he had his family*. But while that one is still speaking, the last messenger comes and says that while his children were celebrating, a wind from the east struck the four corners of the house and it collapsed- killing them in an instant.

What does Job do? He doesn't curse God. He doesn't ask why. He also doesn't pretend like everything is okay. He tears his clothes- the ancient way of expressing horror, grief,, and pain, and he shaves his head to publicly declare that his life has fallen apart- like his hair. *And* he worships. In his pain he goes to God. And he says some of the most profound words of faith that appear in the Scriptures: "Naked I came into this world, naked I will depart." "The Lord gave, and the Lord took away. May the name of the Lord be praised." "My servants, my land, my wealth, my children, they never truly belonged to me. They were gifts from God. They were never going to come with me to the grave. They were going to leave my hands

eventually- it's just earlier than I expected, and it hurts. But God is still good. God is still loving. God is still powerful. God is still in control. God is still mine, and I am still his."

From this part of Scripture, there are three specific takeaways that I'd like you to have: 1. The problem with God and suffering. 2. Why Faith is the answer, and 3. Proving Satan wrong.

1. The problem with God and suffering. There are two major conclusions that people have when confronted with the problem of God and suffering. The first is moralism- the idea that because God is good, that means that if you are suffering, *you* must have done something *wrong*. The other conclusion is this: if God allows evil, then he must either be not good, not powerful, or not present, and therefore, not really God. Job proves that both of these conclusions are not only completely untrue, but way too simple and destructive.

Job was not being punished. God himself says that Job is upright. He wasn't saying that Job wasn't a sinner. But Job didn't do anything specifically wrong to deserve this kind of punishment. It doesn't work that way. This is especially important for Christians to understand. There are times when God allows people to suffer even when they did not do anything specifically wrong to merit it. When you see someone suffering, your job is not to ask, "why?" Your job is to be there for them. To pray with them. Help them. Cry with them. Don't say, even to yourself, "Well, maybe if they went to church a bit more, prayed a bit more, lived a little better..." That's not how it works. Also, God is still in complete control, completely aware and present, and infinitely loving and good, and still not the source of evil. It's all right there: Satan cannot do anything without God's permission- God in control of all things, including evil. Yet, it wasn't God's idea nor did he actively do it- Satan did. God is not out to get Job. Yet, God permits evil and even limits evil- he tells Satan that he may not touch Job himself. And if anyone has the right to say whether or not God is good or loving- it's the one suffering- Job. And Job says loud and clear- God is still God. Also, the problem with this idea is that it falls on itself. When a person says, "suffering is bad," what are they doing? They are assuming that there is a right way for things to go, and a wrong way. They are assuming that there is a good and evil that exists. But if God is not real, then there is no such thing as real good and evil. "Good" and "evil" are simply your preferences, and you have no right to be upset about it. The fact that you feel strongly that some things are good, and some things are bad, is evidence that there is a definition of good and evil outside of our own human preferences, and therefore someone who defines it outside of human preferences: A powerful, infinite, *good* God. If that's not true, you don't have any right to complain.

Yet, the biggest problems with these two conclusions is not just that they are untrue and far too simple, they are both an attempt to control God. The first, "God must be punishing you," is a product of fear- you are telling yourself- I don't want that to happen to me, so I'm going to tell myself that it was that person's fault and if I just don't do what they did, then God won't punish me like this." You're controlling God. The second one, "God must not be real," is controlling God by denying his existence. The solution to these problems is this: To love, worship, trust, and obey a God whom you do not control. Faith.

2. Faith is the answer. The most challenging part of Satan's accusation of Job is that what he says is generally true. If Job would have only loved God for the blessings he gave him, it wouldn't be true faith. Think about this: How many of you have been in a romantic relationship where as soon as you don't get into bed with them, or aren't able to afford something, you never hear from them? How many of you lost

friends because it was no longer socially advantageous for those friends to be around you? How many of you have family members that only call when they need something? It hurts! It proves that they don't love you, but are using you. If true, unconditional love is something we desire from our spouses, friends, and families, doesn't God have the right to desire that from us? This is what we see in Job. Job's love for God doesn't depend on how much God is blessing him. Of course, he's in pain, but he still loves God simply for himself. To denounce and reject God because he takes something away means that you actually love the gift more than the Giver.

How can we have faith like that? How can we love God for God and be able to trust him even when he takes things away from us? How can we love God and serve and trust him only and completely for him? Because God did something no other gods dare claim. He came down and not only joined human beings in their suffering, but suffered the ultimate Hell pain in their place so that they could look forward to a world where there is no suffering. If we are as sinful as the Bible says we are, and God has truly suffered as greatly as he says he has, and each of us is as loved, righteous, perfect, accepted, and destined for heavenly glory, what else could we possibly have to earn from him? He has already given us our desires. Only when we understand that can we have a faith that loves God simply for him- because there is nothing left to earn, and suffering is not a punishment, nor is it a sign that God doesn't care. He may not tell us why- and to be honest, would it even help if he did? What we need to know is that he's unconditionally on our side. If that is true, then he *is* enough in himself.

3. Proving Satan wrong. Part of what makes this chapter in Scripture so important is the insight we get into Satan's mind. He has a bit of truth- true faith loves God for God, and humans don't naturally do that.. But he is so foolish, so blind, so twisted, so lost, that he doesn't think God is loving or powerful enough to work that kind of faith in his people, and if God's people are doing the right thing, it can't be because they love God. but because they are as twisted,, vain, and greedy as he is. So God lets Satan do just enough to prove himself wrong. He lets Satan do just enough damage to prove that Job's faith was authentic. God doesn't just work good things in spite of Satan, but through Satan. As one pastor says, "God only allows Satan just enough rope to hang himself." God used Job's suffering to prove Satan wrong, and it glorifies God because he is so good that he can work true, authentic love and faith in the sinful heart. I want you to consider this question. Is it possible that God is using your pain, right now, to prove Satan wrong? Could Satan have said, "They don't actually care about each other. If you let me cause strife in their marriage, in their friendship, in their family,, they'll despise each other," and God is letting you be tested to prove that you can, with his help, forgive each other? Could Satan be saying, "If you let me tempt that young Christian, they'll abandon you because they've never cared about you," and God is letting him tempt you to prove that his Word is powerful enough to help you to overcome? Could Satan be saying, "If you let me afflict that church in Whitewater, make its members leave, give it hard times, your people will get cold and apathetic because they don't love you,," and God has been using this congregation to prove that his Word is powerful and he can use his people to save souls forever? Is that possible? It's not just possible: it's true. It's all true. The Lord takes, gives, tests, strengthens, empowers, and saves. May the name of the Lord be praised. Amen.