

# **A LOOK AT A BOOK: Job**

## **January 5, 2014**

Tonight, we come to the first piece of Wisdom Literature, the book of Job.

The only person that you think is normal is the person that you don't know very well. You think, "She doesn't have any suffering or challenges in her life," or you think, "He's got everything all together." The reality, however, is the only folks who are really "normal" are the ones that you don't yet know well. Once you get to know her, once you get to know him, you realize she suffers too; he's had his hardships and his losses. All of us – even God's chosen – suffer quite a bit.

We come to the book of Job, which captures the essence of suffering. Those who look so squeaky clean to us – Job was that kind of guy. He had absolutely everything going for him. We look around – everybody seems like Job before the fall. He was wealthy; he was healthy; he had all of his resources. In fact, sometimes we feel mystified, stupefied and terrified at our inability to explain the sufferings that we endure.

The reality is you and I will not escape suffering. I have said often, from this pulpit, that you find yourself in one of three stages of life: you either have suffered already, or you are suffering now, or you will suffer in the future. There are no exceptions.

Unfortunately, about a month ago I was with a family in our church who was in a great time of loss with the death of a child. I didn't bring it up, but the dad said, "Pastor, you have said often, 'You either have suffered, you are suffering, or you will suffer,' and this is our day." He remembered those words.

I am sorry for you tonight if this week, this month, or this year even has been your time of suffering. But what was true for Job is true for you, it's true for me, and ultimately true for all of God's people.

The book of Job finds itself almost in the very heart of the Old Testament. When you did Bible Drill you remember you'd go to Psalms really quick, and Job's right there. Right there in the heart of the Old Testament we have this group of literature called Wisdom Literature – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Right there in the heart of the Old Testament. Wisdom Literature

is not like the Law – it’s not like the first five books where we are told how to live or “thus sayeth the Lord.” It’s not like the prophets where we’re told about the acts of God that are and will be. It’s not like the histories where we see the movement of kings and dynasties and wars. It’s not like that at all. You see, Wisdom Literature deals with the suffering of an individual or, more broadly, the suffering of God’s people. Some of the Psalms are individual laments and some of them are community laments. All in all, they are the heart – not only the center — of the Old Testament.

They contain beautiful literature. The trees clap their hands. The hills sing for joy. God’s enemies melt like wax. And God Himself rides upon the clouds.

Even those who are unbelievers will admit that the Jobian saga is a literary masterpiece. It’s about God’s people having trials and difficulties.

Why did Job suffer? Why did his friends say that he suffered? How did God explain his suffering? And how do we respond to God’s explanation?

The reality is we have a tripod that doesn’t work. We’ve got a God who is all good and all powerful, and yet we have good people who suffer. And our mind tells us one of these three things doesn’t belong. God might be all good and good people might suffer, but then God must not be all powerful, for if God were both all good and all powerful, then good people – our smaller minds tell us – wouldn’t suffer. Or we might say good people suffer and God is all powerful, but God has a sinister side. God is not all good.

You see the problem. How do you have an all good God, an all powerful God, and yet have God’s good people, like Job (in fact, God’s word tells us there was no one greater than Job in Job’s day) – how can God’s very best suffer?

That’s called a theodicy. How do we work out the problem of Jobian suffering in the life of Job, or in your life, or in my life?

First thing I want you see is

I. We often suffer.

Look at Job 1:1.

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. Seven sons and three

daughters were born to him. His possessions were also 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys – [that would be his list of stocks in our day; it was held in cattle and oxen] – and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of the men of the east.

He was righteous. He was wealthy. He had a good family. And, verse 5, he was wise. Indeed, in 1:3b, he was summarized as the greatest man of the east.

But Job's trials are legendary. If you know anything at all about the book of Job, you know something terrible happened to a very good guy – you might not know anything more – and that he was patient through it. That would be the novice approach to the Jobian saga.

The reality is, all of his suffering is actually told in very few verses. Seven verses. We learn about Job's losses and his suffering from only seven verses of the book. Look at 1:13 to about 1:19.

1:13-19

Now it happened on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "the oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

That's usually the way suffering comes – pile upon pile upon pile in our lives.

