

September 8

Job 1, 2 and 3

Today we began reading the Book of Job. We do not know who wrote this book. Some have suggested that it may have been Job or Elihu or Moses himself, but we simply do not know.

Our Daily Bible places it as being written during the exile and referring back to a much earlier time. I think it is important to note that most scholars would date this book much older - possibly the first book of the Bible ever written, with Job existing before Abraham - before 2000 B.C!

The historical setting of the book, regardless of when it was written, seems to be the second millennium before Christ, similar to the time of Abraham. Like the Patriarchs of Genesis, Job lived to be over 100 years of age. He was, like them, the "priest" of his family. Also, like Abraham, his wealth was principally concentrated in flocks and herds. He led a nomadic lifestyle.

This book is a theodicy. I am not sure that I have used that expression before, but a "theodicy" is an attempt to explain or to deal with the problem of suffering and to answer the question. "Why do bad things happen to good people?" It is another way of dealing with the problem of evil. We believe 3 things about God. He is all-powerful (the theological word is "omnipotent"). He is all-knowing (we call that "omniscient) and He is all-good. So, if God is all-powerful (He could stop bad things from happening) and He is all-knowing (He is always aware of what is happening) and He is completely good, then why is Job suffering these horrendous losses? That is, why is Job suffering if he really is a righteous man?

This may be the oldest spiritual question of humanity. It may also be the most asked spiritual question - it is as common as humanity.

It may take us awhile to sort through everything that God wants to teach us from the book of Job, but there are at least a few things we can learn right up front:

1. Lesson #1 - There is always a lot more going on than you or I am immediately aware of. There is always, if you will, a story behind the story. Do you remember the story of the 3 disciples that Jesus took with Him up on the Mount of Transfiguration? All of a sudden they became aware of the fact that they were living in a universe that was a whole lot bigger than they realized! Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah and He was transformed into someone a whole lot more authoritative and glorious than the rabbi that they were walking beside a few minutes before in Galilee.

So here is Lesson #1: Always remember, that when we encounter evil, adversity, sorrow, and pain that we did nothing to bring upon ourselves, it is not a time to wonder if God knows, or if God cares, or if God has the power to act. Instead, it is a time to realize that we do not see the whole picture as God does and simply trust that He will do the right thing at the right time if we will simply trust Him.

I don't think our key lesson in this, though, is that God makes wagers with Satan and our lives settle the score. The scene in heaven can be instructive, but the target audience of the book of Job is not Satan, but you and me.

There are a few important things that we learned about Satan today:

He accuses the people of God - his claim here was that Job was only righteous because God had blessed him. The word "Satan" means "accuser" - like a prosecuting attorney in a court room. Satan's claim is that people are only righteous because they are blessed. We are not sentient beings with the power to express covenant love. Like the evolutionary claim, Satan is saying we are only the product of our environment... What is at stake here is the nature of humans, and the power of the covenant love that is at the center of the universe. Satan is accusing humanity of being, well, less than human.

That Satan is still under the authority and power of God. Even though he has rebelled against God, even though he actually attacks and brings harm upon the people of God, he can do no more than God, in His sovereign wisdom, allows. For now, at least, grab this thought - God places clear boundaries on how much injury and suffering Satan can inflict on us.

Finally, we learned - or saw - that Satan is not all-powerful he is not omniscient (he did not know what was going on in Job's mind and heart); and he is not omnipresent. God is eternal and uncreated. That is a big difference!

2. Job demonstrates here, and throughout the book, that it is possible to be very righteous, in great tragedy, and faithful to God. Despite his circumstances, he believes the best about God. He might curse his circumstances... or the day he was born... (as a matter of fact, he curses it heavy - like today he might say "Curse the day I was born, the doctor who delivered me and the guy who brought out the cigars and said "It's a boy!" but he never curses God. Whether Job is a historical person or brilliant fiction, the point is that when the ultimately righteous person experiences severe trial, he can still be faithful to God.

Now, Job has 3 friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Namathite. We do not know who these men were, but they were real friends who travel to be with Job and then just sit there on the ground with him crying and saying nothing for a whole week. You don't do that if you are not a real friend!

This practice of sitting with a friend for a week became the basis of a Jewish practice that is still in play to this day "sitting shiva" or sitting sevens. The three friends may not have always said the right things, but their silence is brilliant. We could learn a lot from them.

As the book unfolds, I want you to watch for this theme: Why did suffering come to Job? His friends have one theory, Job is just confused... and God will bring his answer later. But for today, we are just set up with the problem.

May God give you insight into the tremendous question of suffering this week as you tackle the book of Job.