

Message Notes January 31st, 2021

The Bible in One Year Week 5: Job (Part 2 – How the Gospel Transforms Suffering)

(Job 28:1-3, 10-15, 21-28; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Romans 5:1-5; Philippians 3:10-11)

• Job & Suffering

- Last week, we began talking about the book of Job and today, we're digging into it again before we go on to Exodus next Sunday. If you've read Job, you know that this is a *challenging*, yet *amazing* book in the Bible. It's worth *wrestling* with, because you will find treasures there.
 - Just to recap, last week was an overview of Job and we talked about four different perspectives it can give us: 1) Job confronts us with the reality of suffering. 2) Job confronts us with the mystery of evil. 3) Job confronts us with the mystery of God's power. 4) Job reminds us that the Story ends with restoration. That's our overview in a nutshell—if you missed it, go watch it!
- Today, we're focusing on one of those major themes—it's probably the most obvious theme in the book and the first thing most of us think of when we think of Job: *suffering*. One of the reasons Job is challenging to read is that it really does cause us to face the depths of human suffering.
 - Job demonstrated an amazing amount of faith at the beginning, and by the end, he's profoundly humbled and trusting once again. But in between, as his physical and emotional agony lingers for what seems like a never-ending "dark night of the soul," he has all kinds of terrible emotions and struggles of faith.
 - When we go through times like this, it's not uncommon to *feel* like God is far away, to *feel* like God is against us, to *feel* like God is the one to blame. That's what Job was going through.
 - Consider this from Job 6-7: "*If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas... The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks their poison; God's terrors are marshaled against me... When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?' The night drags on, and I toss and turn until dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.*"
 - ...And that's just a few verses out of *42 chapters!*
 - Job brings us in touch with the reality of horrendous evils in this world. Not the kind of stuff that you can get through with "positive vibes." The kind of suffering and evil that makes you sick to your stomach, that threatens to fracture the soul. Job gives us a window into that part of human experience in a way that only creative, poetic expression can do.
 - A shallow faith, an only-when-it-feels-good, only-when-it's-convenient kind of faith, will *not* get you through this stuff. Faith like *that* will crumble in the face of these kinds of evils.
 - But what we have in the Word of God, in the Gospel of Jesus, is not a shallow, feel-good faith. It's the very wisdom and power of the Living God. It *can* get us through the *deepest, darkest valley*. It's a Love that's deeper than the deepest ocean and higher than the greatest mountain.
- At the end, Job comes to a place of some resolution where he's humbled by his encounter with God: seeing the *majesty* of God was enough for him to accept the *mystery* of what he couldn't understand. He's ultimately able to live in peace and his life is restored to greater than before.
 - But **we have something that Job didn't have: the revelation of Christ, the Gospel**. And this Gospel doesn't answer "why" more than Job does—in fact, like Paul said in Corinthians, it looks like *foolishness* to the world. It's about an all-powerful, innocent Savior who humbled himself to drink the Cup of Suffering to the last drop, like Job, and more. It's the last thing we expected God to do! And yet, it's greater than what we could have imagined or hoped for.
 - **The Gospel doesn't merely resolve suffering or bypass suffering, it transforms suffering.** It leads us to the glory of resurrection. Jesus opened to us a new Way, the Way of the Cross. It assures us that in the end, God will restore—*all things made new and all wrongs made right*. And in this world, it doesn't take much knowledge of history or world news to know that there are many, many wrongs.

- **“Where is God?”**

- Elie Wiesel was a Holocaust survivor who eventually won the Nobel Prize. His novel, *Night*, chronicles some of his terrible experiences in Auschwitz. (Now, I want to warn you here that if you or someone watching with you has sensitive heart or little ears, you may want to preview this story before they hear, or just mute this part and turn it back on in a minute—that’s the nice thing about streaming, you can mute the pastor! Nothing here will be inappropriate or overly detailed, but it’s heavy—like Job is heavy. If you’re willing to listen, I think it will impact us greatly, but if you want to be cautious just mute this for a minute, it’s a fairly quick story.)
 - Weisel recounts a time where all the prisoners were forced to witness the execution of someone who had plotted against the Nazi guards. But there was something especially sinister about this execution: the prisoner was a *child*. A young boy, led to the gallows. And his death was sadly not quick, but prolonged, because his small body didn’t respond the same way that a grown man’s would have. The guards made them watch this agonizing, horrendous evil. One of the many horrendous evils of the 20th century—an era that was supposed to be the age of progress.
 - As the crowd watched in despair, one onlooker blurted out, “*Where is God? Where is He?*” And Wiesel said he heard a voice inside himself say, “Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows.”
- Some would say that the author meant this was the “death” of God, so to speak—it represented a loss of faith, the death of something he once believed that couldn’t be reconciled with this horror. There’s in all of us that wants to cry out, much like Job, *what kind of God would let this happen?!* And perhaps that is what Wiesel meant—that God for him seemed to die there.
- But the Gospel is far more surprising and less simplistic in response: the voice Wiesel heard is the answer of Christ. In a way, *God was there, hanging on the gallows. God was there, suffering with this poor boy and with these horrified captives, where darkness seemed unassailable.*
 - Jesus the humble King identified with all the poor and powerless, all the unjust suffering of the world; he once said, “Whatever you did unto the least of these you did to me,” (Matthew 25:40).
- God was there hanging in the gallows, because God was *there* in first-century Palestine, *hanging* on a cross—another instrument of capital punishment, more torturous than the noose. We see there God’s only Son, hanging on a tree, suffering the physical torment of torture: gasping for breath; pierced, bruised, broken and bleeding. Suffering the emotional anguish of shame, rejection, and abandonment. Suffering the immeasurable spiritual travail of the sins of the world, drinking the Cup of God’s wrath so we wouldn’t have to.
 - And in that one moment in time, for *all time*, he took on all of evil and sin in this broken world, to purchase once and for all the redemption of humanity and secure the Way of our salvation. Darkness is swallowed up by eternal Light, Death is swallowed up by eternal Life. This is the radical message of the Gospel, summed up in the image of a Crucifix: an innocent man, the Lamb of God, suffering and dying on a Cross. And in His Resurrection, He transformed this horrible symbol of evil and suffering into glorious, Good News that no darkness can undo. It’s *through* His suffering that He overcame. “For the joy set before him, he endured...” (Heb. 12:2)
- And now he reigns. Although evil lingers and works terrors in the earth to this day, its days are numbered: because the King is returning and He will bring justice to all the horrendous evils of this world, He will give mercy to all who will receive Him, and He will make all things new and forever destroy the works of Evil.
 - *This* is what we know that Job didn’t know: and yet, for Job, to see the *majesty* of God was still enough to accept the *mystery* and trust the Lord.

