

Job: The Principle of Suffering for No Apparent Reason

Job

Good morning, men! Dear friends, do not be surprised by the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that we are privileged to participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that we will be overjoyed on the day when we see him in glory! This morning we're going to talk about suffering, we're going to talk about the story of Job. I wanted us to just pause and say that I know some of you are in the death grips of this, you feel like even this morning someone has punched you in the gut; you feel like you're knotted up with suffering. I have to say that you should never try to teach a broken heart. Broken hearts need love, not teaching, and so it would be very insensitive to try to give you theology at a moment when you are going through deep suffering. So I just want to say in advance to you take what you want from this. It may be that you want to come back and listen to the video later if you're really in the death grip of suffering this morning. But go ahead and take in what you can, and then for the rest of us who are not suffering... Well you may not be, but I am, and just remember that the guy sitting next to you is as well. Always.

I work with men as a vocation, and throughout every day the one thing that I know for sure is that almost every man, I would say 90%, have some major issue that they are dealing with. The reason that most men don't look like they have some major suffering is because they're bluffing. They're trying to pretend that things are better than they are, and that's not a bad thing. You have to figure out how to navigate through your work, but nevertheless remember that most of the men that you meet today do have some kind of major suffering. Some men feel like they've been punched in the gut this week, others feel like they have this kind of low grade fever, this long term suffering that's just been eating at them year after year. So, by way of introduction, that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

Let's go ahead and do a shout out. Got a new group of guys that are starting up at the Church at Osage Hills, 6-8 men who used to meet together and they are getting their group going again by doing the Man in the Mirror Bible Study. They're in Camdenton, MO which is in the area of the Lake of the Ozarks, and Shawn Walters is their leader. These guys are 36 to 56 years of age and they will be joining us, so why don't we give them a big Man in the Mirror welcome. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're really glad to have you with us!

Okay, so the title of the message: *Job: The Principle of Suffering for No Apparent Reason*. Sometimes we suffer for doing the wrong thing, we all get that. We yield to temptation, we sin, we pay a price, we don't whine about that. Well, maybe we do, but we understand what's going on when we suffer for doing the wrong thing. Sometimes we suffer for doing the right thing, we're persecuted. We say to our boss, I'm not going to lie in order to make this business transaction work because it violates the values of my faith. Then for the next several years, he distrusts you, he doesn't give you the good assignments. He persecutes you, you've been through that, we all get that, and we can accept that. But it's this third kind of suffering which is very confusing, very frustrating and perplexing and that is when we suffer for no apparent reason. So someone gets a cancer and ends up dying, or someone goes into a hospital for a particular reason and in the hospital catches a virus, ends up in a coma and dies for no apparent reason.

The death of children, or you are raising your children and they're zigging when you thought they should zag.

One man I was talking to this week, he is a Godly man that I know used to come to this Bible Study, and his unmarried daughter is now pregnant for the second time. So for myself it's just like this; when I hear you suffer, I suffer! It's not only the sufferings that we go through ourselves, but it's the sufferings of the people that we know and love and care about. In fact, sometimes it's easier to bleed than to watch somebody else bleed. Especially when it's someone in our family! A son or a daughter who rejects Jesus, or has decided to experiment with a gay or lesbian lifestyle. All of these things, promiscuity, or somebody wrapped up in pornography. We know the agony that we feel with these sufferings, and that's not to mention marriage problems and money problems! There are just all kinds of reasons that you might be suffering. It might be a lack of meaning, it might be a lack of purpose or direction, like you're struggling to know, "God, what is it you want me to do? Just tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it!" The agony of that is a suffering that is excruciating and it seems to be for no apparent reason, but what we're going to learn today is that it does have a reason, and that God is using that for a good! Let's find out how that happens!

A Biography of Suffering

First thing we want to look at this morning is a biography of Job's suffering. You should be at Job 1, and it begins:

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and he shunned evil.

The end of verse 3:

... He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

He had integrity, he had prosperity. In fact, the prosperity was the reward for his integrity! He had a huge business empire, a fantastic family, everything was going his way. Then Satan presents himself to God, and God said, "Where have you been?" He said he's been roaming back and forth throughout the earth, and God says in verse 8:

"Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

Then Satan takes on his role as your accuser. Satan is accusing you in front of God, he accuses Job in front of God. Well sure Job loves you, fears you, and shuns evil! Why shouldn't he? You've blessed him with every kind of blessing imaginable! And what does God do? He says in verse 12:

... "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

And so enshrouded in mystery is this idea that God wanted to show Satan the uprightness of his servant Job by allowing Satan to plunder his life. What happens next is unbelievable! Satan decimates his business empire, all ten of his children are killed in a tragic accident, his wife says, "Why don't you just curse God and die!" His wife turns against him! "Why are you still clinging to your integrity? Why don't you just curse God and die!" And then his friends who come, and at first are very supportive of him, they

end up turning against him, and explaining to him you must be a sinner, you must be doing something wrong! He says in response to them, "I don't care! Though he slay me, yet will I trust in God!" And so he continues to cling to his integrity!

