

"JOB, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Job 1:1; 2:3-6, 9-10; 13:15

Introduction.

January has been a rough month for me. Unlike any other month of my life.

Three doctors' office visits, one urgent care visit, ER and hospital overnight, a long sickness and then to top it all off, a kidney stone. In the midst of my pleading prayers for mercy and relief I wondered if this was the hand of God the week before preaching on the book of Job.

But I want to be very careful not to suggest I have great wisdom on suffering. Yes, kidney stones are unimaginable pain, but it is short lived relatively speaking. I don't know the pain of a chronic or debilitating illness. I don't know the lifelong pain of the death of a child or spouse. I see the suffering of the poor in refugee camps, the innocent victims living in Gaza or Ukraine. So I speak carefully, humbly, knowing there is much I haven't suffered and much I don't know.

Someone once said, "Don't trust a man who doesn't walk with a limp." Maybe another way of saying it is don't trust someone who hasn't been humbled by a few hard knock in life, someone who hasn't suffered.

Suffering makes you humble. Suffering also makes you wiser, it gives you a bit of perspective.

You don't want to read books on suffering written by people for whom the subject is only intellectual, and not experiential. But even then you have

to be careful. What lens are they looking through to understand their suffering? Is it fatalistic or is it Biblical?

Job

Job is widely believed to be the oldest book in the Bible and some have even suggested it might be the oldest book in the world. Be that as it may, it is fitting that the oldest book deals with the oldest of human problems, “Why do good people suffer?” This is the first of the Wisdom Books which teach us the relevance of God and God’s truth as applied to the greatest issues of man’s life in this world.

Why does God allow suffering in our lives? Why is life so unfair?
Why doesn’t He answer our prayers?
Why does He allow the wicked to prosper while the godly suffer?
Does God cause suffering or just allow it?

It is easy to get confused by the problem of human suffering. Remember the confusion of the disciples when they asked Jesus:

John 9:2-3 “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

Suffering presents one of the greatest challenges to our Christian faith, and also one of the greatest challenges to our witness to non-Christians who question our faith and our God and His love in the face of so much suffering.

Where is God in Southern California? Where is God in cancer and death?
Where is God when tragedy strikes?

The suffering in Job presents us with special challenges because it is irrational, it doesn’t make any sense. Job’s physical suffering is compounded by endless chapters of wrestling with trying to make some

sense of it all and coming up with nothing. God's silence until the very end is disorienting and confusing, and threatens to destroy Job's understanding of God, and the world.

Let's look at Job through the lens of three statements:

We often suffer.

We sometimes understand.

We can always trust.

We often suffer, chapter 1-2.

The book of Job most likely takes place in the time of the patriarchs in Genesis. He may have been a contemporary of Abraham. We are told:

Job 1:1-3 [He] was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 2 There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. 3 He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. ... 5 he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Blameless doesn't mean he was sinless, it means he had integrity, he wasn't a hypocrite. Upright means he treated others fairly and with just. He feared God, meaning he had the loving, reverent fear of a believer. He is repentant, turning away from evil.

He was a great family man with a wife and ten children. His public life was a great success with a thriving business and a good reputation in his city. It is possible he was like a king. He was a spiritual leader in his home and community, like a priest in his own house, praying for them.

Unknown to Job, God arranges and ordains a great trial of affliction in the life of Job.

Job 1:8-12 And the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” 9 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” 12 And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” All of Job’s trials are recorded in just eight verses, 1:13-19 and 2:7.

In the first trial he loses all his outward splendor and wealth, possessions and family. But he doesn’t curse God. In the second trial he loses his health, but again he doesn’t curse God. But make no mistake this sudden suffering is beyond terrible and he has no clue why.

We sometimes understand, chapters 3-41.

The center of the book from chapters 3-31 is made up of a series of debates Job has with his three friends, cycling through three times. Then Elihu, a comparatively young man, enters the debate with his rebuke from 32-37.

