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Sermon Notes

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An Overview of the Book of Job

Job 1-42

The most profound problem facing all believers in an infinitely powerful, infinitely wise, infinitely good God is the problem of evil... and more acutely, when evil descends into the lives of God's people in the form of suffering. Why do "good people" suffer? Where is God when we face the varied sorrows of life in this world?

Some of you are going through significant trials right now... some of them you are willing to share with other people; others keep the suffering to themselves. We are a nation of winners, of people who like to appear prosperous and successful and healthy and powerful. There is a kind of shame in suffering, many of us feel. And even if we ourselves are not enduring sufferings right now, perhaps we have in the past... and we have a strong sense that we will in the future.

And with the sting of that lash, we cry out to God "Why, O Lord? Why? Do you still love me?" We feel disconnected from the apparently happy people around us... their laughter, their vigor, their apparent success in life can feel like so much salt in the lacerations that our suffering has left in us. We yearn for some explanation, some sense of a reason why... and we are left with the worst problem of all – a sneaking doubt about God above. Is he really good? Is he really powerful? Is he really wise? If so, how do we understand the world we see around us... a world of pandemics that afflict tens of millions and kill

millions; a world of natural disasters like tsunamis that wipe out entire coastlines of cities, towns, and villages; a world of wars and rumors of wars, of viciousness and cruelty and seemingly mindless, purposeless evil.

And when we as Christians try to proclaim a Creator God who rules lovingly as king and who calls on all people everywhere to trust him and love him and follow him, it is not long before our evangelism meets the brick wall of this question, this seemingly insurmountable question of the problem of suffering, of evil, of pain.

And our own faith can be deeply shaken. Shaken to the roots.

Such is the effect of human suffering.

If you have never been there, you almost certainly know people who have. And you know that you will someday be facing it yourself. No one gets out of this world unscathed by pain, sorrow, and death.

Reality. A real-world faith... must face this problem square on and address it. And no book of the Bible does so with the same masterful skill as does the book we are about to study together – the timeless Book of Job.

This morning we begin our journey through this book. My goal in preaching is the same as always – the faith of my hearers, faith in God, and faith in his Son Jesus Christ:

As Jesus himself said to his disciples the night before he was crucified for our salvation:

John 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

That's my goal... that, in the face of suffering, you would be stable in your faith in God and in Christ Jesus. That you would not

Ephesians 4:14 infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching

Instead, that you would be

Ephesians 3:17-19 rooted and established in love, [AND] may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Overview of the Book of Job:

Part of what is known as “wisdom literature” in the middle of the Old Testament, five books – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

These books are in the form of Hebrew poetry; unlike the books that precede it in the Bible, it does not cover history, the great events that unfolded to shape the history of the world, and of God’s dealing with his people, the Jews. Nor are they like the books of prophecy that follow in the Bible, in which God’s prophets act like prosecuting attorneys, bringing severe words of judgment mingled with hope for the glorious future of Christ.

Instead, wisdom literature speaks of the heart-life of faith in Almighty God; how individual believers can navigate life in this sin-cursed world in a wise way that glorifies God. These five books address heart issues, of reactions to life’s highs and lows, joys and sorrows, in the context of a stable faith in God.

Job is the first of these wisdom books... and it addresses the problem of suffering... specifically, the suffering of the righteous.

Some scholars believe it is the oldest book of the Bible... older than the books of Moses. We will never know in this world. And the same is true of the author... we don’t know who wrote it. Some scholars focus too much on the author, saying he was a literary genius, brilliant, knowledgeable. But that neglects the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring this account, and seems to assume

the whole story was fabricated like a work of moralistic fiction, rather than something that actually occurred in space and time. The real author, as with all scripture, is God the Holy Spirit... and he gave us this faithful account of the events of the life of Job, and of God's dealings with Job.

Job's message of faith in the face of immense suffering, and his process of reasoning through it, and the final resolution of unshakable trust in God once God has revealed himself is timeless and essential for us today. WE NEED THIS BOOK! Our unsaved neighbors are going through the same trials we are, but they are "without hope and without God in the world." We Christians are called on to suffer well, to be radiant with an unshakable hope in Christ, that shines brightly though we get the same cancer diagnosis, or suffer the same economic setbacks, or contract the same virus, or lose loved ones in the same way... God may well light some of you up this very year like a lamp:

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Faith in the God of Job will help you shine when the world is darkest!

Four-part outline for today's sermon:

1. The Problem of Human Suffering
2. The Limits of Human Understanding
3. The Resolution in the Glory of God
4. The Call for Unshakable Faith

I. The Problem of Human Suffering

A. Job Introduced: Righteous, Wealthy, Pious

Job 1:1 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job.

