

Series Job

This Message Why?

Scripture Job 3:1-26

Today we move beyond the introductory prologue of the book of Job to a description of Job's emotional state of mind. Job has endured a series of devastating losses. His children and possessions are gone. His body is wracked with pain from ugly, repulsive sores. He sits in isolation on a heap of refuse, emotionally depleted in grief, pain, and confusion.

The prologue makes it clear that Job's agony was not due to any personal guilt. He had been declared by the LORD Himself to be a man who was "blameless and upright." In fact, it was his uprightness which had brought on him his terrible ordeal. He was a pawn in a contest between the LORD and the Accuser. It was the LORD who brought Job to the Accuser's attention.

Last week we thought about the cause of Job's sufferings. The Accuser questioned the reason Job worshiped the LORD. That was the surface issue. The deeper level issue concerned the integrity of God. The Accuser stated that God manipulated His worshipers by showering blessings on them, so that people like Job were loyal only because of the material benefits which were given to them. It was asserted that God was spiritually dishonest, that he was a hypocrite because He was offering incentives to attract the loyalty of people. According to the Accuser, neither Job or God had pure motives of love. According to the Accuser, if the benefits offered by God to His human followers would end, people would hate God and God would lose His right to be worshiped.

What is fascinating is how God handled this challenge. God could have immediately stamped out the Accuser and thereby eliminated all evil opposition to His authority. However, this was not what God did, nor is it the way He handles evil circumstances in general. God's chosen way to defeat the forces of evil is surprising. He chooses to work through weak humans rather than through His omnipotent power. He chooses to work through ordinary processes lived out by His faithful followers rather than through miraculous displays. It is through love rather than selfishness.

The two most detailed examples of how God defeats evil and vindicates His purposes is, first, this story of Job, and the second example is the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. In both instances, a voluntary loving relationship and faithful obedience on the part of humans was required. Last week we read that “Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (*Job 1:22*). In spite of the sufferings afflicted on him, Job was willing to trust in the mysterious providence of God who “gives and takes away,” and from whom he “received good and bad.” Job’s behavior verified the words and methods of the LORD.

Jesus had a clearer understanding of the reason for His sufferings and death than did Job, and it was love for the Father and humanity and faithful obedience to the purposes of the Father that enabled Him to endure the crucifixion. And through His behavior the challenge of evil against the Father was met successfully. The behavior of Jesus verified the words and methods of God. In both cases, the Accuser lost his challenges with God.

The fact that God had a plan and was working toward the fulfillment of His purposes was made clear in the prophetic announcements of Scripture. The LORD made clear that His ways would seem incomprehensible and unfathomable to His people. The LORD Himself declared, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (*Isaiah 55:8-9*).

The sort of parallel experiences of Job and Jesus should help us to understand how the suffering of innocent and righteous people can have eternal significance. If we understand who God is and have sincere convictions about our reasons for worshipping Him, we should be able to accept the fact that our infirmities and pains might have a divine purpose.

There are some crucial questions we should ask ourselves. Does our knowledge of Scripture help us to endure the pains and inconveniences of this life when they occur? Is the Accuser’s implication that people worship God because of the benefits given to them a latent thought in our minds? Can we worship God in those times when we may feel abandoned by God? The study of the book of Job can help us evaluate the sincerity and intensity of our love relationship with and confidence in God.

Read Job 3:1-10

Many days had passed by since the life of Job was so drastically altered by the various calamities which had fallen on him. An abundance of thoughts, questions, and doubts had built up in his mind, and these came pouring forth in words of grief, regrets, and anguish. There is an irrational tone in his words. Job had had many joys in his lifetime, yet they could not compensate for the present misery he felt. His existing agony was so overwhelming that he had neither positive thoughts of the past nor a hope for the future.

Job's words were spoken in the presence of three friends. We skipped over a few verses in chapter 2 which described their coming together to be with Job. Apparently they had talked about what to do, and then by agreement, had traveled from their homes to be meet with, sympathize with, and comfort Job. When the friends arrived, they were shocked by Job's appearance. "When the friends saw Job from a distance, they could hardly recognize him. They began to weep aloud, they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads, and then they sat on the ground with Job for seven days and nights without anyone speaking" (*Job 2:11-13*).

Job finally broke the silence with the soliloquy that we read. His first words were a curse on the day he was born. The word "curse" here refers to the fervent distaste, disapproval, and hatred of something. Job's wife had previously advised him to "curse God and die," advice which Job had rejected. The Accuser had predicted that Job would curse God to his face. This never happened. God was not the object of Job's curse. Rather, it was the day of his birth.

In his monologue, Job questioned why he was born into a life that brought so much misery. He wondered why death had not come quickly to remove him from his painful existence. Based on the thought pattern in the words of Job, we can divide this chapter into three parts. In the verses we read he expressed the wish that he had not been born.

Notice the kind of statements Job made against the day of his birth. "May that day become darkness;" "May God not take any notice of it or have any regard for it;" "May no light shine upon it;" "May darkness and the deep shadow of death claim it;" "May a cloud settle over it;" and "May blackness overwhelm its light."

