

## Job

The book of Job is highly significant for a number of reasons. First, in a literary sense, it is possibly the oldest book in the bible. Before Moses wrote his Pentateuch, there was Job, living in the times of the patriarchs – Abraham Isaac and Jacob. He is outside the land of Canaan. And shows us that people knew of God in other parts of the world even then. Truly God has always had his Church, his believers.

The depictions of the flora and fauna of the world are quite astounding. A behemoth that shakes the earth as it walks, an elephant? Ah, but it has a tail the size of a cedar tree. The leviathan of the ocean, so vast, so armored, it laughs at spear and harpoon alike. What might those accounts signify? I leave that to your imagination that will surely wander throughout this sermon.

Secondly, this book is significant because it deals with the problem of evil. The atheists shout, “Checkmate, Christians, there can’t be a God because there is evil in the world!” And we respond, “Wow, you know what, I never noticed! I wonder if any other Christian in the history of the world has realized or thought about this?” And here we are, the oldest book in the bible is all about – evil.

It seems almost like a fairy tale when you read chapter one and satan goes and talks with God. But we have known this. That fallen angel had a seat in the throne

room from which he would accuse God's people. Satan does mean "the accuser" after all. Why did God entertain such things? To hear both sides of the story? Or to show his justice and mercy over and against accusation and to show the might of His Son our Lord Jesus, who in his ministry, sends the devil falling like lightning from heaven. So that now the accuser's testimony is no longer permissible in that court, not anymore – which is good news for you, Christian.

Is there any good news for Job? The devil claims that Job only worships God because God gives him nice things. Is that why you worship God, modern American with your freedoms and toys and finances? What if we took them away from you? So God says, "I'll take that bet." And allows Satan to kill Job's family, and eventually strike Job with a painful illness.

And, lest we think God is a gambling addict, who sacrifices the lives of his people willy-nilly. Consider this: Ultimately the deaths of Job's sons and daughters served to shame the devil, to prove that he is wrong, and point to a Redeemer who will restore them back to Job in the resurrection. I pray all our deaths will be so good.

One must also note that the devil does not kill Job's wife who, let's be honest, lost her children too, so we can only imagine her struggles and pain, but nonetheless encourages Job to "curse God and die." I think the devil had a plan for keeping her around, though, as he is a complete loser, do not miss the fact that Job does not

curse God, and God restores Job *and his wife* with children and a promise to see that first batch of kids again – I tend to think Job’s wife found a balm and healing for her woes in God as well, can you find a balm for yours in Him also?

But that balm and healing takes time to come around, namely 30 or so chapters!

The middle 30 chapters of Job are actually quite tricky. Because in them you find truth, intermixed with falsehoods, because Job is visited by his friends who are pretty wrong, and so is Job. And we often bash on these guys but don’t miss how much they cared for their friend. Chapter 2 verse 11 thru 13: And [Job’s friends] made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.” Lord, provide us all such friends.

And when they do start talking we begin to hear from Job, I think, the most sincere cries of anguish and suffering that can be recorded. I’ve sat in the office as people described their depression. “There IS no hope, Pastor. It will NEVER get better, Pastor. I wish I was dead already, Pastor.” I’ve heard them all. And Job says them all. I have been at the home where the lady was so distraught that every time I tried to give some hope of the gospel she got angrier. She didn’t want to hear it. She

refused to be comforted, like Rachel weeping for her children the anguish is so great. And so it is with Job. If you have had a dark night of the soul, you are not alone. Job has walked that road before. As has his Redeemer and yours, Jesus, but lets not spoil a long sermon...

In response to his grief his friends offer their counsel. One says, "Well you must have done something wrong because the innocent prosper." Careful, careful, don't we know some wicked that prosper..? Another says, "Yeah you better repent or you might die like your children (who clearly did something wrong)." Woah, woah, woah. The next says, "Your attitude during your suffering may bring even worse upon your head, so be careful." Which may actually be true, but there is no tact, no sympathy, no Gospel. Is there any wonder Job tells them in chapter 16, "I have heard many things; miserable comforters are you all."

And, so often, is that not us? You see, each of them thought they had the answer to the evil that had befallen Job, they thought it was a simple recipe. And we think we have the answers too! We think its our parents' fault, we think it's that political party's fault, we think it's because we didn't pray enough, and we give this reason and that reason for our evil and why it's OK, but not *them*, we have them figured out: they are a bad person. But did any of us stop to think that maybe this world is so evil because we are in it? Because it's our fault? Did any of us stop to think that maybe a particular instance of evil out there ISN'T actually that other person's

fault? The fake, false, prosperity Gospel says exactly what the three friends say: If you believed enough and lived a good enough life no harm would befall you. You would be healthy, wealthy, and wise. Tell that to the four year old with leukemia. Tell it to Bartholemew getting his skin peeled off for preaching the Gospel.