1. Righteous:

“blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (1:1)

2. Wealthy (1:2-3)

a. seven sons, three daughters; 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, huge number of servants

b. “The greatest man among all the people of the East” (vs. 3)

3. Pious (1:4-5)

a. His children loved each other and lived a blessed and happy life

b. They would often feast together

c. But Job realized that this kind of comfortable, full life of feasting and drinking can lead to sin... even secret sin

d. He would act as a godly father to them, even though they were grown and independent... he would sacrifice and pray for them

Job 1:5 ... thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

B. Overwhelming Suffering Strikes (1:13-19)

1. It's overwhelming because of how SUDDEN and COMPREHENSIVE it was

2. What is shocking is how this all came upon him IN ONE SINGLE DAY, and the report came upon him like wave upon wave of sorrow... as soon as one messenger finishes his devastating report, the next one comes... in one terrible day Job loses all his wealth and all ten of his children

3. I would daresay that, not only have none of you ever had anything like this happen to you, you have never heard of anyone who has
4. The level of pain is almost indescribable... everything that made him wealthy and blessed in this world was taken in one single day
5. ALL TEN CHILDREN... gone, dead, in an instant!
6. But the trial was not yet done... the second phase came on him as well... the instant loss of his health; in Job 2:7, we are told that he was afflicted with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head... his agony was so great that he was scraping his flesh with a piece of pottery while he sat in ashes; his appearance was so transformed that his friends did not recognize him
7. Beyond this, as we shall see, he lost the esteem and respect of everyone who knew him; the three friends that came would soon unveil the assessment that he was only getting what he deserved because of some secret sins; and so the community that had once esteemed him now mocked him

Job 29:4-9, 25 Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, ⁵ when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me, ⁶ when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil. ⁷ "When I went to the gate of the city and took my seat in the public square, ⁸ the young men saw me and stepped aside and the old men rose to their feet; ⁹ the chief men refrained from speaking and covered their mouths with their hands...[I] sat as their chief; I dwelt as a king among his troops; I was like one who comforts mourners.

Job 30:1 "But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs.

C. This is Real Life

1. Our Christianity must face this level of suffering
2. Every last one of us will lose everything we love in this world

3. Perhaps (most likely) we will not survive all of our children... that is very uncommon
4. But everything we value in this world will be taken from us by aging and death

Job 1:21 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.

1 Timothy 6:7 we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

5. There will come a time when not a single person on planet earth will even know we ever lived, unless we are one of those rare famous people, once in a generation, to be still remembered a century from now
6. Our Christianity must be REAL-WORLD and face this suffering head on... we can't just come to church for what John Piper calls "yippy-skippy worship" and a lightweight sermon that tickles your ears and entertains you like a form of fluffy cotton candy, but doesn't help you fight off despair that reality tempts us to sink into

II. The Limits of Human Understanding

A. We Don't Understand!

1. Again and again, we struggle with this searing question WHY, O Lord?
2. We just don't understand the reason why a loving, wise, powerful God would allow such suffering in our lives

B. Job Didn't Understand!

1. The majority of the book of Job records limited and faulty human attempts to make sense of human suffering
2. The end of chapter 2: Job's friends hear about his suffering and come to console him; they are staggered by his appearance and sit there in silence with him, silently lamenting for a full week

3. Then come the words... a RIVER of words... seeking to make sense of it all; and they begin with Job's lament in chapter 3
 - a. He curses the day of his birth... he wishes that day had never occurred, that it would sink down into the depths
 - b. He asks the deep question: Why was I ever born at all??
 - c. Worst of all for Job was to cry out to God for an answer and NOT GET ANYTHING BACK AT ALL

Job 30:19-21 I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me.

C. Job's Friends Don't Understand

1. They THINK they do... they think their theology covers everything, and, however much Job doesn't want to hear it, they think they know exactly why Job is suffering
2. They all come from the same school of theology: God is perfectly just and perfectly sovereign; the only way such terrible things could be happening to Job is if he has some sin in his life; since they have never seen that sin, it must be secret; since his suffering is great, his sin must be horrendous
3. So, from chapter 4 through chapter 27, we have three cycles of dialogue between Job and his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar
 - a. They just keep making the same points over and over again: his friends assert that Job must have sinned, and all he needs to do is confess it and repent, and God will restore him to prosperity
 - b. This moment was the worst: Eliphaz the Temanite...

Job 22:4-5 Is it for your piety that [God] rebukes you and brings charges against you? ⁵ Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?

This is of a man that God said was "blameless and upright"!!