Several commentators have noted that these phrases reverse the order of God's work in the creation of the universe. The first words in the Bible inform us that "the earth was formless and empty," and that "darkness was over the surface of the deep." That's what God started with when He said "Let there be light." Job wanted the day of his birth to be like the formless, empty, dark, and chaotic conditions of the physical world before God began to give it light, shape, and structure.

In addition to the allusion to creation, in his cursing of the night of his birth, Job made several other angry statements, starting in verse 6: "May thick darkness seize that night;" "May that night be removed from the calendar;" "May that night be barren;" that is, without life; "May no shout of joy be heard;" "May those who curse the seas curse that day" (the meaning of that phrase is unclear); "May the morning stars not shine;" and "May there be no daylight."

The words in chapter 3 are poetry, and Job was expressing raw emotions in an uninhibited way. He was unable to express himself calmly and rationally. His grief and disappointment were so great that he was not concerned about the logical absurdity of his desire. Obviously, history could not reverse itself.

Now read the second portion of Job's soliloquy, 3:11-19.

In this section there are two rhetorical questions: "Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came out of the womb?" (*verse 11*), and "Why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child?" (*verse 16*). Death at birth was the alternative to never being conceived and never being born. In answering these questions Job described the results that he wished for — non-existence. If he had died at birth he would be "asleep and at rest," and he would not have experienced any turmoil in life.

Job was thinking of the place of the dead, called in Hebrew "Sheol." Ordinarily, "Sheol" was not understood to be a desirable place, but in Job's mind it would be a place of peace and rest. He described it as a place where even the wicked were no longer in turmoil, where prisoners were at ease, where those who were nobodies in this life shared with those who were great, and where slaves were free from their masters. According to Job's illogical thinking, if he had died during his delivery, he would never have experienced his devastating circumstances. He had convinced himself that non-life in the place of the dead would have been a much better situation than his present condition.

Now read the last section of chapter 3, verses 20-26

There is another set of rhetorical questions in this third section. “Why is light given to those in misery and life to the bitter of soul?” and “Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?” In other words, “why does God give life to people and then subject them to meaningless turmoil?”

These are questions that people have asked throughout history, and the lack of a clear answer has been the reason many people have refused to place their faith in God. For non-believers, the questions are “How can an all-knowing and all-powerful God allow evil to exist?” and “How can the justice of an all-mighty God be defended in the face of the existence of evil?” For believers, the question is sometimes, “How can a loving God allow His righteous followers to be afflicted with misery?” As I mentioned in the first message of this series, many people have concluded, on the basis of these questions, that God is neither almighty nor loving and just.

For those of us who carefully reflect on the Scriptures, in particular this book of Job, there is enough information to provide for us a basis of trust and confidence in the sovereign providence of God. We have, in our Bibles, the fully documented story of Job, including the back story of the challenge by the Accuser. We are not ignorant of what was happening.

Unlike us, Job was not privy to any of the heavenly dialogue and so his mind was filled with unanswered questions. Of all the questions which raced through his mind, the ultimate question concerned the purpose of life. Did God bring people into the world only for the purpose of subjecting them to unrelenting misery, through no fault of their own? For many years, the relationship between Job and God had been real and genuine and sincere. Job’s life was full of meaning and purpose. Then, suddenly, his life was filled with confusion, dread, and alienation. Instead of a life which was well ordered and filled with contentment, Job’s days were filled with grief, oozing sores, and time on the ash heap.

Job longed for death because it seemed to him that his life had no more purpose. In truth, he longed for life, but it had to be a life worth living. It had to offer more than constant pain and misery. Job’s faith and his experience contradicted each other. He recognized that God was responsible for his sufferings, that it was God’s sovereign right to send both good and bad his way, but the foundations of his trust in God were being stretched to the breaking point.

Let's focus on the word "way" in verse 23 for a moment. Scripture makes it clear that the followers of God are expected to walk in the way of God. They are to "fear God and turn from evil," just as Job had done in previous years.

Unfortunately, Job could not recognize the way of God, the purposes of God, in his suffering. He accused God of intentionally "hiding his way" and of "hedging" (or "blocking") the way to a meaningful, purposeful, satisfying, and happy life. In his confusion, Job wondered if meaninglessness and purposelessness was, in fact, the way that God wanted human life to be lived.

There are believers who, because of adverse circumstances, also become confused about this, but they shouldn't be. God has told us that His ways are beyond our ability to understand, and that there are issues in the heavenly realm that may not be revealed to us. What we do know is that we are to glorify God by our lives and to be witnesses for Him in our dark evil world. Here's the point: our adversities, infirmities, and sufferings may be the means whereby God displays His grace. How we handle the difficulties in our lives may be the way we can glorify God and be a witness to Him. That was true of Job, and Jesus, and innumerable other believers in history.

Implied in the last six verses of the chapter is that God is the Creator of light and life. The assumption that Job had held for many years was that God created life for good, and that He had a concern for the welfare of humanity as well as all creation. When his circumstances changed, Job became confused. It would be easy to imagine Job abandoning God, even as it seemed that God had abandoned Job. However, he did not let go of God, even though he was ignorant of the back-story issues, nor did he cease trying to discover the way of meaning and purpose. In that sense, he was a role model for all believers. He continued to trust in God in spite of his confusion and distress. We today have many more reasons than Job to be faithful in our difficult circumstances.