Job went from it couldn't get any better to it couldn't get any worse. Now we ask the question why did God put this story of Job in the Bible? A few reasons: First of all, so that you would never be able to say, "God doesn't know what I'm going through. Nobody's ever suffered as much as I have." Just look at the incomprehensible suffering that Job went through! I skipped the part about how Satan later inflicted his body with sores from the top of his head to the tips of his toes and it was so bad that he sat down and took a piece of pottery and just scraped his body! His physical health failed, he lost all his children in one fell swoop, and all of his vast business empire! His wife turns against him, his friends turn against him; he's a man completely alone. Some of you feel that way right now. Some of you are that way right now! I meet men who feel like everyone is against them, and for good reasons. Nobody believes in them anymore, they've lost their confidence. God has included this story in the Bible so that we will have an example of suffering we can turn to so that we will not be put into the position of having this thought that God can't possibly understand what I'm going through. God absolutely knows what you're going through!

So let's look at Job's responses, and then look also at God's meticulous care of Job. First of all, Job's responses are mentioned, one of them, though he slay me, yet will I trust in him! That's what he did when his friends turned against him. And then when he lost his family and lost his business, verse 21, he fell to the ground and said:

"Naked I came from the womb, and naked I shall return. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

So how did he do this? How could he say that? How could you ever say that when your family has been ripped apart, and you've been crushed by natural disasters? How could you ever say that? Naked I came, naked I shall return, the Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord! You do it by faith in Jesus Christ, that's how Job did it. The true answer is you can't do it, but Jesus Christ in you can do it.

And then his wife, turn to chapter 2 verse 9:

His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

That's what she said to him, and then look at his response:

... "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

In all this, he did not sin.

Look at this! Go back up to chapter 2 verse 3 because this is fascinating:

The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."

Without any cause! This is an example of suffering for no apparent reason! God was incited by Satan to allow Satan to create this suffering without any cause!

You know that his story is also your story. These are the exact same kinds of issue that we deal with, hopefully on a lesser scale. His story is our story in this sense that even if you cling to your integrity, as he did, and even if you cling to your faith, as he did, that does not mean that you are immune from suffering. In fact, God tends to put Christians through the same trials that he puts non-Christians, that the world will be able to see that Jesus Christ is real. My friend with the pregnant daughter, the way that he and his wife have handled that is so exemplary! It set such a powerful example of the gospel at work in their lives, and they're actually building an extra room on their house and they're going to raise the child! They're going to give Jesus Christ a chance to demonstrate himself through the way that they handle this crisis, this suffering that they are going through.

The best Christians will have the same problems as the worst Christians because you're not immune from humanity with God. You're going to go through the same kinds of problems that everybody else goes through, because that's God's order of things. And if you're not the person who is suffering, then you are probably the person that God has stuck in the middle of somebody else's storm so that he'll have someone there on the inside when they lose hope. If you're not in suffering, don't flee from other people's suffering! Instead understand that you are his agent, and he's probably put you there for the precise reason that he'll have an inside man there when they're going through their problems. That's the kind of story that I want to have!

The Big Idea today is this, what we glean from all this is that **God makes men by allowing us to gain through suffering what could be gained no other way.** And I want to demonstrate that next by talking about what to gain that can be gained no other way.

To Gain What Can Be Gained No Other Way

If you would, turn to chapter 23 verse 10. This is Job speaking, he's talking about God:

But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept his way without turning aside.

I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.

Verse 15:

That is why I am terrified before him; when I think of all this, I fear him.

Remember Solomon? God will not force you to revere him, but he will make it impossible for you to be happy unless you do? Well the flipside of that is that suffering is sometimes the way that he's going to make it impossible for you to be happy unless you revere him. So what Job is gaining here out of this is he is gaining a reverence for God that he did not have before! Job is gaining an intimacy with God that he had never had before! Integrity leads to prosperity, but it is suffering that leads to this intimacy with God. You know this is true! You praise God when you have been blessed, but there is something very

unique and special that happens when you suffer! You hear the voice of God in a key that is only audible to the ears of the broken hearted, and there is an intimacy that develops from that!

Turn to Job 42. After saying many things God tests Job with these questions. It says in chapter 42:

Then Job replied to the Lord:

“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

You asked, ‘Who is this that darkens my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

“You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’

My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

So all those questions in our moments of frustration and suffering produces a sorrow, but it also produces an anger. We could shake our fist, “God why?” And you have probably said “I can’t wait to get to be with God because I have some questions and he’s going to need to answer!” I don’t think so. You’re going to be like every other character in the Bible which is why he’s given us so many that do this. When you see God face to face you know where you’re going to be? You’re going to be BAM! Hitting the deck, buddy! When you’re in the presence of that overwhelming holiness, you think about a situation in which you’ve felt the most gravity, when you were breathless, you could barely suck in the air! Because of the gravity, the overwhelming nature of any kind of awesome event! It could have been the birth of your child, it could have been three minutes before your wedding, it could have been some incredible nature experience! But you just think about that and that is nothing! Because when you see God face to face what you’re going to do is despise yourself, and you’re going to repent in dust and ashes! You’re going to hit the deck, buddy, and that’s what Job has done.