What I didn't read for you – we'll talk about it in a moment – the reason Job is being tested is Satan shows up to God and God says, "Man, I'm proud of Job. You haven't got that one, do you Satan? He's really good. Look at him."

And Satan says, "Yeah he's good. You made him rich. You gave him a great family. Everybody's good, God, when you bless them. Of course he's faithful to you. Of course he's righteous. It's paying off to be righteous. But you let me take away his health and his wealth, God, and he'll join my team. He'll curse you."

God says, "Okay, have at it. Let's see what Job does."

So this begins the trials allowed by God, from the evil one himself, tearing up Job.

First of all, he loses his wealth. They come in raids – people groups, ethnicity after ethnicity – taking away his flocks and his herds. And not only did he lose his possessions, he loses his children, his family. They were taken. And after he loses his possession and his family, all he has left is his health. How many commercials do you watch and they say, "Well after all, the only thing you have is your health." They are usually trying to sell you something in that commercial to make your health better. And if you lose your health, you've lost it all, haven't you?

So now he's lost his wealth, his family, and his health. And Job has absolutely nothing left.

Now Job, perhaps, suffered more suddenly than we have suffered. But in the end, he did not suffer any more comprehensively than we will suffer. You think about that. Job suffered more suddenly, but not more comprehensively. Sir Walter Scott said of our lives, "Come he slow, or come he fast, it is but Death that comes at last."

Job lost it all in a hurry, but at the end of all of our sagas, we lose it all.

Tomorrow I have a funeral. I believe she's about 96 years of age – almost a century. Whether 9 or 96, death and suffering is universal.

We don't really like preaching about suffering. In fact, growing churches today are pep rallies which deny Jobian sagas. We are full of suffering at First Baptist Church. I couldn't get up here and do pep rallies and pretend it is not so, cause it is so. But for some reason, we have a very unknowledgeable population that is

drawn to pep rallies. Maybe suffering is so bad on the outside of the courts of God's house that when you get here you want all pleasantries.

That's not the way they did it in the Psalms. The book of Psalms is the oldest song book that exists. And half of those songs are about suffering. They sang, they lamented about their hurts. We don't like that. But the reality is, we all suffer. And sooner or later we have to learn to deal with it, to come to terms with it.

But what we really don't like – and I know why you don't like it – is when good people suffer. “He's got lung cancer.” “I know, he smoked for years. He had it coming.” We don't like that, but we can deal with that. “He chose lung cancer. He smoked four packs a day for forty years.” But when the guy who didn't smoke gets lung cancer – “You sure he didn't smoke?” – we don't like it.

Or someone with liver failure. “Probably drank – drank his liver to death.” We can deal with that. But when he didn't drink.

He gets AIDS. “Wonder how he got it?” Sexual promiscuity? “Yea, well he had it coming.” Drugs, sharing needles? “Well, what do you expect.” Blood transfusion? What are you going to do with that one.

The reality is we can tolerate it when our own sin causes suffering. We cannot tolerate it when the innocent, the righteous, and the good suffer. We don't know what to do with it. Jesus' disciples didn't know what to do with it. In John 9, there is a blind man. Jesus heals him. But before the healing, you remember the disciples of Jesus saying, “How was he born blind?” They couldn't deal with it. How could he be born blind? You have to do evil to suffer. He couldn't do evil. He was born blind.

You see the problem. It was a guy who gets AIDS from a blood transfusion. He didn't do anything wrong. The innocent was attacked.

“Well maybe,” they said to Jesus, “maybe his parents sinned.” He was in the womb, his parents sinned, the sin went to him and he's blind. We have to trace it back to some cause. We can't just let unexplained suffering exist. We'll chase it down. Jesus said, “Nobody sinned.” That's the answer of Jesus.

And the reason we like explained suffering is because then we can be sure it won't happen to us. He smoked ; he got lung cancer – I don't smoke; I won't get lung

cancer. He was into sexual promiscuity; he got AIDS. He shared needles; he got AIDS – I don't do that, I don't share needles; I won't get AIDS.

You see what we like to do. If we can attach suffering to the fault of the sufferer, then we are safe. It's the most selfish thinking that exists. The moment we learn someone is suffering we try to trace it to them to protect ourselves.

