

Message Notes January 24th, 2021
The Bible in One Year Week 4: Job (Part 1)
(Job 1:1-3, 20-22; Job 42:1-6, 12-17; Romans 8:18-25)

- **Suffering**

- There's at least one thing that *all* humans experience, from all places and times, without exception. *Suffering*. All people experience suffering. Being a human in this world means that you will encounter pain in some way.
 - The first thing a baby does when it takes its first breath *is cry*. And all of us (unless Jesus returns first) will eventually breathe our last breath and die—and people will *cry*. We all suffer. There are different kinds of suffering and different levels of suffering, but we all experience it.
- So, why are we leading off with such a grim subject today? Because we're talking about the book of *Job*. The Old Testament readings this week finish up Joseph's story in Genesis, but then it gets into Job, so today and next Sunday we're talking about this unique book. Today, we're taking a *big-picture* view of Job; next week, we'll drill down to a more specific part.
 - One thing Job does is cause us to face a question that haunts our all our imaginations: *What if the worst should happen?* What would I do? Would God still be enough?

- **4 Quick Facts about Job**

- I want to show you an overview of Job from the Bible Project, a great YouTube channel for learning about Scripture. ("The Book of Job," - <https://youtu.be/GswSg2ohqmA>) Let's review a couple things from that video to keep in mind:
- **1) *What kind of book is Job?* Job is a part of an Old Testament category of writings called "Wisdom Literature," along with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.**
- **2) *What's the historical context of Job?* We don't know much about the author and time of Job. It seems to fall somewhere after Noah and before Abraham. But it looks like historical details were intentionally left out to get us to focus on the message of the book. It reads more like a *parable* than a historical narrative, which is one reason why it's seen as "wisdom literature."**
- **3) *What's the structure of Job?* Job has a clear literary structure: a short prologue and epilogue, then a large middle section of poetry. In this section, Job and his friends argue for **34 chapters** about whether Job is being punished by God for some sin or if he really is innocent. (Unlike his friends, we know from the details of the story that Job is not being punished, God says so!)**
- **4) *Does Job explain the mystery of suffering?* Surprisingly, *no*. Job doesn't really answer "Why?" The Bible gives us lots of insight and perspective on the causes of suffering, but it doesn't really fully answer "why?" **We can't ultimately comprehend why God allows suffering, because we can't ultimately comprehend what it's like to be God, running this universe. But even though it's a mystery, we can still gain wisdom, perspective, and best of all, hope.****

- **4 Perspectives from Job**

- So, let's talk about that perspective. Job is a book of wisdom that widens our perspective, that challenges us not to oversimplify the complexity of life and the greatness of God. Just to give us a big-picture view, here are four perspectives Job confronts us with:
- **1) *Job confronts us with the depth of human suffering.***
 - There can be such depths of joy in this life. God is *good* and gives *good* gifts. Yet, there can be such depths of sorrow. We're living *out of Eden*. We live in a broken world: a good creation that has become marred with sin. There is much that is not as it should be, much suffering.
 - We wish we could look away. We wish we could avoid it. We wish we could stay safe in our comfortable little bubbles. But we can't. And Job, rather than answering "why" we suffer, instead helps us know *what* we can do when we suffer.
 - The reality is, for some, there is such a depth suffering that at times, death looks better than life. If you never feel that level of sorrow, you're fortunate: but there are many who walk through valleys so deep that at some point, death feels like it would be easier. In the grip of deepest

grief, in the bitterness of loss, in the weary road of pain, we can lose heart. Job gives a voice to this pain and doesn't invalidate it.