Their theology is the same as the disciples who questioned Jesus about the man born blind:

John 9:2 "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The only explanation the friends have for Job's suffering is that he must be a very great sinner, only in secret where no one has seen him

- c. Job again and again asserts his innocence... he is not claiming sinlessness, but rather that there are no horrendous secret sins that could possibly explain such massive suffering
- d. But Job himself is becoming increasingly distressed

D. Job Swears Total Innocence

1. In chapters 29-31, Job basically takes a solemn vow before God and man that he is innocent, blameless of great transgression
2. Job 31 unfolds the most comprehensive articulation of a godly man in the Old Testament, very similar to Proverbs 31 for women... he claims to be innocent of lust, falsehood, covetousness, adultery, mistreatment of servants or of the poor and weak; he has lavishly cared for the poor and needy; he has not trusted in his wealth, or celebrated a foe's misfortune; he has not failed to care for a sojourner, or secretly worshiped the stars, or failed to confess any secret sin
3. However, he also goes so far as to charge God, Almighty God, with injustice, and to challenge him to come and accuse him face to face

Job 19:6 God has wronged me and drawn his net around me.

Job 19:7 "Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.

Job 13:15 I will surely defend my ways to his face.

4. It is for this very sin that God confronts Job, and Job later repents... questioning God

Job 40:1-5 The LORD said to Job: ² "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" ³ Then Job answered the LORD: ⁴ "I am unworthy-- how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. ⁵ I spoke once, but I have no answer-- twice, but I will say no more."

But God doesn't let it go easily:

Job 40:8-10 "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? ⁹ Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? ¹⁰ Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty."

To question God's justice, to question his love, to question his power, to question his goodness... this is a very great sin; and it is the point of the whole book of Job... to move us to a stable faith in God that never murmurs against him, never questions him

The basic issue with our seeking to understand... we lack all the facts, and we are limited in our ability to process the facts we do have... worse than that, our sin twists our interpretation of the facts and gives us a faulty view of our suffering

E. We Lack All the Facts

1. I have left out the fascinating drama in the heavenly realms
2. This whole assault on Job came as a result of a conversation between God and Satan that Job never knew anything about, recorded in Job 1 and then another one in Job 2... God boasts about Job

"Have you considered my servant Job?"

3. Satan accuses Job:

"Does Job fear God for nothing? You have blessed and protected him!"

4. This information shapes the entire experience powerfully... if Job had known this had happened, it would have enabled him never to question God; he would have known that God was just putting him on display before the wicked accuser of his people, that God

approved of him in the most staggering way... a man of whom God would BOAST

5. It would have shut up all of Job's friends... for they would have known God's evaluation of Job that he was blameless and upright, a man who feared God and shunned evil...
6. As it turns out, WE the READERS of this account know more than Job did when he was going through it
7. And we know how blessed Job was when everything was said and done... the story ends with Job's full restoration (not counting his deceased children)
8. As James says, we see what God finally brought about

James 5:11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

F. Our Earthly Knowledge of Our Sufferings is LIMITED

1. The Book of Job takes us up into the heavenly realms to show us dimensions of God's providence that we do not have access to
2. And it takes us at least to the end of Job's earthly story to see the blessedness God poured out on the end of Job's earthly days
3. But I really believe the FULL explanation will be in heaven!
 - a. There we will see in retrospect the full dimensions of God's plan for our lives
 - b. There we will see how God ordained our suffering for our own salvation and for the blessing of others through the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - c. There we will see the Satanic/demonic activity in our lives, as the "thief who steals, kills, and destroys" and also of God's protection, who did not allow us to be tempted beyond what we could bear

- d. There we will see how Christ interceded constantly for us that our faith would not fail
 - e. There we will see how our blood, sweat, and tears were essential to building the Kingdom of Christ for all those that knew us and followed us... our children, our grandchildren, people we led to Christ, other Christians who watched our lives
 - f. There we will finally understand HOW INFINITELY RATIONAL were the purposes of God in all of our suffering... how God had a reason for it all... and we will admire his amazing craftsmanship, in composing such a symphony of beauty from the lives of his people
4. But NOW... our perspective is limited! God will keep us in the dark!

William Cowper:

In 1773, William Cowper wrote a poem he called "Light Shining Out of Darkness". He was a man who battled depression and even occasionally strong temptations to suicide throughout his Christian life. That poem was part of his effort to fight depression. We know it as the hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" He wrote it based on Jesus' statement to his disciples in John 13:7 "What I am doing, you do not understand now; but later you will understand."

God moves in a mysterious way,
 His wonders to perform;
 He plants his footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,
 The clouds ye so much dread
 Are big with mercy, and shall break
 In blessings on your head.