So, we don't know how to deal with Job because the book blows all of our theories. Job didn't smoke. Job didn't share needles. Best I can tell, Job didn't do anything wrong. If he's the greatest and most righteous man that God had, if he was the superstar of God's team, what's the problem.

First of all, we suffer.

II. Sometimes we understand.

Sometimes, indeed, our suffering is attached to our behavior. Still, we want God's comfort in that kind of suffering, don't we. Whether we cause it or not, we need and want and seek God's comfort. Doesn't matter if you caused it or not. I caused a lot of things I want God's comfort through.

We often suffer, but only sometimes do we understand.

What happens to Job is that all of his friends show up. They know the good, the righteous, the wealthy Job. They've been to his parties. They know what a good man he is. He's helped them.

So they sit in silence for a week. Sometimes that's the best ministry you can give when somebody is suffering. Then, after a week, they start talking. And when they start talking, they start messing up terribly.

“Pastor, I don't know what to say.”

“Good, don't say a thing. Just go see her.”

Once you start talking, you'll get in trouble.

The majority of this book of Job is Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu in dialogue –three cycles of dialogue in chapters 4-41. Chapters 4-41 are the dialogues of friends telling Job why he is suffering.

And what they are saying to him is, “Job, you smoked. Job, you shared needles. You must have done something.” They can’t understand how someone who is innocent could possibly suffer.

Look at Job 4. If you sound like these friends, I don’t want you to be my friends.

Job 4:7-9

Remember now, who ever perished for being innocent?

“Now Job, you’ve got a little secret, don’t you?” they’re saying. “We see you falling. God has allowed all this calamity in your life. We’ve got the tripod. We know God is all good. We know God is all powerful. And, therefore, you’ve got a little secret, don’t you, Job. Who ever perished who was innocent?” This from Eliphaz, one of his best friends.

Or where were the upright destroyed? According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of His anger they come to an end.

“Job, you and I both know you’ve done something. You’ve got to be plowing and sowing trouble, because that’s what you’re harvesting. There is no way that those who are innocent will suffer.” That’s what Eliphaz had to say.

Turn to Job 8.

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered, “How long will you say these things” (Job has been saying he is innocent), “and the words of your mouth be a mighty wind? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert what is right? If your sons sinned against Him, then He delivered them into the power of their transgression.”

“You lost your sons because they’re sinners, Job.” That’s comfort, isn’t it?

If you would see God and implore the compassion of the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely now He would rouse Himself for you and restore your righteous estate. Though your beginning was in significant, yet your end will increase greatly.

Now Job, you've done something. Your children have done something. But you've got a life left to live. Just fess it up. Call on God. Let Him have mercy and let's move on.

Bildad – another great friend you'd love to have. What does he do? He has bad theology about Job.

It's like an old time detective show. Job is in the examination room and the cops are in there. "You know you're guilty. You know you've done." And they keep on, and they pressure and they pressure.

Turn to chapter 20. Chapter 20 is the third friend, Zophar.

Look at 20:5.

The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless momentary.

"Job, you had it going good, but it was just for a moment because you're godless."

Though his loftiness reaches the heavens, and his head touches the clouds, he perishes forever like his refuse. Those who have seen him will say, "Where is he?" He flies away like a dream, and they cannot find him; even like a vision of the night he is chased away. The eye which saw him sees him no longer, and his place no longer beholds him."

Zophar.

In the midst of all this three cycles of dialogue in Job 4-41, Job answers. Turn back to Job 16. This is Job's response to those who say, "You must have caused your own suffering.

Job 16:1

Then Job answered, "I have heard many such things; sorry comforters are you all. Is there no limit to windy words? Or what plagues you that you answer? I too could speak like you, if I were in your place. I could compose words against you and shake my head at you. I could strengthen you with my mouth, and the solace of my lips could lessen your pain.

Thanks for the pastoral comforting. Just be quiet when someone is suffering. Guys, thanks but no-thanks. You are of no help.



Often we suffer. Sometimes we understand.

III. We can always trust.

Finally, at the end of the work, God comes to speak.

God has heard all of this. Job has said, “Why? Why? Why?” The friends have said, “You’re guilty.” Job has said, “I’m not.”

So we come to the end.