So one of the things you gain that can be gained no other way is the intimacy and the closeness to God, but also this deep reverence, this sense of awe and the humility that comes with it. This sense of contingency that I’m not the main thing, I’m not the one who’s in charge here, I’m like dust on the scales, I’m like a flea, I’m like a worm, here for a little while then poof! A vapor that vanishes! And yet God has chosen to love me anyway.

On your tables you have some verses. I printed them out for you just so that I don’t have to spend the amount of time required for them in speaking, but I wanted you to have them. Some of the reasons and benefits for suffering can be found there, things that can be gained no other way:

So that the work of God can be displayed in our lives in the case of the man born blind.

For God’s glory, so that the son of man may be glorified, as in the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

So that our perseverance, character and hope and the hope that doesn’t disappoint can be developed in us.

So that evil may be punished, and so that we may be delivered from bondage to decay and into the glorious freedom of the children of light.

So we may comfort others with comfort that we ourselves have received. So that we may not rely on ourselves but on God.

So that God may receive praise.

And because when we suffer, sin loses power, and as Jesus learned obedience by what he suffered so that we too can learn obedience through suffering.

So there are so many reasons and benefits for it. So many things that can be gained through suffering that honestly you just can't gain any other way! That's the Big Idea, that's just one of the ways that God makes men. **He makes us by allowing us to gain through suffering what can be gained no other way.** This humility, this reverence, this awe, this intimacy, and this sense of closeness. This whole thing that I've been teaching over the last few months about how a servant doesn't ask what do I want, a servant asks what does the master need. Suffering will help you in this. I've known in my own experience that even though the question should be what does the master need, it took me decades to stop asking the question what do I want! I woke up for decades asking, "Well, what do I want? How can I get what I want? How can God help me get what I want?" I didn't ask, "How can I help God get what he wants. What does the master need?" But suffering has been my tutor. Suffering has shown me, and I'm going to guess this is not your first suffering rodeo here this morning either. Suffering has shown me that you gain from suffering things that you can gain no other way! We should never seek out suffering, that would be crazy! But when God in his providence allows suffering to come our way, dare I say it, embrace it! If you go through the Kübler-Ross model, these different stages of denial, anger and depression, go ahead and do that. But when you come out the other side of that, embrace this, because it's part of God's plan to make you into the man he created you to be from the beginning.

How Should You Respond?

Finally, how should you respond? First seek God. Along with this idea from Solomon that God will not force you to revere him but he will make it impossible for you to be happy until you do. That and the idea that suffering compels us to seek the God that success makes us think we don't need. Use the suffering to seek God, because that's one of the ways that God compels us to seek him, especially if you've been trying to have your cake and eat it, too. What a great opportunity to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Intellectually, you already know you are supposed to seek God, seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness and then everything else that you want will be added to you. Intellectually you know that! But God uses suffering to make it the reality of our lives.

Secondly, manage your expectations. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible describes a great cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil that result in human suffering, from beginning to end! Everyone suffers! Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world." So manage your expectations. If Christianity claimed to insulate you from suffering, it would not be true, but it does not make such a claim.

Finally, just be glad! Look at the bottom of the sheet of paper you have, our responses to suffering: rejoice and be glad! The apostles say, "Rejoice and be glad, it's a privilege to suffer for Christ!" We're invited to participate in the fellowship of these sufferings. "Consider it pure joy my brothers when you

face trials of many kinds, rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ!" Seek God, manage your expectations, and be glad!

One of our men, a number of years ago now, had a partner who committed fraud. The state prosecutor assumed that he was also in on it and guilty, so he pursued this man, one of our own, with a vengeance. Many of us prayed for this man over a four year pretrial period. During that period, this man's finances were completely exhausted. At the end of this long four year period, he accepted a plea of no contest with five years of probation rather than trying to figure out how to finance a lengthy court battle. You know what he said to me? He said, when it was all done, "You know, I needed this. I needed to be broken." So what looked like suffering for no apparent reason exposed many other sinful ways that he realized he needed to bring in repentance, in dust and ashes, to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ and lay himself out! He gained through suffering what could be gained no other way! We're like wild horses men, stallions. We don't need the world to break us, but we do need our Lord and Savior, Jesus, to break us!

The Big Idea today: **God makes men by allowing us to gain through suffering what can be gained no other way!** Let us pray!

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for the story of Job. Father, each of us has a need to understand more about suffering. Would you just allow your truth, the truth that we, need to percolate by the power of your Holy Spirit into our hearts in a way that will result in a different outcome than only knowing it in our heads. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.