It isn't true. There are so many possible reasons evil happens, maybe God made a bet with the devil that you could get cancer and not fall away. Scandalous? Yes. But congratulations you have a chance to shame the devil – keep the faith!

And this is Job's struggle. He is angry at God, he is in pain and suffering and anguish and he doesn't know why. He wants to disown God, he wants to, but he can't. Which is our first clue – why do we worship God? Because he gives us wealth and health? No. And Job is getting a painful lesson in that. So in the middle of his despair and anguish he cries out, Chapter 19, that he knows there is a Redeemer who lives and Job after his flesh is thus destroyed, he will see God with his own eyes. And there is no resurrection in the Old Testament? No, no, no, the oldest book of the Old Testament knows about the resurrection and the Redeemer who will judge.

But even as he confesses that he knows there is a Redeemer, it's true, there is a God and he is Good in spite of evil and suffering, he knows that, but, well, he is still struggling. Demanding to speak with that judge, to state his case before the

judge and say, “I think you made a clerical error! You messed up God!” And has that ever been you? “God I know you promised good, but I am having a hard time seeing it right now!” Can a Christian pray that prayer? I think so. It’s not a fun prayer, no. But God already knows your hurt and anger and doubt, so you might as well tell him.

But be careful, as Job learns, he might answer.

But before we get there, I will just briefly mention the fourth friend: Elihu. As the youngest he speaks last. He rebukes the other three friends and rebukes Job. He alone actually offers truth into Job’s anguish. And is adamant that God has not cheated him, and cannot error in his just judgments. And points out that God is more than capable of using suffering and evil for his ends and even for our deliverance. And we have echoes of Romans 8:28 where Paul reminds us that God will work all things (good and evil things) for the good of his people. But that’s hard to see when you are in the midst of suffering isn’t it? Job can relate. So again he demands to speak with God.

And so, finally, after 37 chapters, God answers. Will there be kind and tender words of explanation from a warm ray of sunshine? 38:1 Then Yahweh answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make

it known to me.” And then, as we read in our lesson, we have the first batch of questions our Lord gives to Job. And he can answer none of them.

But we are smart engineers, “I know the taxonomy of these creatures, and we could plum the depths of the marianas trench now, and we know that storms are caused by low pressure systems...” Stop. Is that going to be your defense before the Maker of all things? Are you going to outsmart the One who made those laws of nature and still upholds them? You don’t know half of what you think you know and before the tempest you will tremble even more than Job. Because after Job hears from God he suddenly doesn’t want to ask his questions anymore.

Which is odd, because God doesn’t answer them. So why is Job suddenly satisfied? God doesn’t tell him why his family died, God only tells him that he, God, is the author of all life and can see beyond the realm of life and death.

Is that a satisfying answer? It’s not specific to Job and his family, but maybe Job is smart enough to realize that God, as he has now seen, is not only real but also vastly beyond our reckoning. And maybe he is reminded that perhaps this God, who has promised him and his family, good, might actually be strong enough to pull it off even if through suffering, pain, and death.

And so Job will worship that God again. Not because he is a lucky rabbits foot or vending machine who gives us comfortable things, but because he is real and he

offers victory over suffering and death and lasting goodness, redeemed in his presence.

And if you doubt that. If you think God is on an ivory tower and it is mean of him to condescend to Job is his pain, well consider the Redeemer, true God, come not to an ivory tower but an old rugged cross, condescending in his own pain, suffering the tempest of God's righteous wrath for your sin. You think God is distant? You think he can't relate to pain and forsakenness and depression and fear? You think he made or approves of evil? Then you do not know the true God as revealed in suffering. And if you don't know that God then you do not know the God of omnipotent power who has authority over the grave, as that God, the only One, is risen again and promises to see his people forgiven and brought through suffering and death to life eternal.

But you do know that God. You have confessed his name, you have been baptized in his name. Job knew that God too. So did his friends. Even as this God offers them forgiveness and mercy for their foolish words. He tells them, "Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right..." And what of us in our fear, and doubt and complaining and our



foolish words? Is there a sacrifice for us? Of more value than seven bulls and rams?

You know there is. And so God forgives the foolish friends, he forgives Job, he restores Job. A sign of the fuller restoration to come where Job gets BOTH sets of kids back. Can God not restore to you all of which he has let be taken from you?

Kids, youth, strength, clarity of mind, love, meaning, purpose? Or is he too weak?

Can he not overcome the evil in you in the world in the evil one? Or is he too small and foolish? Is he uncaring because we don't always get the healing or wealth we desire? Or is he able to love us sacrificially in the midst of pain and to even refine us through it?

Our God is the King of wind and wave, the king of justice and mercy, and the Redeemer who will make all things new. And he is real. So in a world of suffering and pain, ask Job, God is worthy to be praised. Amen.