- **The Gospel & Suffering**

- Job reminds us that there can be such an experience of suffering that death seems preferable to life. Evils that consume our attention and make the memory of goodness fade.
- On the other hand, the Gospel shows us that there exists such a Joy and Victory and Glory that, in the end, all the pains of life will seem like a small thing, a distant memory.

- C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Great Divorce*, “Both good and evil, when they are full grown, become retrospective...That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporary suffering, ‘No future bliss can make up for it,’ not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.”
- Like we sing in the hymn, How Firm a Foundation: “When through the deep waters I call thee to go / The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow / For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless / And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.”
- The power of the Gospel of Jesus is able to *sanctify* even our deepest distress. God is not far away from our pain; God in Christ *transforms* our suffering. We can bring the horrors of this life to the Cross and see them there transformed. And this is how the Gospel transforms suffering:
 - **The Incarnation shows us that God suffers with us:** he became one of us and identifies with our human experience, with all of our pain.
 - **The Crucifixion shows us that God suffered for us:** at the Cross, God’s justice and mercy meet to bring us redemption.
 - **The Resurrection assures us that God redeems us:** as we die with Christ we will rise with Christ, and the weight of glory will forever replace the weight of our sufferings—no matter how great they seem at this time.
- Now, because we are in Christ and Christ is in us, when we suffer, we suffer *with Christ*. Think of Paul in Philippians 3: “I want to know Christ...the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection...”
- What does all this mean? Let’s give the let word to J. D. Walt. He’s reflecting on Paul writing Philippians from prison: “Consider Paul’s words: ‘Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel,’ (Phil. 1:12). Translation: You can put the Apostle in jail but you can’t imprison the gospel. It will only get stronger. We so want the Christian faith to be a ‘Get out of Jail Free’ Card, immunity from tragedy, protection from cancer, and a happy life in the suburbs. It is none of those things. Instead, following Jesus should more often take us into harm’s way than out of it. Why? Because it’s in the most turbulent storms where Jesus demonstrates the most transformational suffering. These are the places where the awful things that happen to us, quote, ‘actually serve to advance the gospel.’...When you put Paul in jail you put Jesus in jail and when you put Jesus in jail the jail changes. Give a tried and true follower of Jesus cancer and you give Jesus cancer and when you give Jesus cancer he will make it serve the purposes of God. This is what the gospel does. Jesus can take a situation far from the realm of God’s purpose and cause it to serve the purposes of God in astonishing ways. We must only allow our suffering to lead us to deeper surrender to Jesus...Every time and in every one of these situations, many are watching and waiting to see God arise...Let’s give them something to talk about.” (“First Love: A Study in Philippians,” *The Seedbed Daily Text*)
- The Gospel changes everything.
 - Another Holocaust survivor, Corrie Ten Boom (a “tried and true follower of Jesus” as J.D. would say) went on to impact the world through her testimony of the Gospel’s power. A few weeks ago, I shared her quote: “There is no pit so deep that the love of God is not deeper still.” What I didn’t share is that these were not her original words, but a favorite saying of her sister, Betsie, who was in the concentration camp with her. Betsie and their father died there, while Corrie was eventually set free. “What has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel.”
 - You know, I guess in the bigger picture even Job could say now, “What has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel.” Because his story became part of God’s bigger Story.
 - We can say like Job, in a much more particular way, “I know my redeemer lives,” (19:25).
 - He suffered for us, He suffers with us, and He gives us the hope of Glory.
 - So, have courage. Take heart. And fix your eyes on Jesus. Amen.