Calvin sums up the endless dialogue well. Job has a good case, but he argues it badly. His friends have a bad case, but they argue it very well.

Every major character in the book—Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu—assumed that God governed humankind on the basis of retribution. They believed there were no exceptions to the rule that God blesses good people and punishes bad people in this life.

All troubles are punishments for wrongdoing. They have no place in their thinking for innocent suffering. They accuse Job of great hypocrisy, of some great pent up hidden sin for which he must repent. If you feel like the dialogue goes on ad nauseum, that’s the point. They keep going on

and on, covering the same ground over and over and getting no where. They are stuck in their narrow worldview.

We do live in a world where there is moral cause and effect, but the book of Job reveals while God usually blesses the godly and punishes the ungodly, He does not always do so in this life.

We tend to think God blesses us because we love Him or trust and obey Him. When we do right that God does right by us. In this way of thinking we think we can control God. If we love, trust and obey God then He owes us blessings in this life.

This way of thinking is based on the principle of retribution, that we get what we deserve.

God's relationship with His people is not based on retribution, but on grace.

A lesson in pastoral care and concern is don't say things you don't know. Be humble. And if someone asks why, be very careful, circumspect, I don't know. There are several reasons for suffering. Sin, testing, refining, purging, getting our attention, increasing our faith and trust.

In my suffering someone said, "God must love you a lot to want to refine you so much."

We can always trust, chapter 38-42.

This is the high point of the whole book, such a revelation of who God is, His character and nature. After chapters and chapters of questions, demands for answers, why, who, how. After seeking understanding, God speaks.

What does God do? He cross-examines the witnesses by asking Job 77 questions for which Job has no answer.

But get this, and this is important. Before God spoke Job was without any comfort. After God spoke, Job is comforted even though he is given none of the answers he wanted.

He doesn't get answers, he gets a deep understanding that God can be trusted even when we don't get answers. God doesn't reveal His purposes, He reveals Himself. God is God.

God never changes. God is sovereign, God is good, God is never unfair or unjust, but always loving and just.

The Book of Job essentially is about learning in the midst of trials and difficulties to be subject to the majesty of God, to the immensity of God, incomprehensibility of God, a God who is sovereign, loving, fair, just and always good.

Can you trust God in your pain? The final message is to persevere with humility before a holy and sovereign and good God who is God.

The so-called "problem" of God's sovereignty in suffering is more than relieved by the sustaining purpose and power of His sovereignty through suffering.

So the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" becomes "How does a wise person respond to God in suffering?"

Though He slay me yet will I trust Him.

Romans 8:28 We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Jesus.

"How does this point me to Christ and show me how to live by faith in Christ?" Like all the Old Testament, Job points us to the gospel.

Job is a type of Christ. He descends into the pit of hell, becomes poor, like Christ.

Job is a kind of suffering servant of God through whom the purposes of God are accomplished.

Job is a foreshadow of a sinless, perfect, obedient covenant keeping Savior.

The suffering of Job, point us to the suffering servant, who was tested and tried by God and found faithful and true.

Job has tormented not because he was the worst of men, but because he was the best. He prefigures another man, the best man in history who suffered the worst suffering for the sovereign purposes of God.

The triumph of faith in a time of suffering. Job triumphantly declare, “I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25).

Suffering and death have no dominion over us because they have no dominion over Christ and we are hid in Christ by faith.

The Christian religion has more truth to speak about suffering than any other. Only in Christianity is there a God who loves us so much that He sent His Son to sufferer the worst kind of suffering and to die for us.

Implications and application.

The fruit of Job’s suffering is Job’s confession and humility.

Job 42:1-6 Then Job answered the Lord and said:

2 “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3 ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

4 ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’

5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;
6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

We do not see or know or understand the whole picture. We must learn to trust God not only *when* we don't understand, but *because* we don't understand.

Luke 22:31–32 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”. Through the prayers of the Lord Jesus, Peter displays that he is a genuine believer. What is true for Peter proves true for every genuine believer.

I Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.