

Sermon Notes: October 3, 2021

(Job 1:1, 2:1-10)

I want to share for a few moments about a man named Job and the story of Job in the Old Testament. The book of Job talks about faith and suffering, and “why do bad things happen to good people?” and “is there a reason for it?”. He goes into a lot of poetic discussions, but does he really give us an answer as to why bad things happen to good people?

When I was in First Baptist Church, Concord many years ago, there was a young couple in our church that wanted children. They had a hard time conceiving and finally she became pregnant, and they had a little boy. When he was two months old, he was diagnosed with cancer. At 2 ½ years old, he died in a Charlotte hospital. I’ll never forget that family being so grateful that God had given them a child, and yes, God had given it to them for 2 ½ years. Did they question God? ... Yes. “Why did you let us have a child and then take him?” But then they resolved it, saying, “God gave us a child and it was a gift to us and we’re just thankful he gave it to us. But I still don’t understand why he took our baby.” Some of you go through troubles sometimes and you wonder, “God, why do I suffer? I’ve tried to be faithful to you; I’ve tried to be righteous and holy, to go to church, to give and to do, and yet, I still suffer. Why?”

I want you to know that there is a man in the Old Testament named Job who suffered. He was righteous; he was upright and blameless before God. God told Satan, “Listen, this man fears me. He respects me. He’s devoted to me. He has integrity and faith. You can try him all you want.” But, God was betting on Job keeping his faith in God – and he did. But, I want you to look at what happened to Job:

In Chapter one, Job loses his animals, his children, and his servants. In Chapter two, if you go back and read it, you’ll find out that he was stricken with sores and a disease from the top of his head to the bottoms of his feet. He had leprosy and he was suffering. He went from being financially well-off and prosperous to having nothing but his life. He’d lost his health, his wealth, his possessions, his family – except he and his wife – and that’s all he had left. Before this, he thought he had it made. He was religious and faithful to God, and yet, it was all taken away.

I want you to know that we think of Job as somebody who was patient, but if you go back and read that book, you’ll find out he was a little patient in the beginning. But,

guess what? When he started dealing with all that was happening in his life and all he had lost, he began to question God. He challenged God's justice and fairness. He argued with his friends. He argued his own innocence to God. "God, I haven't done anything! Why am I suffering like this?" He even rejected his friends' counsel and advice. They said, "Wow, Job! You must've sinned greatly because God is punishing you." You see, in those days, they believed that if you were prosperous, wealthy, and doing well physically, emotionally, spiritually, economically, that God had blessed you and you were living righteous. But, if you sinned, God punished you and you suffered greatly. So, his friends said, "Man, you must've done something terrible! God is punishing you." He rejected his friends' advice and counsel, and he challenged God's fairness and justice.

Have you ever made a decision for your kids and they said, "Mom, that's not fair! Dad, that's not fair! Everybody else gets to do it, what's wrong with me? Why can't I do that? That's not fair!"? You have your reasons for making that decision and you hope your child will trust you enough to accept your decision, even when they don't understand. That's a little bit of what God does with Job in this story. Job has lost it all; he doesn't understand why and he questions God. I want you to know that Job goes through all of this stuff and he still doesn't get an explanation from God.

In fact, Rabbi Harold Kushner, who wrote a book called, "When Bad Things Happen to Good People," says that, "God didn't give Job an explanation – he gave him a response – a series of questions: Job, where were you when I put the stars in place? Job, where were you when I created the animals of the deep? Can you control the sea and where it goes?" He went on and on (through two or three chapters) asking Job questions. In essence, Rabbi Harold Kushner says, "God gave Job a response. And in essence he's saying, 'Job, I'm God and I know what I'm doing – but, you don't.'" Do you remember what the Prophet Isaiah said? ... "God's ways are higher than ours. His thoughts are higher than ours." The Apostle Paul said, "For now we see through a mirror dimly, but one way, we'll see fully." We don't always understand everything that is going on in our lives and why. God doesn't always give us a reason, but he's always with us. Job kept his faith in God and trusted him. Remember when I said that you as a parent make a decision and your children say, "That's not fair!" – and you hope they trust you enough, even though they don't understand. *God wants us to trust him even when we don't understand. He doesn't work on our timetable and our understanding is limited and finite. We are not God and we don't completely understand his ways. Job was*

struggling. But, I want you to know, in the end, Job said, “God, I’m sorry. I’ve tried to think of things that are too wonderful, too deep for me to understand.” He keeps his trust and faith in God.