Job 38

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you, and you instruct Me! Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who sets its measurements? Since you know. Who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who enclosed the sea with doors when, bursting forth, it went out from the womb; when I made a cloud its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and I placed boundaries on it and set a bolt and doors, and I said, ‘thus far you shall come, but no father; and here shall your proud waves stop’? Have you ever in your life commanded the morning, and caused the dawn to know its place?”

God shows up with a thundering voice. “Job, you know so much. When I drew the line for the foundation of the earth, were you there? When the sons of God sang in the morning, were you there? Have you ever in your life commanded the sun to rise? Do you know where light dwells (v. 19)? Do you know where darkness finds its place? You know, for you were born then, Job (v. 21). Oh, you’ve been around so long – you know everything Job, you’ve been around here so long! Have you entered the storehouses of the snow? Do you know where I store my snow? Have you seen the storehouses of hail which I have reserved for the times of distress, for the day of war and battle? Where is the way that the light is divided, or the east wind scattered on the earth? Do you know that the rain has a father (v. 28) or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb has come the ice? And the frost of heaven, who has given it birth? Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion (v. 31)? Can you lead forth a constellation in its season, and guide the Bear with her satellites? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens, or fix their rule? Do you know about the cosmos,

Job? Do you know about the mountain goats, what time it is for them to give birth (39:1)? Did you make the ostrich dumb? (That's what He says in 39:13. She has no wisdom. This is Wisdom Literature. Maybe the ostrich is a dumb animal, I don't know. Job thinks the ostrich is dumb.) Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane (39:19)? Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrible. Do you make the hawk soar (v. 26)? Do you give the eagle the command to mount up?"

And look at chapter 40. What do you say if you're Job? God showed up and said, "Hey, you've been asking the questions. Let me ask some questions." And now Job says, "Wait a minute. I've said too much already."

Job 40:2

Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it. Then Job answered the Lord and said, "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; even twice, and I will add nothing more."

Can I debate with you, God?

When you and I stand in the power and the glory of God, our suffering won't even need an answer.

Job replies, "I have nothing else to say."

Turn to Job 42 – Job's final confession.

Job answered and said to the Lord, "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You and You instruct me. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You. Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."

I am going to give you seven words that God answers.

1. Wisdom – Job, I have the wisdom. You don't know anything, Job. I have the wisdom I created it all.
2. Power – You don't have the power, Job. I have the power. I said to the sea, "Stop right here," and it stopped.

3. Presence – I had the presence, Job. I was present when it all happened. You weren't even there.
4. Mystery – Job, I understand the mystery. You know nothing about the mysteries.
5. Trust – You have to trust me, Job. I can't explain it all to you on this side. You must trust.
6. Grace – Life is a gift every day. God owes us nothing.

The 96-year-old woman I'm burying tomorrow, as with many 96-year-olds I bury, had a son die as a young man. God gave her 96, gave him 30 something. She found him dead.

7. Reorientation – Job, your problem (and our problem) is you have an anthropocentric view. We think about things in the ways that man sees them. We don't think about things the way God sees them. We are asking all of our questions from our own understanding. We need to realize it is not about us but it is about the purposes of God. "O God, how long will you forsake us?" It's okay to ask. But we're asking from our perspective.

You know, the killer in this thing is Job never learns that God and Satan had a deal. He never gets the real answer. God never says, "Job, you really were a great guy and you didn't suffer because of your sin. You were right all along. I had this dialogue with Satan and he said you worshipped me because it was good for you. And if things got bad for you, you wouldn't worship me. I had to show him."

God didn't have that conversation with Job. He never learns on this side. We know it. We're reading it. Job didn't know it. He never learns.

The question was will Job still worship God when things go against him rather than for him? And the answer is yes. "Even though he slay me, I will worship Him."

We often suffer.  
Sometimes we understand.  
But we can always trust.

Suffering will always color your life. But you get to choose the color. Job chose a good color. And, in the end, God restores everything that Job ever had.

You get to choose the color.

Small people are made bitter and angry by suffering.

If we're going to choose to follow a God who died on a cross – he's not promised it will be easy. If we have a God who took on flesh to suffer with us and for us, the story doesn't get us out of suffering. We're part of that suffering, but He suffers with us.

C.S. Lewis said, "I never doubt that God will do His best by us, but I'm just afraid how painful His best is going to be."

Often we suffer. Sometimes we understand. But we can always trust.