Judge not the LORD by feeble sense,
 But trust him for his grace;

Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain

“God is his own interpreter and he will make it plain” means that, someday, God will delight in explaining his purposes in our suffering clearly to us, line by line. BUT WHEN? I believe only in heaven will we have the full information, the “rest of the story” ... only then will we be able to see why children had to die, or illness had to go uncured, or natural disasters had to wipe out our home, or why God never chose to give us children to love and raise...

Heaven will involve a comprehensive education in the minute purposes of God throughout redemptive history, including the darkest threads in the tapestry of his grace.

But here on earth, we will get almost no explanations. God never told Job about his conversation with Satan. And God never told how he intended to use the account of his sufferings to encourage his people for centuries to come. We just need to learn to TRUST GOD... and to see his glory in everything.

Those two points take up the rest of our time... first, the glory of God; second, trusting in him.

III. The Resolution in the Glory of God

A. God Appears in Glory

1. After thousands of futile human words, God appears in a whirlwind to end the debate

***Job 38:1-3 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind. He said:
2 "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without***

knowledge? ³ Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

2. For the next four chapters, God puts Job... the best man on earth... in his place; he deeply, fully, completely humbles him!
3. He does it by pointing to his wisdom in creation... this is the pinnacle of what we call “natural theology”... that God the Creator can be known by observing what he created
4. Only in this case, we are not going for a nature walk with our binoculars and sketch pad; God himself is talking with obvious pride about the dimensions and details of his magnificent creation
5. He discusses the fundamental structure of the world, but he brings it right down to Job himself:

*Job 38:4-7 **"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. ⁵ Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ⁶ On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone-- ⁷ while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?***

6. “Where were you, Job? Did I ask you for advice? And if I had, would you have been able to give me any?”
7. God goes beyond that to discuss the limiting of the mighty oceans of the world, as well as the subterranean regions; he talks about the weather... the control of the winds and the storms; the wise arrangement of different types of zones on the earth—the deserts, and the icy regions; also the lightning and the precise measure of rain
8. Then he takes Job up into to the heavens to discuss the stars... the constellations like Pleiades and Orion, which he made and controls; **Job... can you make the stars? Can you count them and keep them in their place?**
9. Having arranged the heavens and the earth wisely, he talks about the creatures he has made... the lioness and raven; the mountain goat and the doe; the wild donkey and the wild ox; the ostrich and the horse, as well as the birds of prey

10. Simply put... Job, can you make an ostrich???
11. He is putting Job in his place!
12. He is also giving a clear lesson... if I can do all this, and care for all of my creation so wisely, how much more will I care for you, my son, whom I love?!!

B. Astonishing Therapy Session

1. Like when Jesus healed Peter after he denied him three times by asking him three times "Do you love me?" Peter was HURT and thereby HEALED
2. So God is hurting Job's pride in order to heal him
3. And it is immensely satisfying and successful!!
4. If a God like this LOVES ME and CARES FOR ME, if he knows me and cherishes me and will talk to me, that I all I need!

C. This is the God Who is Saving Us! And Pain is his method of saving our souls!

1. Because of our sins, we must have a painful process of salvation
2. Not that there is merit in our pain, but this is God's way of awakening our desires for him and becoming aware of our need for him

IV. The Call for Unshakable Faith

A. Bottom Line: The Book of Job Calls Us to Trust God While He Works Skillfully on our Souls... Even if that working takes pain

Job 19:25-27 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; ²⁷ I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him

B. The Son of God Knew Infinitely Greater Suffering

1. Job was a righteous man, but Jesus is the only sinless man in history
2. Job was a man about whom God boasted... "Have you considered my servant Job?" But Jesus was God's perfect, only begotten Son

Matthew 3:17 "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

3. Job was a man who knew immense earthly suffering... but that suffering in no way represented God abandoning him; but Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross and cried out

Matthew 27:46 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

4. God would not let Satan take Job's life... but God required of Jesus that he lay down his life for us... he demanded Jesus' bloody death, and Jesus gave it!
5. Simply put, Job knew immense suffering. Jesus knew infinite suffering... he basically drank hell on the cross for us, so that we would never experience it
6. So... when we are suffering now as Christians, we need first and foremost to evaluate our sufferings compared to Christ's... to realize that in our sins, we deserved to die under the wrath of God and be condemned to hell
7. And we need to thank God with unending thanks for Jesus dying in our place... whose blood atones for our sin

C. Believing That Our Pain is Essential to Our Salvation

1. The New Testament gives a much more developed theology of suffering than we have in Job
2. Many verses explain the benefits of our suffering... and we will have opportunity (God willing) in future weeks to study them
3. But we know that suffering is essential to our own progress in the faith

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith

develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

4. And we know that suffering is essential to the spread of the gospel to the lost

John 12:24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.