If Job doesn’t give us an answer for why we go through suffering, what is the point of his book – his story? I think it’s to tell us that when we go through trouble, painful times, and suffering, that it’s ok to ask the questions; it’s ok to seek understanding; it’s ok to be upset with God – because God can deal with it. And yet, it’s to keep trusting in God. It’s to live out that and go through all those emotions – all that deep thinking and those emotional times and know that it’s ok. But, it’s also a challenge and an encouragement for us, as followers of Christ, to walk through those, who go through times of suffering and pain and wonder, “Where is God?” “Where are you, God? What’s going on? Why am I being punished? Why am I suffering?”

You know, we use all kinds of rationale to explain why people go through bad times. *Some people say that we suffer because God is detached from the world. He doesn’t interfere with the world. But, that’s not a Biblical or Christian answer, is it?* Because God chose to be involved in our lives by coming in human flesh, in Jesus Christ, and living, ministering, dying, and being resurrected for us. He still saves people; he still heals diseases; he’s still involved in our lives – so, that’s not an adequate reason. *Some people say that we suffer (and there’s truth in this) – that we suffer because of the malicious and irresponsible behavior of ourselves and others.* Think about people who put toxic chemicals in water, and it blinds little children or causes cancer. Think about people who go out and shoot randomly, not knowing where that bullet’s going, and it kills an innocent child. So, sometimes people suffer, and we suffer, because of our own errors, our own decisions or that of others – because God gave us freedom of will to choose good or choose evil. Sometimes we have chosen evil. Sometimes others have and we all suffer for it. But, that’s not enough answer. *We also have natural disasters, don’t we?* Natural disasters, like tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and flooding. *Some people say it’s all because of global warming.* Is that the only answer or is there more to it?

I want you to know that I don’t think we’ll ever be able to explain to everyone why some people suffer and others don’t. ***But, the thing to remember is that trouble will come to all of us at some point. Sometimes we may question God, ourselves, and our faith. I think the book of Job says, “Trust God, even when you don’t understand.” I think he***

says that it's okay to question and doubt, to be upset and to seek understanding, and he encourages us to walk alongside those who go through that same thing. Be there for them -- pray for them, encourage them, walk alongside them.

I heard a true story about a lady who had wondered far away from God. One day, she walked into an Applebee's restaurant. There was a little dog tied to the bench outside of the Applebee's. She walked inside and there was a homeless man waiting on a sandwich. He was going to feed himself and his dog. His dog's name was "Cheeseburger." He took Cheeseburger everywhere he went. He told this lady, "Oh, I'm staying at a tent out in the woods." She said, "You know there's a homeless shelter downtown. You could get a shower there, some good food, and a bed to sleep in." He said, "Oh, no. I can't have Cheeseburger, my dog, at that shelter. So, my dog and I live in a tent in the woods. But, we're fine! In fact, God watches after us and we've been doing well for years." He went on to explain that every morning when he and Cheeseburger get up, they walk outside the tent, and he looks up in the sky and says, "Dear Lord, I belong to you. I trust in you. Help me through another day. Thank you." He said, "When we get through the day, my dog and I get in the tent. I look up at the sky again and I say, 'Thank you, Lord for getting me through this day. I still trust you, God. Amen.'" That lady who had wondered away from God said, "I haven't had peace in my life in a long time, but I thought long and hard about what that man said. After I ate my lunch, I got in the car and drove down the street. When I got to the next stoplight, I had to stay there for a bit, so I looked up in the sky and I said, 'Dear Lord, I belong to you. I trust in you. Help me through another day. Thank you.' For the first time in a long time, I felt the peace of God with me." *Sometimes, all we can do when we are going through the struggles and the suffering, is to say to God, "I still belong to you, God, and I trust you. Help me through another day. Thank you, Lord."*

I think Job allows us to question God and to seek understanding. I think he doesn't give us a reason for why suffering happens because God never gave him an answer. He gave him a response and asked him a series of questions, and reminded him, "I am God. I'm in charge. I know what I'm doing, but you don't." I wonder how many times God has to tell us that we need to remember that we're human and not God. But, he also wants us to walk through pain and suffering with others. God loves us and God cares. Is life always easy? ... No. Does suffering come to those who are righteous and faithful? ... Yes. "The rain falls on the wicked and on the good," Jesus said. ***But, God will be with us and he will see us through.***

May we walk with one another in those times that life is difficult and we suffer. We don't understand innocent suffering because I don't think there is a reason that we will understand on this side of earth. One day, we'll understand fully -- but until that time, God says, "Trust me like that parent says to you, 'I know you don't understand, but I'm asking you to trust me.'" Job kept his faith and his integrity. May we keep our faith and integrity as we go through the difficult struggles of life. Amen.