- Even though Job, amazingly, chooses to worship God in spite of his agony, he doesn't hide his suffering, his confusion, or his anger. When he first talks to his friends, he literally curses the day of his birth: *"Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?...Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come?...What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me."* (Job 3)
 - I know that not all of you have felt this way, but some of you have. And you're not alone. If you've never experienced anything like that level of suffering, parts of Job can be kind of *appalling*; but if you have, or if you sympathize with the sorrows of this world, Job can be *comforting* in a way, because it validates our experience.
 - Too often, Christians today don't give much space for this; we want to just focus on the positive, encouraging stuff. But Scripture doesn't shy away from the hard realities of life. We don't have to trivialize or spiritualize suffering. We can do great harm, like Job's friends, when we downplay it or try to over-explain it.
 - Of course, the story doesn't end there, not even close. And we can't stop there either: by grace, we have to press on, we have to finish the race. With God, in Christ, you can walk through it. In your weakness, He is strong.
 - I'm thankful that the Bible doesn't sugar-coat or downplay this stuff. Remember the bigger Story: on the way to Resurrection, the journey of redemption goes through a Cross.
- **2) Job confronts us with the mystery of evil.**
 - There is an Evil One. "The Satan," the accuser. The one who *opposes* God. The one who wants to bring suffering to God's creation, to undermine God's plan, to invalidate God's special relationship with humanity.
 - The Evil One is *not* equal to God, not even close—he's a creature along with other spiritual beings God made. A fallen angel: he was good, but he rebelled. And for reasons we can't understand, God allows him to exist for now until the final destruction of evil. So, we're in a spiritual war. Don't live in fear, but also, don't expect this life to be easy.
 - Yes, the war has already been won at the Cross, but the fighting and violence of the Enemy hasn't ceased yet. Suffering is rooted in the work of the Enemy, not in the heart of God. Still, we question *why* God allows it to happen at all. Again, we can't understand the answer. And when we get to the Glory that is to come, we probably won't feel the need to ask anymore.
 - I like what a theologian named Christopher Wright says on this: *"God with his infinite perspective, and for reasons known only to himself, knows that we finite human beings cannot, indeed must not, 'make sense' of evil. For the final truth is that evil does not make sense. 'Sense' is part of our rationality that in itself is part of God's good creation and God's image in us. So evil can have no sense, since sense itself is a good thing. Evil has no proper place within God's creation. It has no validity, no truth, no integrity...Evil is not there to be understood, but to be resisted and ultimately expelled."* (*The God i Don't Understand*, © 2009 Zondervan)
- **3) Job Confronts us with the mystery of God's power.**
 - Job reminds us that, however great we imagine God to be, the reality of His greatness is still *more*. I love this poetic statement in 26:14, *"These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?"*
 - Picture the most majestic things you've ever seen: a vast, snowcapped mountain range...*"These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways..."*
 - Ocean waves stretching out to a limitless horizon, beneath a many-colored sunset...*"These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways..."*
 - A clear desert sky at night, ablaze with diamond stars and spinning galaxies...*"These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him!"*
 - The first time you held your child, intricately woven in its mother's womb...*"These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can comprehend?"*

- How can we ever think that we could comprehend the power, wisdom, and love of this God?
- In college, I was getting a degree in biblical studies and I experienced a crisis of faith. Like Job's friends, I had gone through life to that point thinking that I was supposed to make sense of everything, but I was learning so much about the world so quickly that I couldn't categorize all of it. I had so much inner tension and cognitive dissonance. I *wanted* to follow God and I *wanted* to believe, but I couldn't *understand* it all.
- I was on a run with my good friend, Zach, when I finally opened up about my struggle. I went on and on about all these questions that I couldn't resolve and he just listened without speaking. (I actually wondered if he was paying attention!) Suddenly, he stopped running, looked at me, and asked a simple question: "*Are you willing to be comfortable with ambiguity?*" And then, we kept running, and I was quiet for a while.
- We need to accept the *mystery*. We need to realize that we can't fully understand God and God's ways; but that doesn't mean we can't trust God and follow God and love God. We can walk in intimate relationship with God without understanding everything about Him. Because we are *finite* and God is *infinite*, there will always be *mystery* in this relationship—and when you accept that, it's actually a beautiful thing.
- At the end of the story, Job still couldn't answer *why* these terrible things had happened, but he could say, "*I have seen the Lord.*" Job says, "*I know that you can do all things... Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*"
- After all Job's suffering, seeing the Lord was *enough*, enough to be able to trust God's wisdom and live in peace.
- **4) Job reminds us that the Story ends with restoration.**
 - "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life *more than* the former part...he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, an old man full of years." (42:12, 16).
 - Although the story is dark and challenging, in the end, Job reminds us that as great as the capacity Evil has for destruction, *God's ability to restore is far greater*. Evil can only distort what God has made. God is the creator. God is the redeemer. And God is making all things new.
 - J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the Lord of the Rings, once wrote: "*Evil labors with vast power and perpetual success—in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in.*"
 - Long before that, Augustine wrote powerful words about this, too: "*For the Almighty God, who...has supreme power over all things, being Himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works if He were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil.*"
 - Nicky Gumbel shares a story in our *Bible in One Year commentary* about a boy who fell down a flight of stairs and shattered his back at the age of *one*. He spent most of his life in the hospital. In an interview in church at the age of 17, he said, "God is fair." When they asked him, "*How is your life fair?*" he answered, "*God has got all of eternity to make it up to me.*"
 - All of us have this hope in Christ. No, not every story of suffering on earth has a happy ending like Job's. But *this life* is not the whole story. Christ is coming again to restore all things, to bring justice once and for all, and to right every wrong. God has all of eternity to make up for the suffering we face in these temporal lives. So, if we are in Christ, all of our stories *will be* like Job's—and more. That's why Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed in us," (Romans 8:18).
- **Trust**
 - In the end, we don't have an answer to "why," but we know *what* we're called to do: Trust. Face the test. Surrender completely. Die to ourselves, live in Christ.
 - Don't try to diminish the reality of suffering. Don't pretend that Evil doesn't exist. Don't try to box-in the greatness of God. *Do* expect God, in the end, to redeem and restore more than we can imagine. This is the wisdom of Job. The Greatness of God is so wonderful that *even if* the worst should happen, we can know that we're going to be ok in the end. Job points to this and the Gospel of Jesus fulfills it. Let's live it. Amen.